

October 29, 2020

Dear St. Hilary School Parents and Guardians,

We have two COVID-19-related matters to inform you about tonight.

First, we are working closely with Summit County Public Health (SCPH) regarding a parent volunteer who has tested positive for COVID-19. The parent volunteer worked in our Hot Lunch kitchen this week. Upon receiving notice of the positive test result this evening, volunteers who also worked in our Hot Lunch kitchen at the same time as the positive individual and were identified as close contacts were immediately personally contacted by St. Hilary School administration. Anyone identified as a close contact will also be contacted by their local health department (SCPH or another health department depending on where they reside) as part of contact tracing and disease investigation, since close contacts have a higher risk of becoming ill. Those identified as close contacts will be quarantining at home for the period of time recommended by their local health department depending upon their exposure to the positive individual.

Upon investigation, it has been determined that this individual did not have close contact with any students. Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet or less for 15 minutes or more. On the advice of SCPH, students are not at risk and will not be asked to quarantine. Further, per SCPH, the fact that the volunteer was working in our Hot Lunch kitchen where food was being served is not a concern and does not by itself present a risk for COVID-19 transmission or a reason for quarantine. All food being served that day had been pre-wrapped prior to the volunteer's arrival in the kitchen, and no food was open or uncovered during the volunteer's shift. The volunteer did not directly handle any unwrapped food, and was delivering tubs of bagged lunches outside classrooms as well as supervising from within the kitchen as students took their lunches from the counter. Additionally, COVID-19 protocols and safe food handling guidelines are followed in the Hot Lunch kitchen at all times lunches are being prepared and served, and were in effect during the individual's shift. These include, but are not limited to, hand washing and sanitizing, wearing gloves, wearing masks, and covering hair. These protocols were in place during the individual's volunteer shift. Finally, upon investigation, our Hot Lunch Coordinator Becky Vieltorf was not identified as a close contact as she was working in a separate area of the kitchen during the time the volunteer was assisting with Hot Lunch. As such, she will not be required to quarantine.

At this time, unless you have received a phone call from St. Hilary School administration, neither you nor your child are considered to be a close contact, which means there is a low risk that you or they will become ill from this positive case. SCPH has advised St. Hilary School administration that the current circumstances do not warrant closing a classroom, a grade level, or the school.

This year especially, we have been relying on an increased number of parent volunteers to help keep our school operating safely and smoothly. As always, please be vigilant in monitoring your family for COVID-19 symptoms daily, and exercise caution in coming to school to volunteer or sending your child to school if you have any reason to believe any member of your household may be ill, may have been exposed to COVID-19, or is being tested for COVID-19. If you have any reason to suspect you, your child or a member of your household may have COVID-19, or if you, your child or a member of your household is being tested for COVID-19, please notify school administration immediately so that we can take appropriate precautionary measures.

while you await confirmation of testing status. By providing us this opportunity, you can help us to be proactive and curb potential spread very early on. And because being proactive is key, we would now like to share with you the second COVID-19-related matter of importance tonight. We had been preparing to communicate this information earlier this evening when we received word of the positive parent volunteer case, which only serves to reinforce its importance.

As you know, for many months while we have moved through the COVID-19 pandemic, our operating decisions have been made with guidance from Governor DeWine, the Ohio Department of Health, Summit County Public Health, the Diocese of Cleveland, and our St. Hilary School COVID-19 Task Force. In response to the recent increase in positive COVID-19 cases across our state, our Task Force reconvened on October 28 to discuss St. Hilary School's response to the situation. We are blessed to have as members of our Task Force many health care professionals who deal with COVID-19 and infectious disease on a daily basis. At our October 28 meeting, our health care representatives reinforced what we have all been hearing in the news: positive cases are on the rise, increased vigilance is crucial, and the holidays will be especially problematic if people gather and/or travel and COVID-19 protocols are not followed. Although we have asked all school families to be especially cautious about social gatherings, obviously we are not able to control what families choose to do over holiday breaks. Recommendations were made to address this situation now in order for students, parents, and school faculty and staff to be able to prepare.

After discussion and consideration by the Task Force, which also includes a representative cross-section of both school staff and parents, a decision has been made to proactively move to remote learning for one week following both the Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks in an effort to curb the spread of illness in our school community. Should conditions warrant, these one-week periods could be extended if necessary, but at this time, our plan is to be in a remote situation for one week following each break. This decision came after consideration of various scenarios that included longer periods of remote learning, canceling school entirely following breaks and adding weeks to the end of our school year, and other options.

Specifically:

⇒ When school resumes on November 30 following Thanksgiving break, all students will be in a remote learning setting for the entire week, with in-person school resuming on December 7.

⇒ When school resumes on January 4 following Christmas break, all students will again learn remotely for the entire week, with in-person school resuming on January 11.

We want to be clear that these weeks of remote learning are not to be considered an extension of the holiday breaks for families to have additional time to socialize and travel. The purpose of these weeks is to enable our families to enjoy the holidays during the planned school break periods without having to worry about missing instructional time due to potential quarantining after breaks, and to provide a buffer period between the holidays and the return to in-person school while maintaining ongoing instruction. To further support this purpose, there will be no St. Hilary basketball practices or games during these weeks. Your cooperation with this plan is vital to keeping our students in school following these one-week remote learning periods.

During these remote learning weeks, teachers will be in their classrooms teaching and students will be expected to learn just as they would if they were physically present. Details about how this will look for each grade level and classroom will be provided as planning is solidified. We feel we provided a quality learning experience for students during the shutdown last spring, but understand there may be reservations about distance learning now. We can assure you that our remote learning platform has been vastly improved and will mirror the in-class experience as much as possible. At this time, we are asking all families who do not have access at home to the technology needed to participate in remote learning to email our Director of Technology, Mrs. Heuer, at kheuer@st-hilary.org by November 6 so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Our hope is that by providing notice one month in advance of the first remote learning week and two months in advance of the second, teachers and families will have ample time to prepare appropriately.

As we plan for these weeks of remote learning, we also want to clarify what may or may not happen if Summit County moves to Level 4 - Purple in the Ohio Health Advisory System for COVID-19. Governor DeWine has made it clear that schools and sports are not a significant source of spread, his preference is for students to be physically in school as much as possible, and decisions about whether school will be held in person or remotely should be made by the school administrators themselves. Our school year began under a recommendation from Summit County Public Health that Summit County schools not open in person, but we made the decision to follow all COVID-19 safety protocols and move forward. Please keep in mind that an advisory recommendation is different from the mandatory order issued in March to close schools, which all schools were bound to follow. In the event that Summit County would move to Level 4 - Purple, we will of course be mindful of the situation at our own school in making any decisions, but this does not mean that our school will automatically move to a remote learning setting even if that is the recommendation of Summit County Public Health, as is likely. In fact, our hope is that by being proactive for one week following each of our holiday breaks, we will increase our likelihood of remaining open for in-person learning through the majority of the months ahead.

We realize this decision may meet with resistance in some households, but having successfully concluded our first quarter of the school year due to thoughtful planning thus far, we are confident in this decision to keep our school community safe and keep our school classrooms open for in-person learning for as many days as possible. We believe asking families to commit to two planned one-week periods of remote learning is a small sacrifice in order to continue in-

person school for the majority of the remainder of the school year. We appreciate your cooperation and support of our ongoing efforts to make this a successful school year during this unprecedented time. Thank you for standing in solidarity with us to help keep our school Saber Strong!

Sincerely,
Mrs. Woodman
Principal