



St. Rita School (K-8) Reopening Plan FAQ Sheet

August 3, 2020

This FAQ sheet is designed to summarize and highlight the most important changes to our school routines according to our Reopening Plan released in July. Wherever possible, greater clarification and detail is being provided about areas of parent concern. We have received some questions on the status of the 5K fundraiser, the school auction, the school play, and other longer-term items that we simply cannot answer right now, due to the ever-evolving COVID landscape in our region. We will focus here on the more immediate concerns and keep you apprised of developments in other areas as we are able.

1. What is the status of HVAC/Air filtration efforts at St. Rita School?

The HVAC system was thoroughly cleaned and sanitized on August 1 and MERV filters were put in place. Air purifiers have been ordered for each room:

- *Alen BreatheSmart Classic Large Room Air Purifier (2 units for larger spaces in lower hall; covers 1100 sq. ft. each, with BF35-Silver-Carbon Air Purifier Filters)*
- *Alen BreatheSmart FLEX Air Purifier (for all standard classrooms up to 700 sq. ft. with AH13 TRUE HEPA: Includes a high capacity H13 HEPA layer to capture 99.97% of airborne particles down to 0.3 microns)*

We will also be opening windows as much as possible to facilitate the circulation of fresh air.

2. What is the status of Extended Day Care offered at St. Rita School?

No Extended Day Care (EDC) will be offered in the mornings until further notice. EDC will be offered in the afternoons on a limited basis by advance registration only (no drop-ins).

3. What will lunch look like?

*Students will need to bring their own lunch; hot lunch options will **not** be available this fall. Students will eat lunch in their classrooms and should bring a clean face cloth to school each day in their lunchbox to serve as their placemat.*

Parents should have children practice opening all of their lunch items to help reduce the teacher's need to open/close items. Children must bring the necessary items to eat their lunch i.e. spoons, forks, etc. We are not permitted to heat lunches for children.

If someone in the class has a severe nut allergy, parents will be notified that lunches and snacks for that class will need to be nut-free. We hope to rotate classrooms outside for lunch as weather and space permit.

5. How will classes be split, and how many students will be in a classroom?

Now that the School Hall has been partitioned, there is adequate space for the full second grade and fifth grade to meet there, all spaced 6 feet apart. Our smaller classrooms can accommodate up to 14 students spaced out 6 feet, and our larger classrooms can accommodate up to 16, spaced out 6 feet. Because eighth grade will not exceed 16 students, the full class can meet in one large classroom. Grades K, 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 will need to be split. We had intended to divide based on gender for classes that are roughly equal but we are currently exploring, based on parent input, the possibility of dividing classes according to mask preference. If (and only if) the numbers roughly balance, we could designate one classroom as a continuous mask environment and the other where students and teachers could remove masks when appropriately distanced. The numbers of parents interested in each option will determine its feasibility. We will review the August 3 parent survey results and make this determination as soon as possible.

6. How will the teachers move between split classes, and how will specials' teachers operate?

For the divided classes (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 throughout the day 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. Specials' teachers and subject specialists will rotate into each homeroom to teach their class. Infection prevention procedures will be in place to assist teachers as they transition from one classroom to the next.

7. What about sports?

So far we have not received word about whether and which sports programs we will be able to run this year, but we will keep you apprised of these developments.

8. What will the daily temperature check and health screening look like?

All students, staff, and teachers as well as any visitors entering the building will need their temperature and answers to health screening questions noted. We are hoping to offer parents the option to conduct these checks at home and enter the data on an app or provide it in writing to staff upon arrival. We are currently reviewing apps and protocols being used by other

schools in our area to determine which approach would work best for our community. More information will be provided as our protocol is developed.

9. How will carline work this year?

At Drop-off in the morning: All students and staff must wear face coverings at drop-off. We also need to be as contact-less 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. (But 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.) The health screening protocol—details TBD—will be conducted prior to entry.

At Pick-up in the afternoon: At dismissal, cars will queue up as usual but we plan to dismiss students one family at a time. Adults will remain in their cars and display a paper (we are testing the feasibility of a QR code system) 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!

Information for Walkers: Walkers will dismiss to the car line area this year. Anyone picking up walkers should space themselves out on the blacktop in the dismissal area (car line area) while waiting. 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.

10. When will students, staff, and teachers be required to use face coverings?

All students, staff, and teachers will have a face covering with them during the day. Anyone arriving without a face covering will be given one; if this is an ongoing issue, parents will be contacted to work out a solution. Face coverings must be used at drop-off, pick-up, and at all times indoors unless and until students are seated at their desks or teachers are teaching at the front of the room. Once students are six feet apart, seated at their desks, they can remove their face coverings and hang them on a hook on the side of the desk. But if they get up to walk around, they will need to slip that face covering back on. Students will keep pencil sharpeners and kleenex boxes in their desks to cut down on the need to keep getting up from their desk. Similarly, teachers will be free to remove their face coverings when teaching from the front of the room, six feet apart from the students, but would slip them back on to go and help individual students at their desks.

