



# ST. RITA SCHOOL

**In the Classical tradition**

## **St. Rita Catholic School Reopening Plan 2020-2021** *Information for the Families in our K-8 School Community*

Dear Families,

We thank you for your patience as we develop our plans to reopen our school for full-time, in-person teaching and learning this fall. We strongly believe that academic growth, character formation, social and emotional development, and the transmission of the faith, most meaningfully occur in the live classroom setting here at school where we gather as a community. As a small school, we are well positioned to implement the guidance of local, state, and national health agencies, to continually reflect on our policies and practice, and to adapt and improve our approach as circumstances change. A school task force (listed at end) has been hard at work this summer developing our reopening plans, and we are eager to share them with you. We know you have many questions and concerns, and we hope the information provided here will reassure you that we are planning as carefully and prudently as we can to protect the health of our school community. Because of the necessary health and safety protocols, the students' day will look a little different. But we will strive to give it the same feel—the feel of being loved, nurtured, and challenged as we prepare our students “for life in this world and the next.” A breakdown of our current plans appears below, and we will update you as more details become available or any changes are made.

***Here is the big news: We are heading back to school!*** We are planning on full-time, in-person instruction for the school year 2020-2021. We expect we will be in Phase III of Forward Virginia when school starts in August. But even if Northern Virginia reverts to Phase II at some point, we plan to continue full-time, in-person instruction for all of our students as our student spacing of six feet suffices for both Phases. **We are so excited to be able to offer full-time instruction for all of our students, and we appreciate your patience, understanding, and partnership as we implement health and safety measures to protect our community as we return to school.** The Saint Rita School

Reopening Plan provides for in-person instruction in Phases II, III and IV of *Forward Virginia*, regardless of any decisions or plans made by Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS). (Unlike our normal inclement weather policy where we follow ACPS, in the case of this public health crisis, we have devised our own plan and we will follow our own plan despite what ACPS does or does not do. I just wanted to be very clear on this point.)

If at any point during the school year Governor Northam announces a return to Phase I, the Preschool and K-8 programs will be closed with only essential personnel on site. All lessons—including Specials—will transition to a distance learning format through Zoom/live sessions, pre-taped videos and online or take-home curriculum packets. We learned a great deal about eLearning best practices last spring, and our teachers will be prepared if we need to go back online at some point this year. But it is our sincere hope that we do not, as a State, need to revert to Phase I.

## **RESTRUCTURING OUR SPACE**

We will creatively use all available spaces in our school in order to position students six feet apart from each other, as currently recommended by health agencies. This will require a little shuffling and adjustment for all involved, but we are so grateful that by doing this we are able to teach all of our students every day, avoiding the alternating or rotating school schedule many other institutions face. To accomplish our goal of sufficiently spacing our students so we can have them all on campus, we are undertaking the following measures:

- Splitting several grades in half, to be housed in two classrooms. This will likely be grades K, 1, 3, 4, and 6. The split will be done by gender where numbers permit. Our typical classroom can hold at least 14 students spaced six feet apart.
- We plan to partition the School Hall down the center with a temporary wall. One full grade can then be housed on each side, most likely grades 2 and 5. As much as possible, extraneous items will be removed, boards installed, etc., to make this a comfortable home for these students as long as needed.
- The current 8th grade class is small enough that it can fit in one large classroom, spaced six feet apart.
- The 7th grade will be housed in the lower level of the Convent wing of the building, as the Sisters have now moved on from that space. We are sad to see them go, but the use of that space has been an incredible blessing. Three large rooms on the lower level will be converted into classrooms, each holding 7 or 8 students. We are investigating ways to use the Convent Garden as an outdoor classroom to use when possible.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HOMEROOMS**

We are committed to teaching as much of our curriculum as possible to our students this year, including art, music, and P.E. But incorporating the guidance of state and local health agencies will mean making the following adjustments:

- Our students will receive all instruction in their assigned homeroom, so all teachers - including math teachers and the specialist teachers - will come to them rather than all the students moving to the art room, science lab, etc. Students will continue to go outside for P.E. and recess whenever weather permits. Teachers will also have the freedom to take their classes outside for instruction whenever practicable.
- For the classes we plan to divide (likely K, 1, 3, 4, 6, & 7), the Lead Teacher will be with one group while an Instructional Assistant is with the others. In a typical instructional model, the teachers will switch back and forth so that the Lead Teacher can instruct the students in new content while the Instructional Assistant helps the students with independent or small group work. Other instructional models may be employed according to teacher expertise.
- Each student will keep his or her own school supplies with them in their desk during the day; there will be no sharing of communal art supplies or other tools.
- Students will keep their books and backpacks at their desks to minimize the use of closely-spaced lockers.

