



ST. MARK Catholic School

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COVID-19 Mitigation Health Plan for Phases 2 and 3 July 10, 2020

Amended on March 8, 2021 to reflect implementation of waiver to allow for more in-person learning in grades 5-8

Background

Decisions regarding the plan to re-open SMCS were made collaboratively with the pastor, school administration, teachers, and parents. A task force of parents, teachers, and administrators (including the school nurse) has met weekly since the beginning of June, as has an internal task force of teacher representatives and administrators, to formulate the best plan for SMCS and to address concerns. Information on our progress, the variance letter from Dr. Vorbach, and various options for re-opening were emailed to parents in late June and early July. A parent meeting was hosted by the principal on July 7, and a recording of that meeting was made available to all parents the following morning. A school survey was sent to parents requesting their input on the options for re-opening. The plan that follows reflects the work of both the parent and school task forces as well as the results of the parent survey. We thank everyone for their dedication to SMCS and their help in creating the best re-opening plan for our students, faculty, and families.

Point of Contact: All questions about this plan can be directed to Mrs. Kimberly Parker, Principal, ST. MARK Catholic School, 9972 Vale Rd., Vienna, VA 22181, 703-281-9103, kparker@stmark.org.

Guiding Principles

- SMCS greatly values parent and teacher input, which has been essential in developing this plan, and will continue to seek their input throughout the school year.
- Parents and teachers indicated, by sizable majorities in their respective groups, that they want SMCS to follow CDC and local health guidelines.
- The school will benefit from a plan that allows us the ability and flexibility to pivot at a moment's notice should conditions and health guidelines change.
- The plan should provide the maximum in-person instruction time possible while also ensuring teachers collaborative planning time, maintaining adherence to CDC and local health guidelines, and working within the school's restrictions on space and budget.
- While the school cannot make guarantees regarding the health of any individual, the safety of students, teachers, and families is of utmost importance in formulating this plan.

Planning to Reopen

On August 31, 2020, SMCS opened our school building for the 2020-2021 school year with a focus on re-opening smartly and safely. As stated in the original addendum, as health conditions warranted and school procedures proved effective, the school worked to increase in-person instruction, particularly for the students in grades 5 – 8.

The original re-opening plan follows. It provided for maximum in-person instruction while also following the June and August 2020 guidelines from the CDC, Commonwealth of Virginia, and local health department for Phase 2 and Phase 3 re-opening. The school's physical limitations on space and budget were also factored into this plan. Mondays will be dedicated to maintaining skills with online learning, attending Mass in person with their families or online, and ensuring teachers have collaborative planning time and time for professional development. The plan also provides families with maximum choice and flexibility for continuous learning throughout the school year as they consider their own family's health and comfort with in-person instruction.

- On Mondays, all students will participate in a half-day of distance learning. Teachers will participate in collaborative planning, professional development, and attend necessary meetings from 1:30 – 3:30.
- Students in grades K – 4 will attend school for full days of in-person instruction from Tuesday – Friday.
- Students in grades 5 – 8 will attend school for full days of in-person instruction in their Blue and Gold groups on alternating days from Tuesday – Friday.

Our amended plan for 2020 – 2021, which will allow for a staggered return of all students in grades 5 – 8 for in-person learning, follows. As space limitations remain a challenge, SMCS has submitted a “notice of intent to vary” from state guidance with the Virginia Council of Private Education (VCPE) in regard to physical distancing in the classroom. This decision was made with the input of multiple stakeholders, including but not limited to administration, the pastor, faculty, staff, and parents. A faculty meeting was held on January 25, 2021, to propose the change in our original plan, and a survey was sent to all faculty and staff following that meeting. On February 18, 2021, a parent meeting was hosted by our PTPO with guest speakers from the Fairfax County Health Department and the possible changes to our current plan were presented. A recording of that meeting was made available to parents the following day along with a survey asking for parent input on the suggested changes, which includes moving seats closer together than the recommended 6 feet. The faculty and parent surveys showed that both groups support the proposed changes by large majorities.

