

July 23, 2020

Dear Sacred Heart School Community,

I pray that you are all staying safe and healthy this summer and hopefully finding some opportunities to relax and rejuvenate.

As you recall, I sent out our plan for re-opening school in the fall back on June 23rd. That plan is based on the guidance that we have received from the governor's office, the state superintendent's office, the health department, and the Archdiocese of Seattle. Since that time, Mrs. Pickett and I have been carefully reading any new information coming out from these sources as well as the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics. We have also been reviewing the plans of other schools, districts, and states in order to gather information and ideas. There are no new directives that re-opening school is unsafe and at least a few reports by medical organizations and studies in medical journals indicating that the benefits of re-opening greatly outweigh the risks when proper precautions are taken.

Yesterday, the Bellevue School District (along with some others) announced their decision to provide online-only instruction for the first six weeks of the school year. I respect the decision of the public districts. They have a variety of issues related to re-opening that we do not have, and I am confident that they are making the best decision for their community. I look to our local public-school districts for information and ideas in a variety of areas, including their response to the current pandemic. However, we do not simply follow their lead on all matters - whether it is snow closures or curriculum or school vacations. Sacred Heart School and the Bellevue School district each have different resources, challenges, and opportunities to consider when making their decisions.

I also want to make clear that our plan for re-opening is not political. Our re-opening plan was released prior to the unfortunate politicization of this issue. While our government officials clearly have an important role in this process (and the final decision in whether or not we are allowed to re-open), partisan electoral politics have no place in decisions about education and safety. At Sacred Heart School we want only what is best for our community - students, staff, and parents.

I think that we all recognize that in-person instruction is the best option for all our students. Students, staff, and parents want to safely return to in-person instruction in the fall. I am still confident that we can do this by working together.

Since the governor announced in April that school would not reopen for the remainder of the last school year, we have been planning for the fall. Our planning has continued to be updated based on new information and suggestions and questions from staff and parents. We are thinking about all aspects of our life together at school and working to make the necessary changes to improve health and safety in those areas. We have accomplished much these past few months. But there is more to

accomplish. In order to be ready to re-open in the fall, we need your help. **Please do your part to make our teachers, students, and parents safe by doing the following.**

1. Make sure that anyone coming to school this fall - children and adults - have at least a few cloth masks that are comfortable and suitable. Practice wearing your masks for extended periods of time in order to become accustomed to wearing them.
2. Follow the state's rules about wearing masks in public and limiting unnecessary interactions with those outside of your household.
3. Ensure that everyone coming to school knows how to properly wash and sanitize their hands and practice doing it.
4. Especially as we approach the re-opening of school, please consider our whole school community (especially those at a higher individual risk) when you make decisions about travel and trips outside of your home. It would be very beneficial if we could all treat those last two weeks as a time of serious preparation for the return to school by staying at home as much as possible (even more than what may be required by the state at that point), getting plenty of exercise and sleep to promote health, and wearing masks whenever interacting with people outside your home (even close friends and family).
5. Staying at home when you are sick - whatever your illness.
6. Notifying the school right away if you, someone in your home, or someone to whom you have been exposed is diagnosed with COVID-19.

At this point, we will be re-opening school on August 31 for an extended Desk & Locker Day. Instead of a one-hour opportunity to set up desks and lockers, there will be timed opportunities over the course of the day for students to come to school and put their supplies into their desks and lockers. The next day, September 1st, we will invite all students in grades 4-8 to return to school for a full day of instruction. The next day, September 2nd, students in grades Pre-K through 3rd will come to school for a full day (half day, as normal, for Pre-K and Kindergarten). Then the whole school will come to school on September 3rd and 4th followed by a three-day weekend for Labor Day. **This phased opening will allow us to ensure that the procedures and policies that we will have in place are operating correctly and we can make adjustments as necessary.**

In addition to in-person instruction, **we will be offering remote instruction online for those who need this option.** We understand that some students and/or their families will not be able to return to in-person instruction immediately due to a variety of health concerns. So, we have been working to develop robust online instruction for any students who need it either for a short time or long-term. Students will be able to see and interact with their classrooms during the in-person instruction each day. Mrs. Simons is our new remote-instruction specialist and will be overseeing and coordinating remote instruction for all of those involved with it. Remote instruction will be available to students no matter the reason. If a student is at home because of a compromised immune system, a broken leg, or the flu, or anything else that keeps them out of school, remote instruction will be available to them. Remote

instruction in the fall will be different than it was in the spring in that students will be participating remotely in their classes according to the regular school schedule. Depending upon your child's grade level there will be some classes that we will require students to participate in "live" (i.e., as the class is taking place). Other classes can be viewed at a later time in order to accommodate each student's abilities and family's schedule.

I encourage families who are inclined and able to take advantage of remote instruction to do so. If you are concerned about having your child return to school right away, please let us know that you want to join in our remote instruction. You are welcome to participate in remote instruction full-time (five days per week) or only a few days per week. **This "hybrid-by-choice" option will allow families who want to return to in-person instruction more slowly to do so.** At the same time, it will reduce the number of students in the building on any given day.

One of the defining characteristics of our school is the community. It is important to recognize that we have a large community with a diversity of needs. Some families are not able to return to school right away due to health issues or concerns. Other families need to have their children return to school so that they can go to work. Some students thrived during remote instruction while others were greatly challenged by the lack of interaction with teachers and peers. All of us miss being together. **I am confident that by working together we can successfully care for the needs of our whole community.**

Since the last re-opening plan, we have made much progress. I want to briefly highlight a few things that we have accomplished. I intend to send out an updated plan for re-opening next week once we have received additional feedback from parents and staff through the attached survey (and a survey about remote instruction sent to our staff this week).

1. We have removed the furniture from classrooms aside from desks and chairs in order to maximize the spacing between students.
2. We are creating one-way travel patterns in the hallways in order to avoid congestion.
3. We have tested remote instruction through our new Boxlight Boards in order to ensure the ability of students to be able to effectively learn and participate remotely.
4. We are adding touchless soap dispensers to our bathrooms and ensuring that hot water is available in all of the sinks
5. All "student help times" and parent meetings will be conducted via Microsoft Teams to ensure equitable opportunity for all while also reducing the amount of close contact and the number of people coming into the building.
6. We are identifying an app that parents and staff will be required to use each day before entering the building that will include a temperature check and screening for COVID-19 symptoms.

7. We have kept our classes sizes small for the time being. Due to a continued increase of interest in our school, we now have waiting lists in all but two grades.

This past spring, with the support of our parents, the teachers and staff pivoted nearly overnight to produce high-quality remote instruction for all our students along with some amazing community events. I am certain that together we can meet the new challenges that face us this fall. We are all privileged to be a part of a community that cares deeply about everyone who is a part of it. Working together we can make each other feel and be safe, happy, and supported.

Please take a few minutes to complete a brief survey. Your feedback will help us update our plan for re-opening.

Sincerely,

David Burroughs