- *By keeping the students in the same room with the same peers during the day, we will be better positioned to keep the school open and running even if a member of our community does fall ill with COVID-19 at some point. Only those in direct contact with the individual would have to stay home in quarantine (discussed below); the rest of the school could continue teaching and learning in person.*

## **HYGIENE, FACE COVERINGS, AND CLEANING PROTOCOLS**

To promote good hygiene, hand washing, and use of face coverings (when necessary), we plan to take the following steps:

- Hand sanitizing stations will be installed/placed at every entrance, office, and classroom doorway for use whenever students and teachers enter or exit.
- Portable sinks will be installed at several locations throughout the building.
- Students will wash their hands with soap and water before eating.
- Drinking fountains will not be used, but students can refill their individual water bottles when needed.
- The number of students permitted in the bathroom simultaneously will be limited, and custodians will clean the bathrooms at regular intervals throughout the day.
- Every student, teacher, and staff member will need to have a face covering with them at school to use during drop off, pick-up, and whenever the six feet of distance cannot be maintained. Staff positioned at car line or greeting any visitors will wear face coverings.
- Face coverings should align with our uniform policy (no offensive or inappropriate language or images).
- Cloth face coverings should be cleaned, or new disposable face coverings should be used each day.
- Students and teachers in their classroom, spaced six feet apart, will not be required to wear face coverings, barring changes in the law or circumstances.
- Students will not be required to wear face coverings during P.E. or on the playground, but physical contact between the students will be discouraged.
- Anyone desiring to use a face covering more often than required is welcome to do so at any time.
- Any visitors to the school aged 2 or older will need to wear a face covering while in our building (and complete the health screening and temperature check discussed below as well).
- The building will be disinfected and sanitized by our contracted cleaning company, using Protexus Electrostatic Technology or comparable method prior to reopening; this technology will also be used if there is a confirmed or presumptive case of COVID-19 in the school community.
- Our contracted cleaning company will conduct nightly cleaning and disinfection of all high touch areas in addition to performing routine cleaning services per their contract.
- Teachers and staff will routinely clean door handles, desktops and frequently touched surfaces to include Chromebooks etc; throughout the day.

## **PICK UP AND DROP OFF PROCEDURES**

The highlights of our day always include welcoming the students to school in the morning and seeing them run to hug you when you pick them up at the end of the day. Without compromising the *joy* of those moments, prudence dictates we make the following changes, to be re-evaluated as the year goes on and adjusted as needed:

- **Pre-screening health questions and temperature check:** Before entering our building each day, everyone (students, staff, teachers, visitors) will need to answer pre-screening health questions and have their temperature checked. We are currently investigating how to do this accurately and efficiently while respecting health privacy laws. We hope to be able to offer families options such as entering the data on a secure app before leaving home, filling out a written log to be handed to staff meeting cars, or having those staff members check the students' temperature and ask the questions directly. More information will be provided as this protocol is developed.

- Anyone with a fever of 100.4 degrees or above or symptoms indicative of COVID-19 **will not** be admitted to the school. Please see below for more details on how illness will be handled.
- Greeting the cars in the morning needs to be as contactless as possible, so please have your students practice unbuckling and opening the car doors themselves. Please make sure your students can grab and handle their own backpacks as they get out of the car. *Please do not send extraneous items to school with your children.*
- Adults will need to remain in their cars and not escort their children into the building. Please speak with Mrs. Manaker as soon as possible if you are concerned about this. (If you are bringing your child to school late and there is no staff member out front to meet him or her, please do escort him or her to the door and buzz the office.)
- As mentioned above, students and staff will wear face coverings during drop off and pick up.
- At dismissal, cars will queue up as usual but students will be dismissed one family at a time. Adults will remain in their cars and display a paper with the child's last name on the vehicle dashboard to be visible to staff, who will radio into the building for that student or sibling group to be released. We will do this as quickly as possible; thank you for your patience!
- Walkers as well as traditional car line students will dismiss school to the car line area. Anyone picking up walkers should space themselves out on the blacktop in the dismissal area (car line area) while waiting. This is a change for walkers. This change provides a necessary control point we need for the upcoming year - all students and faculty dismiss to one area so we can ensure that students who will be exiting the school grounds from many different points (classrooms, school hall, convent, etc.) safely reach parents and guardians.