If (and only if) enough parents in our community prefer that their children keep their face coverings on all day, we may be able to designate classrooms or sections of classrooms as continuous “mask zones.” The feasibility of such an approach will depend on the numbers interested in each option; parent surveys were sent out August 3 to make that determination.

Whether we are able to create “mask zones” or not, anyone (students, staff, teachers) is of course free to wear a face covering continuously if they desire, and any parents indicating that preference to their classroom teachers will have the school’s full support and enforcement for those children.

We understand that the use of face coverings is a polarizing issue. We realize that some people, when faced with risk and uncertainty, prefer to take all available steps to mitigate risk and would like the school to adopt an all-mask, all-the-time policy. Certainly some schools have gone that route. But as educators we need to mitigate the risk of disease transmission in a way that we believe comports best with children’s social, emotional, physical, and academic development. We have declined to take an all-mask, all-the-time approach because we do not find that approach conducive to the learning environment we are trying to create. We worry there could be long-term psychological or emotional harm to constant masks for little people, something there’s really no precedent for in our history. We want our students to be able to look each other in the face to develop their empathy and compassion and to see in the other the face of Christ. We want them to be able to hear and speak with each other clearly without barriers, if it can be done safely. And we believe we can do that through vigilant social distancing. We have filed our plan with the Diocese and with the Alexandria Department of Health (ADH). The ADH did recommend the continuous use of face coverings in addition to distancing, but our policy falls within CDC guidelines. At present, each school is empowered to make the decision it deems best so long as it falls within CDC guidelines. If at any time we are directed by state or local health agencies, or the Diocese, to use face coverings more often than our current plan requires, we will follow those directives. And we will fully enforce any parents’ desire to have their children wear face coverings all the time.

Anyone desiring additional protection for the eye area is welcome to wear clear protective eyewear or a face shield (most likely in addition to a mask when/where mask use is required).

11. What will outdoor time such as recess look like?

We plan to have the students outside as much as possible during the day, sometimes eating outside and even holding class outside. We will continue having daily recess and weekly P.E. No more than 50 students can be outside for recess at the same time. At this time, because of diminished risk of open-air transmission of the virus and in an effort to breathe well, we do not anticipate requiring masks outside. We will make every effort to plan activities and promote play consistent with social distancing. When vigorously exercising, such as in P.E. class, current CDC guidelines dictate 10 ft distancing. If we find 10 ft physical distancing unworkable as a practical matter, for certain grades or during certain activities, we would need to insist on face coverings in those situations.

12. What happens if someone is sick with an ordinary illness?

It is imperative that students be kept home and teachers and staff must stay home when sick, for the duration of their symptoms and until they've been fever-free (without medicine) for at least 24 hours.

13. What happens if someone tests or is presumed positive based on symptoms for COVID-19?

The ill individual must self-isolate at home for at least 10 days, and until he or she has improving symptoms and been fever-free for 3 days without medicine. In that case the whole classroom group (and teacher) would be quarantined at home for 14 days. While at home, eLearning would be made available.

14. What does the eLearning option for the first trimester look like?

Parents have the option to select eLearning for the first trimester if they so desire. Full tuition applies and their spot in the physical classroom would be held should they choose to return in-person for the second trimester. The eLearning we are preparing differs from that offered last spring. We are presently obtaining and installing the AV equipment necessary to live-stream the classroom instruction to eLearners at home. We are still working on exactly what that will look like, but at present our technology unfortunately does not allow for interactive participation from eLearners at home through a speaker system. We intend to issue Chromebooks to each eLearner as well as any materials needed to complete their assignments. The students at home would have work time during the day just as those in the classroom will. Our homebound education coordinator, Mrs. Elizabeth Hexter, will coordinate eLearning, and our classroom teachers will be available to assist their eLearning students as needed. Anyone temporarily isolating or quarantining due to illness or exposure would tune into the same eLearning program for the duration of their stay at home. If we are required to close the school due to an outbreak of COVID-19 or a return to Phase I for our area, we would use a combination of video-taped and live lessons along with assignments. All teachers in our Diocese were offered additional training this summer on how to provide instruction that is more conducive to online learning. All teachers will utilize Google Classroom for the posting of assignments and supplemental material such as videos, readings, etc.

15. Is it possible to switch back and forth between eLearning in-person learning?

We are asking parents to decide now which option they would like for the first trimester, at the end of which they would have the opportunity to make a change. Anyone initially selecting in-person instruction who decides, once we get going, that they actually would be more comfortable with the eLearning option can make that switch at any time. It just doesn't work in reverse; students initially selecting eLearning cannot join the class in-person until the end of that trimester.

16. Do you plan to restrict families' travel prior to the school's opening on August 26?

We understand the concerns behind this issue but as a practical matter, travel prior to August 26 will pose the same risks of undetected infection as any other travel during the school year, over holiday breaks, etc. We do not feel we can mandate a no-travel policy for the families in

our school community. We ask that all parents use their best judgment when planning to travel, take the risk to our school community into account, and keep anyone with known exposure or symptoms of illness home.

