

Dear St. Mary Families,

Now that we have been in school for just over three weeks officially, we would like to update you on the status of our reopening plans.

First, we would like to thank you for your cooperation adjusting to our copious new protocols. We know that sending your children to school in face coverings, completing the daily COVID-19 attestation, and waiting in line at drop-off and pick-up are extra procedures that we are all still getting used to. However, these protocols, and the others we have put into practice on campus are making a difference. Simultaneously, we are also acutely aware of the challenges that remote learning presents to your students and families. Although the experience of learning online has been greatly enhanced with layers of technological tools and support, we know this mode of learning is simply not as effective as in-person instruction.

Our protocols have been working extremely well, and we have not yet had any positive cases of COVID-19 in the school. That's a tribute to a thoughtful and thorough reopening strategy, careful planning, an abundance of caution, and the school's commitment to the health and safety of your children and our faculty and staff. Because of this, and because of the physical layout of the campus and our current enrollment and staffing levels, we believe we can gradually begin bringing more students back to school--should families choose to return their student/s to on-site instruction.

While the DOH metrics we've been using as a guidepost to determine when to bring more students on site still place Spokane County in the "high risk" category, I, along with the administrative team, teachers, and staff, am confident we can phase in more classes in the coming weeks safely. If we maintain our deliberate and intentional course, and families do their part at home, this can be successful. As our phased approach has dictated since day one, this will remain a purposeful and calculated process, both to make sure we can continue to operate safely during a pandemic, and because teachers and students need time to transition from distance learning to in-person learning and acclimate to new spaces for instruction.

On September 17th, St. Mary Catholic School welcomed over 100 students back to campus in Pre-K3-2nd grade. As you know, we brought 3rd grade back on campus on October 12th. Since the physical opening of school, we have carefully monitored and studied our transition to in-person learning. With over 105 children here daily, our reopening system is working effectively and efficiently. Therefore, St. Mary Catholic School is tentatively planning for a **4th grade and 5th grade return to campus on Monday, November 9th**. However, we will continue monitoring Spokane County COVID-19 numbers and our own attendance and health data and adjust this date if necessary. If the data continues to look good (in house) after the return of the 4th & 5th grades, then we plan on **bringing our middle school students (6-8) back on campus in late November or early December**.

The return of the **6th-8th graders** will be dependent on continual positive health data, the success of adding another 50 students in 4th and 5th grade in addition to finding enough volunteers to help with drop-off and pick-up so that teachers can be in their classrooms with students for their safe arrival and departure. Ideally, we will be looking toward the end of November for 6th-8th graders to return to campus.

Our aim is for the transition from online learning to in-person learning to be as seamless as possible. Teachers should have to make very few changes to the schedules and techniques they have already implemented; however, time is needed to prepare rooms and prepare students for classroom expectations once a final decision is made for students to return to school. For those families and students who choose not to return in person out of choice or necessity, our robust remote learning plan will continue to be offered.

It is vital for the continuation and expansion of on-campus learning that all families follow social distancing guidelines away from school and utilize the symptom flowchart that was sent home a few weeks ago—which is attached to this email. Otherwise, the success of reopening is jeopardized. If your child is sick, please follow the guidelines carefully. Generally speaking, if your child had exposure to anyone who tested positive for COVID-19, they must stay home for 14 days from the date of exposure, *even if they are experiencing no symptoms*. If your child is experiencing COVID-19-like symptoms but has not had an exposure to someone who has tested positive, they must either stay home for 10 days from the beginning of symptoms or get a COVID-19 test. See the flowchart for complete detail, or call the office for clarification or questions.

While we have not yet experienced any students testing positive for COVID-19, we know that it is a distinct possibility, and we are prepared for if and when it happens. If we receive word that there is a positive case of COVID-19 in the school community, then we will inform all school families. Families of students who are classified as close contacts, based on classroom seating assignments, will receive a second email with additional information and a phone call from the school with further guidance--in accordance with SRHD epidemiologists.

Thank you again for your patience, understanding, and prayers as we work together to provide quality Catholic education for your children. Feel free to reach out to me with any questions you have about our reopening plan.

With hope,

Ben Walker

Principal