## **OTHER TEMPORARY CHANGES TO OUR ROUTINE**

We plan to make the following changes, to be revisited as the situation evolves:

- Students will eat lunch in their classrooms.
- No hot lunch options are planned for the fall, but that decision will be re-evaluated at Christmas.
- The school will not be providing snacks; students can bring a snack in their lunchbox. Milk orders will proceed as usual.
- Field trips are currently suspended.
- Back to School Night will be different in order to meet the proper spacing protocols. Stay tuned for additional details as we get closer to the beginning of school.
- School Mass will occur on Mondays and Wednesdays with half the school attending—spaced out—on each day.
- School gatherings will be limited and held in a manner consistent with current Executive Orders on size and spacing.
- School band will not meet for now. Students *may* be able to take instrument lessons online.
- Students will not be taken to the library as a full class. The library can be used by smaller groups of students as practicable.
- Computer learning objectives and skills will be integrated into the humanities, math, science, etc. curriculum. Students will continue to receive a grade for their computer work.
- The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium program will be modified temporarily.
- No outside groups or extra-curricular activities will meet in the school building.
- At this time, we plan to continue offering extended care (EDC) in the afternoons, on a limited basis with advance registration (not drop-in). *We unfortunately will not be offering before school care.* The State of Virginia has separate guidelines on EDC, so there may be some variation in EDC operations as compared to the normal school day. We will provide further details as soon as possible.
- Unfortunately, competitive school athletics may not occur this year. We are awaiting further guidance from the Diocese and from the athletic conference association regarding if, when, and how any school athletics programs can resume.

## HOW ILLNESS WILL BE HANDLED

We know we will face the normal bumps, bruises, and minor illnesses of childhood. Our school nurse will be ready as usual to assist any students who are injured or ill during the day. We will also be on the lookout for any students experiencing fear or anxiety as a result of the COVID-19 situation. The COVID-19 situation will require heightened vigilance, and the health of our whole school community will depend on a strong partnership with parents. Any families who are concerned about their students' susceptibility to severe illness related to COVID-19, or who are concerned about a vulnerable family member at home should meet with Mrs. Manaker by July 24th to discuss accommodations or eLearning options. Our current approach to illness is outlined as follows:

- ***Parents must keep sick children home, and teachers must stay home when ill!*** This is our first and most important line of defense against contagious disease.
- ***If a student becomes ill while at school, parents will be expected to pick up their students within 60 minutes of being notified by the school. An earlier pickup time will be greatly appreciated in order to maintain school operations.***
- As mentioned above, no one registering a temperature of 100.4 or over will be admitted to the building.
- For ordinary illnesses (colds, stomach bugs, ear infections), students, staff, and teachers must remain home for the duration of their illness and be fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications.
- The symptoms of COVID-19 vary widely, with reports of mild symptoms ranging to severe illness. Symptoms can appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19:
  - Fever or chills
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
  - Fatigue
  - Muscle or body aches
  - Headache
  - New loss of taste or smell
  - Sore throat
  - Congestion or runny nose
  - Nausea or vomiting
  - Diarrhea
- Anyone in the school displaying symptoms of COVID-19 (or testing positive) will be required to self-isolate at home in accordance with CDC guidelines. Current guidelines dictate at least 10 days of self-isolation at home from onset of symptoms; symptoms must be improving and the individual must have been fever-free for 3 days (without the use of fever-reducing medications) before returning to school.
- Anyone in the school community who has had direct contact with someone displaying symptoms of COVID-19 (or who has tested positive) will be required to self-quarantine at home in accordance with CDC recommendations (currently 14 days). This would include an individual's siblings and homeroom classmates.
- All teachers, staff, or students returning to school following a COVID-19 related absence will be required to meet the guidelines set by the CDC or local health agency regarding re-entry into the school environment. This may include a doctor's note or negative test as medical norms and practices permit.
- The plan to temporarily transition anyone ill with, or exposed to, COVID-19 to eLearning during their isolation/quarantine, as well as how they will make up missed work, will be implemented by the school homebound education coordinator (Mrs. Elizabeth Hexter), in conjunction with the parents and classroom teachers.
- All families will need to know how to access school information on PowerSchool and GoogleClassroom so they can access the school website/classroom platform throughout the school year. Guides will be posted on the school website to assist parents in this process.