Amendment to the original plan:

- Students in grades 5 – 8 will attend school for full days of in-person instruction Tuesday through Friday.
 - All grade 8 students may attend in-person learning four days a week beginning March 9.
 - All grade 5 students may attend in-person learning four days a week beginning March 23.
 - All grade 7 students may attend in-person learning four days a week beginning April 13.
 - All grade 6 students may attend in-person learning four days a week beginning April 20.
- Seats in grades 5 – 8 only may be moved to a distance of less than 6 feet, but no less than 3 feet for the remainder of the 2020 – 2021 school year.
- The school will submit a “notice of intent to vary” with the VCPE.
- Before their child returns to 4 days of in-person instruction, parents/guardians of students in grades 5 – 8 will submit a new signed agreement form to acknowledge receipt of the amended addendum and agree to follow the policies therein.

Communications

Communication with all stakeholders has been ongoing and in various forms since June and will continue throughout the summer and school year as needed. Parent meetings and surveys will continue into the school year on specific dates to evaluate the plan, address concerns, and share information. Email will be employed throughout the year as our main form of communication to keep all stakeholders informed.

To ensure common knowledge and understanding of the COVID-19 mitigation strategies detailed in this plan, we will do the following:

- Develop and provide both in-person and video trainings and orientations for staff and students on the specifics of our COVID-19 mitigation strategies;
- Create one pagers, FAQ’s, and simple visuals related to COVID-19 that are appropriate for children and can be shared and posted throughout the school building;
- Clearly communicate policies for when a student or staff member should stay home, go home early, and return to school requirements with parents and/or guardians and staff;
- Provide regular faculty meetings, in-service, and professional development opportunities dedicated to addressing COVID-19 concerns and updates.
- Create a school handbook addendum that will be distributed to staff and parents before the beginning of school clarifying policies for when a student should stay home, including a fever threshold of 99.5, and specific policies for the return to campus. As with the regular school handbook, the addendum will require signature from faculty, staff, and parents.

- Create a brief “how-to guide” and/or video for students and families highlighting specific guidance regarding hand-hygiene, respiratory etiquette, face covering policies, social distancing, and hallway procedures. Families will be encouraged to read through and/or watch the material together and will confirm having read or watched it.
- Meetings will be scheduled with *ST. MARK* families to discuss COVID-19 specific policies and procedures prior to the start of the school year.

Maintaining Health of the School Community

Daily Health Screenings

All staff, students, and visitors to campus complete a daily health screening consisting of the CDC COVID-19 questions and a temperature check or attestation prior to being admitted to the school building.

We ask that all student and staff absences be discussed with the school nurse. Teachers and staff are encouraged to stay home if they are not feeling well and options will be provided on a case-by-case basis to work and/or teach remotely if appropriate.

Given that daily instruction may be accessed live from home each day through Zoom, families will be asked to keep students home if the student is not feeling well.

Entrance Procedures

Designated entrances and one-way stairwells are being utilized to control flow of students and staff and minimize mixing of non-cohort groups. Directional signs have been posted to ensure correct utilization of entrances and stairwells, and trainings will be provided to staff and students. Students and staff will wear face coverings at all times when inside the building per the governor’s current executive order, and at all times inside or outside when 6 feet of physical distance cannot be maintained.

Students are screened at carpool drop-off for the presence of COVID-19-like symptoms. Students screening positive during carpool drop-off will immediately return home with their parent/guardian and will not be permitted into the school building.

Unnecessary volunteers are not being permitted into the school during Phase 2 or 3, and any visitors are required to attest that they are not experiencing any symptoms of illness nor have they been exposed.

Parents are asked to schedule any necessary appointments for their child(ren) during the remote instructional day. If a parent/guardian needs to drop-off or pick-up their child during the school day (outside of the regular morning or afternoon carpool times), they are asked to call the school once they are in the school parking lot. A member of the staff will walk out to the car with the student, or will walk out to the car to meet the student, conduct the health screening, and if appropriate, walk with the child into the school.

