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BACK TO SCHOOL: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The health and safety of students and faculty are our primary concerns as school re-opens this fall. Please keep in mind that many layers of safety are incorporated in our plans:

- **Prescreening:** No student or adult should enter the building with new-onset symptoms
- **Masks:** Wearing masks reduces risk
- **Spacing of desks and distancing:** Maintaining distance further reduces risk
- **Increased ventilation:** Enhancing airflow in the classrooms reduces risk even further
- **Frequent hand sanitizing**
- **Increased environmental cleaning**

How will the students fit in the classrooms and still maintain social distancing? Will larger classes be divided into smaller classes? If there are too many kids to fit, will anyone be asked to consider virtual learning?

School-parent architects Meghan Cotner and Colleen Nigro have produced scale drawings of all classrooms to adequately space as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Classroom layouts are based on 100% in-school attendance.

To generate the plans, teachers were allotted a safe space of 8 feet at the front of the classroom, and all furniture other than student desks was removed. The CDC guidelines recommend 6 feet from the center of one student desk to the centers of adjacent desks. AAP guidelines stipulate 3 feet of space between the end of one desk and the beginning of another, provided all students are facing forward. Each class layout was drawn to accommodate the number of students, assuming 100% in-person attendance, spacing desks to the maximum permitted by room size. In most cases, the architects were able to achieve the spacing required by at least one of these guidelines. In a few classrooms, the number of students in a room required closer spacing of two rows of desks. In these rooms, custom-made plexiglass barriers have been designed and ordered so that two rows of desks can be safely spaced more closely.

At this time, none of our classes will be divided into smaller classes, as we are able to fit all classes safely into a single room, with the combination of spacing and plexiglass barriers. In some cases, regular rooms are being swapped in order to accommodate different-sized classes.

The Parish Hall has been considered as a classroom space. However, there are serious acoustical concerns related to the HVAC system that limit the use of the Hall as a full-time classroom. These concerns can be addressed but not in time for the start of school. The issues are long-standing and in no way affect the health

and safety of our students and faculty. The Parish Hall may be used intermittently for larger classes to spread out (stretch breaks!) until the issues are resolved.

Have you addressed ventilation and air circulation within the school?

Ventilation will be increased to promote air exchange. Fresh air is the number-one way to dilute the virus.

The first line of defense will be window fans. The fans will be run a minimum of five minutes every hour while an adjacent window is also open to create cross-ventilation. The goal is to exchange inside air with outside air. The second line of defense will be in-room HEPA filters. They will clean the air of any remaining virus. The existing air-conditioning or heat will continue to run as needed.

It is prevailing wisdom at this time that ventilation / fresh air is the best method of clearing respiratory particles from the air. Transmission of COVID-19 is almost non-existent outside in fresh air. We are therefore committed to recirculating the air once per hour, according to CDC guidelines.

My child suffers from allergies and I am concerned about the classroom ventilation.

If your child suffers from seasonal allergies which could be exacerbated by periodic ventilation, we encourage you consult with your child’s health provider to decide what is best for your child under these circumstances. Please keep in mind that the new HEPA filters may also help.

Can we provide a personal three-sided plexiglass divider for our child’s desk?

As explained above, all classrooms will be arranged to safely accommodate all students at the required distances, if not more. We will be supplying plexiglass dividers where warranted in the more populated classrooms. While we will not prohibit a child’s having a personal plexiglass divider, we are confident that the classrooms are safe as arranged.

Where will our child’s books and supplies be stored if there are no communal supplies?

Our first priority was arranging for safe desk placement. Now that the plans have been developed, teachers are free to add back any storage to their classrooms that may fit. Some rooms will not allow for any other furniture. Some items may be stored in cupboard in the hallway outside the classroom. In some cases, seldom-used supplies may be stored in an unused classroom or other area of the building. It is possible that students will be able to keep their supplies in a milk-crate or similar container next to their desk.

In any case, if a student is not able to have their own books and supplies at their desk, care will be taken to store books and supplies in such a way that a single student’s items are grouped together, to avoid commingling of books and supplies among students.

Given all of these variables, teachers will be in contact with their classes with more information about supplies.

Can students bring backpacks to school?

Yes, students can bring backpacks to school. We feel that the benefit of backpacks outweighs any small risk of surface contamination in an environment as safely kept as our school. Students will be asked to disinfect their hands after handling backpacks.

We ask that backpacks carry only the essentials and that they be cleaned regularly.

Will teachers have walkie-talkies or another method to communicate so they can let each other know when they are moving students through halls or when a student is going to the restroom or office?

Our teachers do have walkie-talkies, which can be used if necessary. Hallway / restroom traffic is being taken into account, and the faculty will develop an appropriate system for ensuring coordinated movement. This is one of the many logistical considerations that will be planned and likely adjusted as necessary.

