

June 18, 2020

Dear Parents,

Throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school closure in the spring, we have worked to be as proactive and forthright as possible in our communication with you, to listen to your concerns, and to appreciate and address your needs. I would like to thank all of you who were with us during this unprecedented time for your support as we traversed new territory together. I am also grateful for your candid comments on our surveys as we ended the school year. Your feedback will be instrumental in helping us to refine our planning for the coming school year. As we look ahead, I am writing again today to begin sharing with you what we know at this time in regard to the 2020-2021 school year.

Although Governor DeWine has stated that each school must consider factors unique to it in coming up with a plan, and should continue to work on multiple plans for the 2020-2021 school year, no official directive or guidance has been issued by Governor DeWine, the Ohio Department of Education or the Diocese of Cleveland about the 2020-2021 school year. It is our hope and intent to be able to offer our students an on-site, in-person learning experience each day for the coming school year. At this point, we are planning to return to school with a simultaneous blend of in-person learning, incorporating health and safety modifications in accordance with COVID-19 guidelines, and distance learning as needed.

First and foremost in our planning is ensuring the health, safety and well-being of all of our students and staff. We anticipate that even if the majority of our students are back in classrooms in the fall, there will be some students who are unable to safely return in person and will need to learn remotely while their classmates are simultaneously in the building. We want to be able to offer both options to meet the needs of all of our families. We are also planning for the possibility that we may face transient, intermittent periods of in-person learning and distance learning at points during the academic year as COVID-19 ebbs and flows in our community. We expect to start our school year as planned on August 24, but beyond that, which of these scenarios we employ at any given time during the school year will be determined by guidelines provided to us by the state and local officials who have guided us thus far. We do not expect to return to school any earlier than August 24, as we will need every bit of the time between now and then to prepare for a safe and successful return to school. Governor DeWine has indicated that he expects to release additional guidelines near the end of the month, and we look forward to receiving that information.

One of the many logistics that will need to be managed is transportation. For those of you whose children typically ride buses, we want to let you know that we have not yet received any information from any of the districts that provide bus transportation for our students. At the same time, we want to be respectful of the daunting task they face in planning for safely transporting not only their own students, but all of the private school students they also serve. Please remember, too, that while St. Hilary School, of course, will advocate for busing for our students, the right to request busing from any public school district lies with the parents who are taxpaying residents of the particular school districts.

This past spring proved to be a trying time for everyone involved. We recognize the importance of students being together with peer groups and interacting with teachers and classmates in face-to-face educational settings. With that in mind, we are planning for safely accommodating learning in our classrooms, and at the same time, we are planning for improvements to our distance learning program should we need to use this format, even partially, again in the 2020-2021 school year. On June 5, as our students began their summer break, our teachers began what will be ongoing professional development to hone their fluency in using Google Classroom, which will be our primary distance learning platform. We are also working on plans to build greater consistency in the approach taken across classrooms within a grade, and across grade levels throughout the school. What works well for one age group does not necessarily work well for another, but part of our planning is to take pieces that have worked well and incorporate them more fully across the board.

I want to emphasize that at this time, no firm decision has been made about what the 2020-2021 school year at St. Hilary School will look like. As educators, we want to return to school in the traditional manner as soon as we can safely do so; however, we must comply with whatever directives we are given. When we receive the appropriate guidance to allow us to make firm decisions, we will, of course, communicate that information to our school community. In the meantime, we have formed a task force comprised of administration, faculty, and staff, as well as parents representing a range of proficiencies. We are blessed to include on our task force experts in health care and infectious disease, commercial disinfection and sanitization, and other areas that will be critical to our planning. Our task force has already begun to work together to consider all the requisite aspects of a safe and successful 2020-2021 school year. We look forward to being able to share concrete plans with you as soon as we are able to do so. Until then, we ask for your patience as we work through the many details of planning in the midst of this ever-evolving situation.

One thing that remains constant during this uncertain time is the faith foundation and nurturing touch that is at the root of all we do. If you are thinking about your child's long-term educational plan and overall formative experience, the best decision you can make is to maintain your child's enrollment at St. Hilary School. Stand strong with us now so that we can journey through these uncharted waters together with an eye toward the better future we know will come.

As always, if you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Jennifer Woodman
Principal