Hand Hygiene

Occupants of the building are asked to use hand sanitizer each time they cross a threshold to enter the school or a new area/room, as well as when they re-enter the building. Hand sanitizer is available at all entry points of the building, entry points for each classroom, and throughout the building. A surplus of hand sanitizer refills has been purchased and stored appropriately.

Abundant, age appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette educational posters have been posted throughout the building and the teachers and school nurse provide frequent in-class tutorials.

Washing with soap and water will be encouraged, and sinks in each classroom will be utilized throughout the day. All sinks will have signage providing direction on how to effectively wash hands and adequate supplies of soap will be provided.

Facial Coverings

Students, staff, and visitors are expected to wear a cloth face covering or surgical mask over their nose and mouth at all times when inside the building per the governor's current order, and both indoors and outdoors whenever 6 feet of physical distance cannot be maintained.

Students in grades where seats are physically distanced from one another by 6 feet or more may remove face coverings when instructed by their teachers for snack, lunch, to have a drink of water, or mask break.

In classrooms where students are seated closer than 6 feet, face coverings must remain on at all times except when a student needs a drink of water. Students may only remove their face coverings when the following criteria have been met:

- Students have been moved at least 6 feet apart from one another.
- Teachers have instructed students that they may remove their masks.

In classrooms where students are seated closer than 6 feet, lunch will be eaten in an alternative location where students can be physically distanced by 6 feet or more.

Signs in the building, as well as educational materials that were provided to staff and families prior to the start of the school year, remind everyone of best practices for mask wearing.

All staff and faculty have been instructed in the best practices for encouraging face-covering policy compliance, including that any wet or visibly soiled face covering will be replaced with a surgical mask from the school stock. Teachers were provided with face shields, masks, disposable gloves, and reusable rubber gloves at the start of the school year.

Windows and classroom doors are kept open to promote air circulation in the school and classrooms.

Physical Distancing

All students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to maintain a physical distance of at least 6 feet even when masks are worn. Floor markings and other visual and verbal reminders are being used to help promote compliance. Classrooms have been modified to limit the presence of non-essential items, and to ensure adequate spacing for 6 feet of social distancing whenever possible. Communal areas, including the Church, will be utilized by only one cohort at a time and cleaned between uses OR only in a way in which cohorts of students do not come into contact with one another.

While parent survey results in July of 2020 overwhelmingly showed that SMCS parents would like the school to maintain a physical distance between students, faculty, and staff of at least 6 feet, in February of 2021, both parent and faculty surveys showed a change in this area. Beginning March 9, SMCS will initiate a staggered approach to offering in-person instruction four days a week to all students. While physical distancing is likely to be reduced in grades 5 – 8, at no point would that distance be fewer than 3 feet. A variance will be submitted to the VCPE. Whenever physical distancing is anything less than 6 feet in a classroom or any other location on campus, face coverings will be required to be worn by students and staff at all times during the school day.

Threshold for Attending School In Person

Any student or staff member assessed at the school and found to have a temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher or any other COVID-19 symptom as listed by the CDC will be sent home for the day. Students or staff who are either sent home or are absent from school with COVID-19-like symptoms will be required to provide a note from a licensed independent healthcare provider (to include a physician, physician's assistant, or nurse practitioner), indicating that said provider deems the individual clear to attend school. The student "Permission to Return to School" form is available on the school website, and should be filled out by your healthcare provider.

In addition, students and staff members must be fever-free, symptom-free, and have not vomited for at least 24 hours. Once the student and staff member is confirmed to be free of communicable illness by a healthcare provider or is fever free/symptom free for 24 hours without taking anti-fever medications, the student and staff member may return to school.