How will younger children be safe if they are not required to wear a mask at all times? What is the reasoning behind masks' being optional for 2nd grade and below?

After discussing this point with teachers and hearing the concerns of some parents, we have made the decision to require *all* students pre-K through 8th Grade to wear masks throughout the day unless excepted by their teacher for lunch or other pertinent reasons.

What will the virtual learning look like? Live-stream from the classroom? Lesson plans and assignments? A combination of both? Will students receive books, or will all assignments be electronic?

The faculty and staff are working quickly to ensure that our virtual students have easy access to the same lessons and assignments as our classroom students and develop ways to maintain the strong relationships that make our school so special. Teachers in every grade level will be using Google Classroom. Families will receive a "Welcome to Distance Learning" packet that includes the classroom codes and instructions. Students in Grades 4-8 will most likely be familiar with the process, but younger students will need assistance joining the Google Classrooms.

Teachers are also working with several additional programs that promote engagement in virtual learning and may use apps such as Flipgrid and Padlet. Students will be able to access all of these links through their Google Classrooms. All of the assignments will be posted in Google Classroom and turned in to the teachers through Google Classroom.

We will make every effort to use digital assignments. This is more feasible for Grades 6-8, as they have on-line text books. Physical books, assignments, and manipulatives are developmentally essential for the children in younger grades. In the event that we need to send physical supplies, we will arrange a designated pick-up / drop-off day and time.

Because of the funding received through the CARES Act, SSP was able to invest in an upgrade to our WIFI and order laptops and additional hardware for the teachers. This will allow teachers to live stream lessons through Google Meet so that students can participate synchronously. This will also allow the student to see his/her classmates and participate in classroom discussions. We will be recording those lessons and posting them into Google Classroom at the end of the day. This will allow the students who are in class to review the lessons at home in the evening if needed as well. At times, we will be using pre-recorded videos, either created by the classroom teacher or from other resources. These videos will also be posted in Google Classroom.

Is the class supply list different for virtual learners?

All classroom supply lists are under re-evaluation at the moment. Teachers are attempting to reimagine classrooms based on changes to storage capacity and the elimination of shared supplies. All students will be doing the same work and assignments, regardless of whether they are at home or in school; therefore supply lists will be fairly consistent. For those working at home, a computer or laptop with a camera and microphone will be necessary to participate in Meet OR a phone or tablet with the Google Meet app. We also recommend a

printer and printer paper and a scanner. There are many free scanner apps available, and for anyone with an iPhone, there is a scanner in the Notes App. We also recommend Google Classroom, Google Meet, Flipgrid and Padlet apps. They are all free and will make life much easier.

Will there be a standard for how teachers communicate with students and parents?

The primary communication method with teachers will be through e-mail. Parents can e-mail teachers through @saintstephenstl.org and students (K-8) can e-mail through @ssp2.com. Google Classroom allows parents to receive weekly or daily notifications of assignments and missing work if they sign up for guardian emails. We will include information about the sign-up process in the distance learning welcome packet.

My child is not able to partake in in-person learning at this time but I am concerned that they won't have access to the technology necessary to keep up with distance learning.

We encourage you to contact Greg Sturgill as soon as possible with any concerns about equipment or access.

Does the school have enough bandwidth to handle the demands of distance learning?

We have upgraded our existing Internet service to its maximum capabilities. If there is need to enhance it further, we are prepared to explore other providers.

Is there a tuition discount for the virtual learning option?

The cost of virtual (or distance) learning is the same as in-person learning.

What happens to art and music this year?

Band will be handled virtually. There will be more information after the start of school about joining or re-enrolling in band.

The art, music, and Spanish teachers will go to the homerooms to teach in order to maintain appropriate distancing. We will not be singing in the classroom until there is better science regarding the spread of COVID-19 through singing. There will be opportunities for music learning both virtually and in the classroom, which may also involve outdoor space and online platforms.

Can we eliminate the kids' having to change into gym shorts for P.E., which requires extra bathroom time and increased risk of contact?

PE class is more essential than ever to get the students out of the classroom and moving around.

We are amending the gym shorts policy to eliminate the need to change clothes at school, which uses up precious class time. Students have the **option** to simply wear gym shorts to school on PE days. If gym shorts are not worn, students can go to PE in their uniform shorts or the shorts under their skirt or jumper.

Will the first day of school have an assembly and blessing and, if so, how will that be controlled for social distancing? Will the students be attending Mass during the week?

We do not plan to have any in-person "assemblies" during the first semester. We are looking into virtual options and other creative ways of inspiring community. Students may attend Mass in smaller groups and will mask and

distance for Mass. Mass may be live-streamed so that students in the classroom and those learning at home can participate virtually. These plans are still being finalized.

Will my child be stuck in one classroom all day?

In addition to the usual recess periods and PE class, every effort will be made to use the available space – both inside and out – to spread out and move around, observing masking and social distancing policies.

