

Blessings in the Lord Jesus! The purpose of this memo is to inform you where we currently stand with the 20-21 school year. We will be having our first day of school on August 12th as we had planned. Praise God! When we finally get back, it will have been five months since we have all been together. That is too long, and we are all looking forward to having our schools full again! I also know that there has been a lot of anxiety and anticipation as to what this new school year will look like. I certainly share in those uneasy feelings.

A few weeks ago, Mr. McMahon, Mrs. Zook and I met with several of our local medical professionals, seeking their input on the adoption of general safety guidelines to implement at Aquinas and St. Mary's. We are grateful to Dr. Robert Daro, Leah Hayes, P.A., Dr. Joshua Sypal, Dr. Jo Witter, and Jim Witter, P.A. for their generosity in advising us on COVID-19 as it relates to students and staff in the school building. They gave us helpful information, answered our questions, and are assisting us in formulating a plan for the 20-21 school year.

If the situation in our local area would change, we may have to make adjustments to our current plans. I ask that you be patient with us as we seek to do what is best for everyone.

Bus Routes

- We cannot add routes and cannot add drivers. We are short on drivers as it stands now. Therefore, we will do our best to distance the students on the buses where we can.

General Medical Guidelines

- If you are sick, stay home. Please take temperatures at home each day before school; with a temperature of 100.4 or greater, please stay home. We want to encourage a culture of staying at home if you are feeling sick, so there will be no penalties for students or teachers who stay home for illness. With PowerSchool Learning now available online, sick students should not be afraid of missing class and falling behind. Please follow the health screening form each morning, monitoring temperature and watching for symptoms. After illness, please use the re-entry guidelines.
- Transmission of the virus can be slowed by maintaining 3-6' of physical distance, OR by being in close proximity of another person for less than 15 minutes, OR by wearing a mask when you cannot maintain distance for that time period.
- There is no one sure way to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. There is the real possibility that as the school year goes on, there will be students and staff who will test positive for the coronavirus. A positive case is not a death sentence for the school year. With a positive case, we will maintain the policies we have in place, which already includes additional disinfecting.
- The good news is that for K-12 students, serious illness is extremely rare. In fact, most children experience mild symptoms and only for about 24 hours.

Cleaning and Sanitizing

- The custodial staff at both Aquinas and St. Mary's have done a great job of both cleaning and disinfecting the schools during the spring and the summer. We do have plans in place to clean and sanitize the high traffic areas and frequently used items more often during the school year.
- Handwashing with soap for at least 20 seconds is recommended after using the restroom, and after touching any potentially contaminated surface.
- Our schools have also received ample supplies of alcohol based hand sanitizer from the University of Nebraska, as well as our local ESU 7. This will help ensure that students can always keep their hands clean throughout the school day.

Classroom Social Distancing

- We will spread out all of the desks in the classrooms in order to create a distance of 3-6' between students. Fortunately, we have large classrooms that makes physical distancing easier to achieve.
- During lunch periods in the cafeteria, we will have students sitting in every other seat at each table, and students will be staggered so that no student is sitting directly across from another student. We will be increasing lunch periods and using all of the tables we have in order to provide good spacing at lunchtime.

Mask Wearing

- Masks for students and staff members are optional. Everyone should have a mask available to wear in case a situation arises where three to six feet of distance cannot be maintained between people.
- If masks are worn, they should fit properly snug against the face, and be worn properly with the mouth and nose both covered. The wearer should take care to not touch the front of the mask while wearing it or adjusting it.
- If a teacher is working closely with a student or a small group of students for more than 15 minutes, the teacher and students should wear a mask. Otherwise, teachers and students should always be separated by at least 3-6' in the classroom setting.

If a Student or Faculty Member Is Known to Test Positive for COVID-19

As stated previously, it is quite likely that as the school year progresses, there will be students and/or staff who test positive for COVID-19. In the event that we learn of a positive test, the following measures will take place:

- The person who tested positive will stay home until 10 days have passed since the affected person's symptoms first began, AND at least 24 hours have passed since symptoms have resolved.
- The standard cleaning and disinfecting measures will, of course, continue to be carried out in the affected person's classroom or work area, and throughout the school as well.
- The question of whether siblings and other close contacts of a student who tests positive should remain in school will be handled on a case by case basis. These questions can become very complex, are difficult to answer with any one set policy, and are best handled as they arise.

Hopefully this helped to answer some of your questions. Maybe it created more? We plan to host a prayer service and informational meeting for all parents on Tuesday, July 28th at 6:45 p.m. The administration of Aquinas-St. Mary's will be joined by local medical professionals to answer your questions about the Coronavirus and how it will affect our schools. There is a possibility that this meeting will be Live-streamed online. Check our website and social media for updates.

Now more than ever, we need to place our filial trust in God's providence for our families, our Catholic schools, our Church, and our nation.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Fr. Sean Timmerman, CAO

Fr. Michael Ventre, Asst. CAO

Mr. Dave McMahon, Aquinas Principal

Mrs. Sarah Zook, St. Mary's Principal