17. What will Adoration, Confession, School Mass & Communion look like?

Classroom groups will rotate through the Church for Adoration and Confession, maintaining 6-ft spacing. There will be two school Masses per week, likely on Mondays and Wednesdays. Initially, we unfortunately do not plan to bring preschoolers, Kindergarteners, or 1st graders to the school Masses. Nor can we accommodate parents in the school Masses at this time. The issue is space: we need to ensure adequate room to spread the students out sufficiently in the Church. Once we get underway and see how the Masses are going, we can re-assess whether some groups of younger children could join us on a rotating basis. If space allows, we could also permit interested parents to sign up to attend specific school Masses. The second, third, and fourth graders will attend one of the school Masses and the fifth through eighth graders, the other.

All students and teachers will wear their face coverings into the church and can then opt to remove them once seated and spaced out 6 feet. For this and any other situation in which the masks may be removed and then worn again, it would be helpful if their masks had elastic ear loops (rather than strings/ties) so they could slip the mask onto their wrist or elbow for safekeeping. Students receiving Communion at Mass will wear their masks up to the Communion rail and then remove to receive the Eucharist before replacing. Any parents preferring that their students do not receive Communion need to inform the classroom teacher in advance.

For however long the younger children are not attending school Mass, special efforts will be made to teach them prayers like the Rosary or Chaplet of Divine Mercy, which they could say together during school Mass time. The Mass is the height of what we do as a community, so we will welcome everyone back to school Mass as soon and as often as possible.

18. We don't want our children scolded and stressed by the enforcement of these new regulations...

We don't either! Our teachers and staff will have an extra layer of student behavior to monitor, including proper use of face coverings and maintenance of social distancing. But please know that they are caring educators who understand children and how imperfectly they sometimes follow directives. We will treat the children with love and respect. Any ongoing problems with enforcement of these regulations will be approached collaboratively with parents in order to find a solution.

19. How will all this change our Classical Education?

We have no plans to change or abandon our Classical Model—it is part of what makes St. Rita School such a distinctively beautiful place. All of our teachers were invited to attend the Institute

for Catholic Liberal Education Annual Conference (online) over the summer. We will be using those talks as part of our ongoing professional development in the Classical tradition.

20. What about homework?

A concerted effort will be made to minimize homework. Because students will remain in their homeroom for most of the day, less time will be lost to transitions. Teachers will include more independent work time during the day. Hopefully having to spend less time doing homework after school will allow the students greater opportunities for exercise and outdoor recreation at home to burn off any excess energy.

21. Hygiene and cleaning:

Hand sanitizing stations will be 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. Teachers and staff will routinely clean door handles, desktops and frequently touched surfaces to include Chromebooks etc; throughout the day. Custodians will clean the bathrooms at regular intervals throughout the day. 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.

Prior to reopening, the building will be disinfected and sanitized by our contracted cleaning company, using Protexus Electrostatic Technology or comparable method; this technology will also be used if there is a confirmed or presumptive case of COVID-19 in the school community.

22. Who is our school nurse?

Miss Mary Kate Vander Woude, RN, will be joining us this year as our school nurse. Her bio will be available on the school website as soon as possible.

23. What about co-curriculars like Band and Strings?

Band: In consultation with Mr. Evans, our band teacher, band will be on hold until it is deemed safe to resume in-school lessons. Mr. Evans will offer virtual lessons to interested students and is currently preparing an FAQ sheet for families.

Strings: Mr. Cho will be able to continue teaching strings in a modified format consistent with current COVID-19 protocols. An FAQ sheet will be posted on the school website as soon as possible.

24. How will we do Open House and Back to School Night?

We will unfortunately not be hosting a traditional Open House the day before school, given the risks posed by several hundred people simultaneously visiting a school that will have been immaculately cleaned and prepared for the students. Instead, we are hoping to welcome small groups of Kindergarteners in to meet our fabulous new Kindergarten teacher Miss Haley Lange,

and visit the Kindergarten rooms, during the week of August 17. That same week, we are hoping to slot out some times for any new families or particularly nervous students to briefly drop in and say hello to their teachers. More information and sign-up opportunities will be provided as that schedule is developed. We ask visiting families to minimize the number of family members who will attend and to please all wear face coverings so the students can move around freely. The visits will be very brief but may help some of our young learners feel more secure as we head back to school.

Unfortunately we will not be holding our traditional Back to School Night on campus this year, again given the risk posed by several hundred simultaneous visitors and the disruption to the intensive cleaning process that will occur each evening in our buildings. Instead, the teachers will host evening zoom sessions with parents to introduce themselves and talk about their classes. More information will be provided as we hammer out the details.

25. What is the status of the service hours required of each family?

We don't yet know if or how this program will change. For now, we ask that anyone who plays a particular role, runs a project, etc., to continue that until further notice. It seems likely that with far fewer large events this year and limitations on people coming into the school building, we may reduce the service hours required of each family this year. But there is still a great deal of work to be done, and we thank everyone for their help as we gear up for school.

We are in need of parents to assist with morning drop-off and lunch/recess coverage. If you are interested in assisting us with this critical need, please contact Mrs. Hamm at principal@saintrita-school as soon as possible. All volunteers will need to be VIRTUS compliant and should always have a face covering with them. It would be ideal to have a set team of volunteers for these positions to reduce the risk of exposure.