



July 8, 2020

St. Mary's Community:

On June 17th, a message was sent to all of you that included a letter from Bishop Callahan indicating his hopes for Diocesan schools to open in the fall using direct instruction. The following day, the Diocese superintendent had a meeting with school principals and system presidents regarding schools opening in the fall. On June 26th, the Diocese of La Crosse sent a guidebook of directives and guidance for fall 2020 school openings to principals and system presidents. Parts of the guidebook are mandatory while other parts are advisory. Since then I have been in contact with the Marathon County Health Department, Father Joe, St. Mary's School staff, parents, local public and private school principals and area school nurses. St. Mary's has formulated a plan for the fall with a variety of input but is largely based on the Diocese of La Crosse plan. With the pandemic and opening being a fluid situation, I'm apprehensive to share the plan as things will likely change which may lead to confusion or frustration. Thus, I'm going to share only the major points and the items you may need to plan for at this time but leave some specifics out as some details are more likely to change.

As of July 8th, the St. Mary's School plan for the fall of 2020 opening includes:

- Direct instruction at school every day that we were scheduled to have school as outlined in the calendar sent home as part of the end of year packets and currently on our website.
- Having the school day the same time, from 7:40 – 2:50, which will include Mass on Mondays and Wednesdays.
- Guidelines for social distancing and cleaning procedures.
- After care the same times as last year (3 – 5) that follow the social distancing and cleaning procedures.
- A variety of activities to help with social emotional concerns and to determine where students are academically after the long time away.
- Hot lunch program with cold lunch option similar to last year.
- Making masks and face shields optional for students. The school will not be providing masks and face shields to students thus parents who wish for their students to have them, can purchase them. The instance that a student will be required to wear a mask or face shield is if a student is in the isolation room for COVID-19 symptoms. If the child does not already have one, we will give them an option of putting on a cloth mask or face shield until they are picked up.
- Parents having a daily plan for children that are sick to get picked up from school quickly. Current authorized pickup people are labeled in Sycamore.
- Having medical information updated. Current medical information can be checked in Sycamore.
- Teachers preparing lesson plans in advance, in case we need to quickly change to distance learning.
- Students bringing water bottles to school to fill in our hands-free drinking fountain on first floor.
- Implementing an opt-out option for parents that don't feel comfortable with sending their children to St. Mary's due to COVID-19 concerns for a period of time. This involves a form St. Mary's has that will need to be filled out by parents and which constitutes the necessary request from the parent and approval from the school. If a parent calls in and tells us that their child wouldn't be at school for COVID-19 fears, this is not a request and approval thus the student is unexcused and truant. Also,

this can't be simply because the student does not want to go to school, this is also truancy. If a student has COVID-19 that is obviously a different situation and they are excused. However, if there is a legitimate health concern and a parent request, the school will approve. The intent is the leave wouldn't be just one day or the whole year, rather a period of days or possibly weeks where you don't feel comfortable sending your child to school. The dates will be on the form but can be shortened or extended if need be. Teachers would then prepare lessons and it would be like the distance schooling we did this past spring. Multiple requests within this school year to not attend school for direct instruction due to COVID-19 concerns can be done. Right now, the logistics aren't as important as the understanding that you do have an opt-out option if you do not feel comfortable sending your child to school, while still being considered a St. Mary's student thus complying with mandatory attendance laws.

- Asking for travel destinations if families go on vacation. If those vacations are to high risk areas, the student(s) may be quarantined. This may include vacations taken in the 2 weeks prior to school starting on September 1st.
- Parents screening their children for symptoms in the morning before being sent to school. The school is not asking for documentation from parents indicating they screen their child daily, but if a child is sick, keep them home. If a child has a fever, don't give them Tylenol to get their fever down and send them to school. School staff will be monitoring for symptoms throughout the school day and those with symptoms will be sent home.
- Replacing a back to school night assembly with a back to school day so as to not have as many people in the school. The back to school day will be Tuesday, August 25th, from noon – 8 PM. Families will drop off supplies as they normally do and will have more time to visit with their teachers. The school supply list was sent home at the end of year and can be found on our website, Parents' Page/School Supply List. Some of these items, especially cleaning and health items, might need to get purchased well in advance. School pictures will also be taken on that date from noon – 8 so get those haircuts before August 25th. Picture order forms will be included in the smaller back to school packets that will be sent home in a couple weeks.

There is more to talk about, but those items will be described as we get closer to the school year when there is less possibility of changes. I wanted to give the big points and the items you need to plan for. I realize many of you have heard different medical information or are in the medical profession. The school will be taking medical advice from the Marathon County Health Department as directed by our Diocese. They have been helpful; I've talked to them several times since this started in spring and they also plan on doing an in-service for our staff before school starts. Also, some of you work at places that have certain guidelines that St. Mary's may or may not follow. The Diocese guidelines were laid out with our schools in mind. Also, you may have students that are going to the public school and they may do things differently there. We did some things differently during the closure last spring, this is because we are different schools and we do things differently. There is a different number of students, the physical buildings are different, there are different school philosophies, we take guidance from our Diocese, etc. Having talked with local schools, public and private, it does look like there will be differences but there will be many similarities too.

I will keep you informed, but for now that's what I have. Again, I'm going to note that things may change but as of July 8th, 2020, this is where we are at.

I hope you are enjoying the summer.

Sincerely,

Mr. Koch
Principal

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