

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

August 16, 2020

*Thank you for your questions. Many of these questions are prior to the recent change. I answered them and I am sharing them with hopes that we will return to our original opening plan.*

**If a cohort must be sent home because of symptoms will siblings of the cohort also need to be sent home?**

Yes, and they will need to remain home following the guidelines.

**Will the students be taught the spring 2020 curriculum that they missed before starting new curriculum? We noticed that half of the material in the Summer Bridge workbooks was never taught (for example 3rd grade long division and geometry). Worried that they will be behind if they never learn it or skip ahead to the next year's curriculum)**

The students begin every year with a review and assessments to determine their level of knowledge. Summer Bridge is designed in three parts, review, level work and advanced. It is not aligned with the curriculum but is a great tool for all of the above.

**Will children in the same family be assigned the same arrival and departure times so the van walk to /from school together? Do we pick our time or will it be assigned to us?**

Any time there will be grouping of children it will be done in a “Family Grouping”. Arrival time if we need to go that route will be a sign up. We are looking into a Dismissal app that can be used to notify the teachers upon your arrival.

**Is there a time we can visit before to see his class with us so he feels more comfortable before the first day of school?**

Only essential people are permitted in the building.

**Will the whole class be together at some point?**

When the level changes there is a possibility that the classes will be together but not under the current level of alert.

**The state came out with new guidance on Aug 11 for schools. Will SMS still be able to be done in person 5 days?**

Yes, we received that notice on Aug. 11. We are currently working on opening under a hybrid/virtual model with the hope of moving into full attendance.

**It is easier for some families to do online school than others. If we reach the point where we can't do full 5 days in school, would it be possible for families to volunteer to go virtual? This would enable the school to lower the number of students in school, but allow those families for whom virtual learning is a big hardship to continue to send their kids to school. We are offering the virtual and assessing each family situation.**

**Will children be permitted to wear gaiters for their masks?**

No, the students will be asked to wear masks.

**What, if any, physical activity will the children have to help with their energy and focus?**

**Gym? What, if anything, can they do at recess that is active?**

The children will have gym class and recess. They will be able to play various games but not with equipment until we move into a different phase. The teachers have been given resources for games other than contact sports and games that involve ballplaying.

**Concerning arrival and dismissal. Will it be first come first served for sign up?**

Yes but we hope to be able to accommodate your requested arrival time .(7:40,7:55,8:05)

**What will be the dress code for virtual learning and will there be a different class list for online learning since students will submit all through Google classroom?**

Yes, we are asking the students to wear their uniforms. All students will submit through google classroom, since there is to be limited exchange of paper and materials.

**Is St. Margaret School accepting new students this year?**

It depends on the current enrollment and space in the classes. We have forty people wait listed.

**According to the PA Dept of Health, Montgomery County falls into the moderate category for transmission. The recommendation for the moderate level is blended learning or full remote. How did SMS come to the conclusion that they would go full in person? Based on what health data? Based on the fact that Lower Merion and the surrounding counties have decided to go virtual, how does SMS justify full in person**

You are absolutely correct. That information just came to us on Monday August 11. Our plans are being adjusted to review and assess the recommendation. It is not a mandate from the Pa Board of Health and Dept. of Education. It changed on August 11th.

St Margaret's take the directives and the recommendations from the Office of Catholic Education.

**If you are not comfortable or willing to send your child in for physical learning, will the days be documented as unexcused absences?**

If you don't want your child to attend in person, it is necessary for them to register for online learning. Attendance will be taken and noted as present online learning or not present for both in school and online. There is no difference between attendance for online and in school learning.

**The reopening plan says "small groups of no more than 18/25 students." Why the two numbers? Is it a maximum class size of 18 for the younger grades and a max size of 25 for the older students?**

The original plan was that we could have up to 25 in a class. Our class sizes for the upper grades fall between 18 and 25.

**Please explain more details regarding this method of instruction: "When a class exceeds the suggested class size a cohort of students will be formed. Those students will work/live stream in a separate designated location on their chrome books with a moderator."**

As an example: One class has 32 students in it. The class is split into separate homerooms. There are certain subjects where the entire class will need instruction. The entire class cannot come together so one section will go to another room and learn remotely.

**Is there an option for virtual learning when there is illness within the family or increased virus activity within the community (I am mainly interested in in-school learning with option for virtual when appropriate)?**

Yes there is an online option when a student or family member becomes ill. You can notify us by email.

**How will the students be utilizing the required face shields?**

The preferred method is a face mask. In certain circumstances face shields will be acceptable.e.g, allergies, can't remove the mask on their own, hearing concerns.