Lunch

Lunches are eaten in the classrooms or alternative area as necessary to maintain 6 feet of physical distancing between students and keep the same grade cohort of students together for the entire day. Hot lunches purchased through our lunch supplier are provided in sealed single portion containers. Face coverings are allowed to be removed for eating, but only when 6 feet

of physical distance exists. Any wet or visibly soiled fabric face covering will be replaced with a disposable surgical mask provided by the school.

Teachers' Lounge

The teachers' lounge will be limited to no more than 4 staff members at a time requiring 6 feet of social distancing between staff at all times. There will only be 3 seats available at the tables, and they will be marked so that staff may clearly maintain 6 feet of social distance while seated.

Assemblies and School Mass

School-wide assemblies will either be cancelled or delivered via Zoom. School-wide singing assemblies and gatherings will be suspended. Singing will be conducted in cohorts while maintaining a distance of 10 feet or more and taking place outdoors with social distancing whenever possible.

Students will attend Mass virtually at least once a week.

Band instruction is offered by the Garwood-Whaley Music Program. This year band instruction has been delivered virtually, and band performances were suspended temporarily. Currently under consideration are outdoor band practices and a possible outdoor spring concert, with physical distancing and all other health and safety measures in place.

Restrooms

Use of restrooms will be limited to only 2 students at a time. Only every other stall, sink, and urinal will be available to promote distancing.

Elevator

Use of the elevator is limited to 2 students or individuals at a time, and they must be wearing a mask.

Water Fountains

Water fountains are covered and not available for use during the school day. Students are allowed to bring in a water bottle from home. Students who require water for medical conditions are allowed to go to the school nurse or other designated area for the water.

School Clinic Operations and Dedicated Quarantine Space

SMCS student health services are prepared to meet the health needs of our student body, including non-COVID-19 health concerns. Additional staff have been asked to participate in Medical Administration Training (MAT), multiplying the number of school personnel available to address routine health needs of the student body. Additionally, the clinic workflow has been streamlined to include the following process:

- Students screening positive with symptoms of COVID-19 during the school day will be removed to the designated quarantine space in the school and will be attended by an RN prior to dismissal with parent/guardian;
- Students needing assessment for non-COVID-19 specific symptoms will be admitted to the clinic for further evaluation;
- Students needing routine, scheduled medications will receive them just outside of their classroom door.
- Nebulizer treatments will not be provided at school. Parents will be encouraged to contact the school nurse to discuss alternatives.

The school clinic space has been supplied with procedural masks, gloves, and sanitizing cleaners. A dedicated quarantine room has been established that will allow for adequate privacy for evaluation, and includes a dedicated entrance to the school building. Students and staff who screen positive for COVID-19 symptoms will be removed to this space for evaluation. The nurse has been supplied with medical-grade PPE including gowns, shields, gloves, and fitted respirator masks for RNs staffing the quarantine space, consistent with universal precautions for droplet-borne pathogens. Students and staff will be attended to while in the quarantine space exclusively by licensed health care providers or MAT-trained staff once the MAT training is complete.

Parents or caregivers picking up the student should call the school office once they are parked in the school parking lot, and the nurse or member of staff will walk with the student out to the parent's/caregiver's car in order to limit access and exposure to other parts of the facility.

The location(s) of the individual while he or she was in school will be determined and disinfected. Individuals sent home will not be permitted to return to school until he or she is fever free/symptom free for 24 hours without taking anti-fever medications, and cleared by a healthcare provider.

Communicating and Responding to Positive Cases Detected at the School

If confirmed as COVID-19, exposed individuals may be required to self-quarantine and self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days. Determinations of when this will be necessary will be made on a case-by-case basis and coordinated between the school nurse and local health authority.

If one or more cases are confirmed, SMCS will work with the local health authorities to determine if community transmission is taking place. Closing some or all of the school building until a thorough disinfection can occur may be considered. Longer term closing will be considered and determined in cooperation with local health authorities and communicated to all families in a timely manner.

If the school is closed for any length of time, it will not reopen until disinfection is complete and the building is determined to be safe.