- For student absence, the make-up work policy permitting one extra day for each day absent to complete and submit all required missed work remains in place.
- In the event of a teacher absence, and where practicable, the Instructional Assistant will take the Lead Teacher role. A substitute teacher will then take on the duties of the Instructional Assistant.
- ***Parents able to serve as substitute teachers should contact Mrs. Manaker at principal@saintrita-school by August 3rd in order to create a substitute roster.***
- If anyone in the school community exhibits symptoms of COVID-19 (or tests positive), areas visited by the ill person will be closed off as much as possible. To increase air circulation in the area, outside doors and windows will be opened and ventilating fans used as much as possible. After 24 hours (or as long as practical), the school will thoroughly clean and disinfect the area.
- In the case of multiple possible cases of COVID-19, if advised by local public health authorities, or at the discretion of Mrs. Manaker or Fr. Gee, the school may close temporarily to permit an enhanced cleaning/disinfection protocol.

### **POSSIBILITY OF SCHOOL CLOSURE**

We are planning on full-time, in-person instruction for the school year 2020-2021. We expect we will be in Phase III of Forward Virginia when school starts in August. But even if northern Virginia reverts to Phase II at some point, we plan to continue full-time, in-person instruction for all of our students. The school would only close and return to eLearning if any of the following occurs:

- We are directed to close by the state or the local public health agency (such as reversion to Phase I)
- We are directed to close by the Diocese of Arlington
- Mrs. Manaker and Fr. Gee deem closure necessary

The following protocol would be used if the school had to close:

- Parents will be alerted of a school building closure via email/School Messenger and the School Website and will be given directives on how to transition into eLearning.
- Students, parents, staff, and teachers would be allowed into a closed school building only to the extent advised by the local public health agency.
- Following safety measures, students in need of technology to implement eLearning will be allowed to borrow school devices; I am grateful for the PTO's recent allocation of additional funds to purchase more devices over the summer.

### **GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL!**

- School Supplies: student school supply lists will be posted on the school website July 31, 2020. To limit the transmission of COVID-19 and other seasonal illnesses, students will need to have their own pencil case, and they will not be allowed to share items with other students.
- Uniform Closet items are currently being refreshed and reorganized. A notice will be sent via school messenger to sign up for a visit to the uniform closet.
- Our local uniform supply store, Robcyn's, is open for in-person shopping and will also be offering uniform pieces for sale on their website starting in August.
- Milk order forms will be distributed electronically July 31.
- Please take some time to practice the following routines with your children, so they will be able to do as much as possible independently:
  - Frequent handwashing
  - Getting in and out of the car unassisted

- Carrying their belongings in and out of the house and car
- Opening their lunch items and returning all scraps and trash to their lunch box
- Packing their backpack so they are ready for school!
- Putting on, wearing, and removing a mask without assistance

God asks us to be joyful in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:16-18). Although none of us want to have to change our school practice and routines, we sincerely hope that we have found a way to prudently bring our school community together. We cannot stress enough how important it will be for all of us to be vigilant in keeping sick children home, communicating with your classroom teacher if you have concerns, and supporting the school in policies that we have, or may need, to implement in order to provide a safe, joyful, and fulfilling learning environment.

Again, if you do have concerns about sending your child back to school for live classroom instruction, please let Mrs. Manaker know as soon as possible, but no later than July 24th by phone or email at 703-548-1888 ext. 24 or [principal@saintrita-school.org](mailto:principal@saintrita-school.org)

Please know that this plan may need to adapt as circumstances change.

With our prayers and gratitude,

*Mrs. Manaker* and the Members of the K-8 Reopening Task Force

**Members of the K-8 Reopening Task Force:**

- Melissa Manaker, Principal
- Josephine Cunningham, Director of Admissions and Development
- Missy McGraw-Upper School Team Lead Teacher
- David Klosterman-Lower School Team Lead Teacher
- Thomas McMullin-Teacher
- Jennifer Walsh-School Admin and Parent
- Jennifer Dhanagom-Computer & Technology Teacher
- Bethany Hamm-School Parent and Former Teacher
- Miss Mary Kate Vander Woude-School Nurse
- *In consultation with Rev. Daniel Gee, Pastor; Mr. Adan Aguilar, Plant Manager; Mrs. Caitlin Rockwell, Preschool Director*