The mask will be lifted from the face while eating. The student will remain behind their private desk shield.

There will be mask breaks at the discretion of the teacher and only in open spaces.

**With the school districts in the area going all virtual, how is SMS going to make sure these children are safe?**

There is no guarantee that we can keep your children safe. However if parents do their part in keeping us informed when their child is not well that will help us implement the appropriate measures of care. This was just published in the Policy and Procedures for Covid 19:

As the challenges of educating through the pandemic continue, we will strive to build upon the four pillars of, Health and Safety, Instruction, Operations and Logistics, Communications and Technology. The following measures have been implemented at St Margaret School to help prevent the spread of the Coronavirus:

- St. Margaret has positioned the desks to follow the recommendations of the AAP, to be placed three to six feet apart. (It has always been 6 feet, however the AAP, strongly supported the distancing for three to six feet. The Archdiocese also supported this., recommending three to six, and face mask. WE took an extra measure to purchase for each student a desk guard as well.)
- Classes have been designed so the number of students is twenty -five or below,
- Masks are mandatory, desk shields have been purchased for each student in grades K- 8<sup>th</sup> grade however shields can be worn by the child who may have specific needs, learning would be interrupted or may not be able to remove their own mask.
- Each room has been equipped so that synchronous learning can take place within the building and when necessary distance learning
- Signage, as reminders for personal hygiene, physical/social distancing, is placed strategically throughout the building,
- Placement of physical guides, such as tape, on floors or sidewalks to create one-way routes.
- Hand stations have been placed throughout the building
- Portable hand washing stations will be used outside
- Continuous cleaning throughout the day will take place and after hours
- Ductless Hvac units are equipped with silver ion antimicrobial filters. These are changed on a regular basis
- Classes will be held outside when weather permits. Windows will be opened for fresh air circulation within the classroom.
- N95 face masks have been purchased for staff working with children who may become ill
- An action plan has been devised for students who may have been exposed to Covid 19.
- 100 new chrome books have been purchased for all students. The students in grades K-8 will have a personal device these will used throughout the day but in particularly if instruction will be interrupted due to illness in a cohort or school closures
- All teachers have been trained in trauma informed instruction
- Students in grades prek-4 will be cohorted. Due to leveled groups in math the students in grades 4-8 will work with part of their cohort throughout certain times throughout the day.
- Schedules have been staggered to accommodate movement throughout the building
- Lunch will be eaten in their cohort
- Schedules have been redesigned to meet the needs of the individual cohorts
- The cafeteria, gym, faculty room and an additional room will be utilized for cohorts.
- When feasible teachers will rotate in and out of classrooms for instruction
- A continuous maintenance and cleaning cycle have been designed in order to maintain the necessary level of decontamination in the building
- A room designated for students who have become ill is prepared

**St. Margaret School will continue to take measures to identify and prevent the spread of the coronavirus. While these steps greatly reduce the risk of the virus being transmitted, no set of precautions can completely eliminate the threat the virus poses.**

Knowing this, you voluntarily and willingly send your child/children to St. Margaret School and in sending your child/children to St Margaret School, you agree not to hold the school, parish or the Archdiocese of Philadelphia responsible for illnesses related to Covid-19 or other health related conditions.

**Given masks are required, how can the school teach and police all these procedures for the students? Even the youngest pre-K students.**

It is not a matter of policing. It is a matter that the rule is wear your mask. If a student cannot comply then they cannot remain in the school and the better method of education would be to do the virtual classes. We cannot risk the health of others due to one person's inability to follow directions.

**Is full time virtual learning an option for everyone interested?**

Yes, but there will be a reevaluation periodically to be certain that this is supporting the student's learning needs. The sign up is for one complete marking period unless otherwise discussed with the administration and the teacher.

**What safety measures are in place concerning the classroom size?**

The original directive was that we could have 25 in a classroom with a physical distancing of three to six feet. Recently the recommendation from Montgomery County is that the students can return to school either in a hybrid model or virtual. The plans for the hybrid platform are being finalized.

*Definition of Hybrid -Any model in which the number of students in a school building is reduced to allow for social distancing of 6 feet. This may be accomplished in many ways, including split schedules, schedules that rotate by day or week, or similar approaches. For these recommendations, blended learning also includes scaffolded approaches that treat grade levels in a differentiated manner.*

**Are masks to be in line with uniform guidelines? Navy blue, no prints?**

There is no regulation on the color of the mask.