Addressing Emotional Needs

The school nurse, assistant principal, and student support services coordinator will serve in the role of emotional support of students. Students with mental/emotional needs will be seen by the members of the emotional support team. Students will be referred to outside sources as needed.

Maintaining Healthy Environments

High Touch Surfaces

All rooms have been equipped with soap for their sinks, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant wipes. Age appropriate classroom procedures include disinfecting desks and chairs on a routine basis. All students have their own desk supplies for individual use.

Facility Cleaning

Facilities and maintenance staff routines have been expanded to include frequent cleaning and disinfecting of public spaces including restrooms, staircase bannisters, and hallways. Nightly cleaning and disinfecting practices have been instituted. Over the summer, the school ventilation system was reviewed by facility staff. Weather permitting and where safe to do so, classroom windows are open when classrooms are occupied to promote air flow and circulation. Similarly, classroom doors remain open to support circulation. Water systems were operated throughout the summer and were reviewed by facility staff.

Maintaining Healthy Operations

At-risk Populations

In accordance with the Office of Catholic Schools policies, options were explored to support those adults at higher risk for severe illness. Efforts were made to make reasonable accommodations for this population. Offers included, but were not limited to, temporary teleworking, modified job responsibilities, and modified working hours. Sick leave policies have been expanded to allow flexibility for faculty and staff.

Faculty and staff members have been identified who will be able to serve as substitute teachers and push into classrooms as necessary.

Students who are at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 will be provided the option to participate in full time distance learning consistent with the pace and curriculum of their brick and mortar peers. Additional sick leave policies, as well as student absentee processes and practices have been developed. These practices encourage faculty, staff and students to stay home or self-isolate when they are sick or have been exposed to COVID-19.

Students with health conditions that are exacerbated by wearing a face covering will be allowed frequent mask breaks throughout the day. Parents should contact the school nurse with any additional concerns.

Transportation Services

SMCS does not provide any type of transportation services.

Sports and Recreation

ST. MARK Parish CYO recreational sports that utilize the gym will be suspended for the duration of the 2020-2021 school year.

Mitigation of Exposure

In the event that a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, the school will follow all directions from the Fairfax County Department of Health related to contact tracing, quarantining and potential classroom or facility closure. Contact tracing will be conducted by our school nurse in conjunction with the Fairfax County Health Department. SMCS intends to communicate with parents and guardians via email. Students who are unable to attend school in person will participate in distance learning in order to continue academic progress.

Return to School

Policies for return to class/work after COVID-19 illness or exposure require a note from a licensed independent provider (including a physician, physician's assistant or nurse practitioner) clearing them for return to school building. SMCS will participate in community COVID-19 mitigation efforts as deemed appropriate through the network of school nurses serving the Arlington Diocese.

Community and Field Trip Activities

Additional recreational, field trip, and family activities have been suspended for the duration of the school year. No unnecessary volunteers will be permitted indoors.

Severe Conditions

As health conditions change throughout the school year, so too will CDC, state, and local health department guidance. To allow SMCS the flexibility and ability to pivot quickly and seamlessly to a model that could require increased space between individuals, reduced capacity in the school building, or all students returning to distance learning, we plan the following:

- ALL students were assigned to a Blue or Gold group to allow us the ability to make a quick transition should the entire school need to change to 50% capacity.
- Mondays have been dedicated to distance learning for all so that teachers in all grade levels can maintain their expertise in online instruction and students will maintain their proficiency with online learning.

The original school re-opening plan for SMCS allows us to revert to Phase 2 guidelines without disruption. We will file a variance with the VCPE to allow for students in grades 4 – 8 to continue to attend school in-person should health conditions necessitate reverting to Phase 2

guidelines. Should we revert to Phase 1, both teachers and students in grades K-8 will participate in distance learning, the skills for which will be maintained throughout Phase 3.

SMCS Early Learning Center, which houses the SMCS pre-school program, is permitted to maintain operations during Phases 1 and 2, following all CDC and Virginia Department of Health operational requirements.