Will masks be required during recess?

Most likely. We are still exploring options for recess. There may be areas designated for more spread-out activities which might not require masks, once routines are established and we can ensure safety.

How will lunch be handled?

Lunch will be delivered (for those purchasing) and eaten in the classroom, followed by hand-washing and disinfection of personal space.

What will arrival and drop-off look like?

While we have general goals for this process, the particulars are still evolving.

Each day will require that a health-screen report be submitted for each child before drop-off. We are still determining the most efficient format and process. Each day will require a temperature check before entering school. We expect this will be handled by assigned faculty and staff as the students arrive. Students will go directly to their homerooms upon arrival, where the homeroom teacher will be waiting for them.

If a student arrives at school without pre-screening and without a parent (e.g., the student walks to school), the student will remain with Greg Sturgill or another staff member in a safe place until a parent can be contacted and the pre-screening completed. A student will remain apart from their homeroom (i.e., isolated) until daily pre-screening is completed. If a student walks to school without a parent and is found to have a temperature higher than 100.4 F on scan, the child will remain with Greg Sturgill or another staff member until a parent or guardian can pick the child up. No child should attend in-person school with new onset of symptoms of illness.

We recognize that some children suffer from seasonal allergies or other underlying conditions that will produce symptoms on the pre-screen, such as cough or sneeze. The pre-screen is asking about new, different, or worsening symptoms, so if your child is suffering from “the usual,” it’s OK to not indicate such symptoms on the pre-screen. However, if your child has “the usual” symptoms from another known illness or condition that could be mistaken for COVID-19 symptoms, we also ask that you obtain a note or letter from your child’s health care provider (such as you would for medication) documenting this condition.

We are considering a longer drop-off period if necessary. This is a part of the day that will likely be adapted once we see what works best.

Dismissal will be done in groups, likely beginning with those who walk home and then by grade level. More details will be forthcoming.

How will proper mask wearing be enforced? What happens if a student refuses to wear a mask or follow distancing rules?

Non-compliance with our mask and distancing policy will be regarded as a disciplinary issue and handled accordingly. If a child persistently refuses to wear a mask, they cannot safely participate in in-person learning.

What happens if someone tests positive for COVID-19 or is exposed to someone who is positive?

If someone who has been in the school building tests positive for COVID-19, we will contact the St. Louis City Department of Health and our representative at the Archdiocesan Department of Education. The Health Department will then perform contact tracing to determine who at school may have been a “close contact” of the COVID-19 patient. Depending on when the positive test is reported and other circumstances (e.g., whether child or adult, age of child, etc.), it may be that students seated near the positive person would be asked to remain at home while contact tracing is performed. In other circumstances, this may not be required. Anyone who is determined to have had “close contact” (as determined by the Health Department*) with an infected individual will be asked to follow quarantine before returning to school. Quarantine is currently 14 days per CDC guidelines. During this quarantine, the “close contacts” would monitor for symptoms of illness.

Under current CDC guidance, those who are not “close contacts” of a person positive for COVID-19 would be able to return to in-person learning, if they had been previously asked to stay at home. The CDC states that a single positive case of COVID-19 does not require school closure. Our goals with the distancing measures, mask requirements, and other safeguards is to create a school environment in which such high-risk contact (“close contact”) is unlikely.

If someone at SSP is exposed to a COVID-19-positive person but the COVID-19-positive person has not entered the school building, then the exposed person should contact their local health department to determine if they meet criteria for a “close contact” and if testing or quarantine is required. A student who has been exposed to someone with COVID-19 should not attend in-person school until cleared.

A secondhand contact – i.e., exposure to a person who has been exposed to a COVID-19-positive person – does not create increased risk. Therefore, we would not need to take action if a person who has been exposed to another person with COVID-19 (but didn’t know it yet) attends school before learning of the exposure. Should the secondhand contact later develop symptoms, then we would contact the Health Department and begin contact tracing, as outlined above. Please keep in mind that people who may test positive for COVID but are asymptomatic are much less likely to transmit, and no symptomatic child should be attending in-person school.

*The current definition of “close contact” per the CDC is being within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes. However, this is a **general** guideline and individual circumstances must be taken into account, which is why the Health Department is contacted for each case. For instance, being seated at appropriately spaced desks (per AAP guidelines), with masks, all facing forward, for more than 15 minutes, is likely not considered a close contact. However, being coughed at directly in the face by an unmasked person just once would be a “close contact,” even though it was of shorter duration than 15 minutes. “Close contact” might also include hugging or kissing someone who is COVID-19 positive, sharing eating or drinking utensils, etc. Thus it is impossible to provide a specific definition in this FAQ document.

What if I am aware that someone is sending their child to school after exposure to someone who has tested positive?

We have been instructed to report such cases to the Department of Health.