**When will information about cohorts be provided? I received the list for my daughters first day back for Kindergarten...or are we to understand that since she is scheduled to be back on Aug 31st (the first of the three days) that she would be in cohort A?**

No. That is her homeroom. Cohorts are still being determined based on the design for when we return to school.

**I am concerned about lunch. This is when students will not be wearing masks. Whenever students are not wearing masks, the risk of spreading the virus increases dramatically.**

The students will either eat outside or in their classroom. The older students may be split. The one group, which will be the predetermined cohort will eat together. When in the classroom, all students will need to use their desk shield.

**Are the various Models (A-F) intended to apply to all grades? Most of them say Grade 4-6, ie., not including 7-8. Assuming they are intended to apply to all grades, is the 8th grade homeroom a cohort or are you planning to divide the 8th grade homeroom into two cohorts?**

**Plans have been updated and changed.** If we were to use those models. The model presented was based on the different levels with the possibilities that some grades may be able to be full time. Because the grades 6-8 have different math groups the students would be grouped according to those groups and then again their ELA groups. So the eighth grade is technically split.

**The staggered arrival times seem like a good idea, but (especially with the likely increased number of families who will drive their kids to school rather than put them on a bus), aren't the proposed arrival times of 7:45, 7:55 and 8:05 doomed to fail because they are too close together (the first group will still be in line for drop-off when the second group starts to arrive)?**

**We will not have the staggered start due to changing to a hybrid model.** We designed this based on previous years drop off. We have seven people on duty. There is a possibility that it would fail and we would need to adjust our times. However, when we return to full drop off or more than half the school we will return to staggered start. We will inform you about the sign up.

**Why are we opening hybrid and not in person if this is guidance from the state but not mandated?**

**What are the risks (aside from health risks, but risks to the school) for going against the state guidance to open hybrid?**

This is a challenging situation. Opening our doors is a health risk, as well as the liability. We were willing to take that chance in order to get our children back to school. That is critical! However, if we do not take the recommendation of hybrid/ virtual how many families would come back to us to say that you had the recommendation but you did not follow it and now my child is sick? We need to be cautious and thoughtful about moving ahead. Hopefully we will return to our original plan (please read the answer to the next question)

**Why are you switching to a hybrid model? The SMS safety plan for five day in-person was excellent, the PA guidance seems only to be a recommendation, not a requirement. I understood that schools could make a decision based on the resources available to them, and the set-up of their classrooms.**

Even though this is a recommendation, we had to weigh the risks if we did not agree to move in this direction. It is very clear that anyone who has the interest of the child at the heart of the decisions being made would promote ways for our children to be in school full time. The American Association of Pediatricians and even the CDC has made statements in support of this. However, the government agencies are the ones making decisions now. If we do not comply, we are at risk of them coming in and shutting us down, which would be a far worse scenario than trying to deliver our education to the best that we can within these restrictions. One risk is that we are not six feet apart. In all of my correspondence I mentioned that we were designing our school according to the American pediatrics suggestions that three to six feet apart with face masks would present a physical safe distance. The board of health is visiting schools measuring desks. I will not subject St Margaret's to that. This is clearly not the best decision for our children but at this time this is what we can offer our children. The design is made to go hybrid. The bottom line is we are not 6 feet apart and our desk shields are on back order.

Anyone who has any sense about children or makes them the priority know that they need to be back in school. Now these two government agencies are making decisions. This may only be a recommendation but I am not willing to take that risk for the two agencies to come in and shut us down after opening to a full school. We are talking about PDE if we don't take their recommendation. Are we opening ourselves up to losing our funding? Are we opening ourselves up to litigation, where our insurance won't cover it? We take the recommendation we get our kids back in and we give them the best that we can in this hybrid model. Then when and if things change, we can gradually bring the children back to full capacity.

**We need to look at some of the advantages:**

\*The children are back in school, not how we wished but they are back with us.

\*The teachers will have the opportunity, while the students are in the small groups to assess and determine learning gaps. Specific plans to remediate can be established.

\*Teachers can really build a one to one relationship with the students and identify those social and emotional needs. This is beneficial in that the child will be able to relate, especially if the next step (recommended or mandated) is go virtual.

**Will kids continue to get services from MCIU?**

Yes.

**Will kids get an outside mask break (not including recess)?**

Each teacher will determine their mask breaks and how they want the child to proceed.

**In the public school if your child has an IEP or accommodations they will be in school the full days, will that happen at SMS if your child has an accommodation?**

We do not have IEP's at SMS .Our hope is that students with accommodations/modifications will be able to attend at least the four days.

Reminder: Zoom Parent Meeting, Tuesday 7 pm, August 18, 2020. Zoom Link will be emailed to you.