

August 11, 2021

Dear Sacred Heart School Community Members:

It is hard to believe that we are approximately one month away from the opening of the 2021-2022 school year! We hope this summer has been an enjoyable and restful time for you. Although the hallways have been quiet, the last several months have been busy as we plan for another safe and successful school year.

You are likely aware that the New York State Department of Health recently announced that they will not be issuing COVID-19 reopening guidance despite what they had previously suggested. This week, we were informed that the New York State Education Department (NYSED), which possesses oversight authority for schools, is in the process of developing health and safety guidance for the new school year. This document will be based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines and guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Although no release date has been announced, this information will be a critical resource in the development of our back to school opening plans.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Sacred Heart School has partnered with several agencies including our local county health department to ensure that we provide the safest learning environment possible for our school community members each day. We plan to proceed on a similar path for the 2021-2022 school year given the evolving dynamic and recent increases in COVID-19 transmission rates.

In collaboration with the Catholic School Office and the principals of the Diocese of Albany Catholic Schools across our region, we have reached consensus on the following:

- We intend to provide in-person instruction for the vast majority of our students this school year. If there is a documented medical condition that necessitates an alternative arrangement, please contact the school office immediately to discuss if accommodations can be made.
- At this time, we plan to follow the CDC's recommendations for social distancing and other prevention strategies including mask wearing, hand washing and respiratory etiquette, health screenings, staying home when sick, testing, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, cleaning and disinfection, and ongoing monitoring to guide future decisions.
- In consultation with county health officials, we are currently drafting a plan incorporating tiers of mitigation based on the CDC's four levels of community transmission (Low, Moderate, Substantial, and High). We will layer prevention strategies based on the rate of infections and level of transmission in our local county. The intent of the tiered approach is to maintain a balance between prioritizing health and safety and supporting the social, emotional, and mental health of students and staff. We will share the plan with you once it is finalized.
- For your information, Rensselaer County is presently experiencing a HIGH level of transmission. We will continue to fall into one of these categories moving forward and we plan to adjust our mitigation strategies accordingly. Our county's designation can be found at <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>.

- Lastly, while our primary goal remains keeping our schools open for in-person learning, we are developing contingency plans for the delivery of instruction should infection rates continue to rise.

We will continue to send updates throughout the balance of the summer recess with the objective of keeping you informed and providing opportunities for our community members to ask questions about the opening of school.

In closing, we have successfully navigated the many obstacles we have faced since March 2020 by working as a team. You play a pivotal role in making our students feel safe about returning to school. Speak with them in a positive light about the upcoming school year to reduce the stress and anxiety they may be feeling. We are so proud of the way our students, parents, teachers, and staff have worked together throughout the pandemic and look forward to continuing our collaboration to overcome any challenges the 2021-2022 school year may bring.

Thank you for your continued cooperation and partnership with Sacred Heart School. Let us continue to pray for each other as we approach the first day of school. Please feel free to contact the school office if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Amanda Goyer, Principal