

Re-Opening OLM 2021

Coming Together in Community



“We have all known the long loneliness, and we have learned that the only solution is love, and that love comes with community.”

-Servant of God Dorothy Day

August 2021

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Message from the Principal

To Our OLM Community:

Here we are again. In preparing for this school year, I have often thought back to a conversation I had in the midst of last winter when someone asked me how our kids at school were doing. I paused, and I said, “You know, they’re ok.” The strain of the year on everyone was obvious and real, but because adults chose to shoulder the burden of the pandemic, our children had a largely uninterrupted school year where they could truly strive to be saints and scholars: where they could continue learning and growing as children should. Now we face another year where we ask ourselves the question, “How do we best serve our children?”

It is a complex question where we take into account their need to be physically in school with their teachers and friends, our responsibility to take reasonable precautions against the ongoing pandemic, the need for authentically human interaction in our school building, and our desire to bring about a more complete school experience, with extracurricular and social activities. These important goals have often been placed in competition with one another in our planning as we weigh the relative risks and benefits of interventions such as masks, quarantines, and stable groups, recognizing that a reduction in one intervention may necessitate an increase in another, and the simple fact that, while the most difficult days may be behind us, there are more challenges ahead.

But we know unequivocally that our students benefit from their participation in a warm, nurturing community of faith and love. And above all, that is what we aim to keep providing for every one of them. As we go into a year where each of us has developed a sense of what ought to be done for children, we must keep our eyes on the fact that nothing will serve them better than our shared commitment to the common good of this community and our solidarity in the face of the many obstacles that continue to stand in the way of our students’ education in faith, knowledge, and wisdom.

We as a community have done that extraordinarily well for a year and a half, and now we take up our yoke again, coming together in community with courage, joy, and love, undaunted by our shared challenges and committed to making whatever shared sacrifices are necessary to help our kids become all that God is calling them to be.

You will see that this plan represents our best efforts to balance the competing goods that we wish to give our children, providing an educational experience that is both safe and warm, cautious and joyful. It also takes into account the continuing reality that positive cases of COVID-19 in our building will subject students and classes to quarantine and our corresponding efforts to protect in-person learning for all of our students. This is also a plan that is subject to change based on the evolving picture of health in our school and broader community, and which we will revisit regularly to make necessary adjustments as the year progresses. Thank you for being with us as we again come together in community to strive right along with our kids to be the saints and scholars that God is calling every one of us to be. May He bless us all.

For Christ and Our Kids,



Mr. Patrick H. McNabb
Principal

Remote Learning Considerations

As we prioritize our school's in-person, community experience, we are re-focusing our academics away from a hybrid approach. Remote learning will be available only in the following situations:

- When a class is in quarantine because of a positive COVID-19 case in school
- When a student must isolate because of a positive COVID-19 test
- When a student must quarantine because of exposure to COVID-19

If a child must isolate or quarantine due to a positive test or exposure to COVID-19, families should follow the procedure below to arrange for remote learning:

- Contact Mrs. Fleury to inform her of the positive test or exposure
- Determine with Mrs. Fleury the child's anticipated date of return to school
- Mrs. Fleury will then communicate the need for remote learning to our office staff and your child's teachers.
- Remote learning will be available, and materials will be ready for the current week two school days after notification.
- If isolation or quarantine extends into the following week, hard-copy materials will be ready for the additional period of time on the following Monday morning.

Any students who need to stay home because of a temporary illness or other reasons will be able to make up learning when they return to school.

Health & Safety

We continue to ensure the health and safety of students through five key areas:

- Face Coverings
- Stable Groups
- Social Distancing
- Hand Hygiene
- Staying Home When Sick

Face Coverings

Face masks are required for all students and teachers while in common indoor areas of our school buildings and grounds such as hallways, bathrooms, and the church building. We also strongly recommend their use for all K-8 students and teachers while with stable groups, especially during group work or other periods when students are in close proximity to one another for periods of time. Masks are not required or recommended while students are eating or drinking or while they are outside, although students are free to keep them on outside if they or their families prefer.

Stable Groups

Each grade level in our school is designated as a stable group. Students will remain with their stable groups throughout the day. In middle school, students will rotate between classes and must wear masks

when in common areas such as hallways and bathrooms. All students will travel to their enrichment classes with their stable groups and must wear masks while travelling in common spaces.

Social Distancing

Outside of stable groups, everyone in our school building will practice social distancing to minimize the likelihood of viral transmission. Even within stable groups, as much distance as possible will be maintained. Desks will be spaced as far apart as possible, and each student will have an assigned seat. Small group work is permitted, and we especially recommend the use of face coverings when students are working together in small groups.

Hand Hygiene

Every classroom and every building entrance is outfitted with hand sanitizer. Students must clean their hands at the following times:

- When entering the building
- Before and after eating
- After using the restroom
- When re-entering the building from outside
- When re-entering the classroom

Staying Home When Sick

We will not require a daily symptom checker this year. With that being said, parents continue to play a critical role in helping all of our students to remain healthy by ensuring that students who are sick stay home. Students who have any of the following symptoms may not attend school:

- Fever or chills
- Cough (New)
- Shortness of Breath or Difficulty Breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or Body Aches
- Headache
- Sore Throat
- Loss of Taste or Smell (New)
- Congestion or Runny Nose (New)
- Nausea or Vomiting
- Diarrhea

If a child is exhibiting any of these symptoms, parents must contact the school and speak to Mrs. Fleury to determine if a COVID test is necessary to return to school and what other conditions must be met prior to return.

Restrooms

Students in Grades K-8 must also wear a face covering in the restroom to minimize the chances of viral transmission. Students should always use the restroom closest to their classroom.

Restrooms will continue to have a regular schedule of cleaning and disinfection to minimize any risk of contamination between stable groups.

Nursing Protocols

Mrs. Fleury continues to be on campus throughout the school day. If a student does not feel well during the school day, the classroom teacher will call the nurse. If the nurse determines that the student is demonstrating COVID-like symptoms, the student will go to the isolation room, and the student's parents will be called. **Students must then be picked up within the hour.**

Cleaning & Ventilation

HEPA Air Purifiers continue to operate in every classroom. These work to remove coronavirus particles and other impurities, significantly aiding classroom ventilation and improving overall air quality. All classrooms also have operational windows to further enhance ventilation and minimize risk.

We will follow a regular schedule of cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, railings, and restroom surfaces in accord with CDC guidance, and using EPA-approved disinfectants.

Shared spaces will be cleaned in between uses, and individual student desks are cleaned prior to snack and lunch and again at the end of the day.

Visitors

We continue to limit visitors to our school building, and to begin our year all visitors must be approved by the school administration. Approved visitors must wear masks while in the school building.

Responding to Cases of COVID-19

Vaccinations

We encourage all faculty, staff, and eligible students to consult with their healthcare provider regarding COVID-19 vaccination. We also request that all those who have received an approved COVID-19 vaccine to provide documentation to our school nurse to assist in cases of contact tracing and quarantine. Individuals who have not provided proof of vaccination will be considered unvaccinated for these purposes.

Contact Tracing

Per the directions of the Rhode Island Department of Health, Our Lady of Mercy School will assume responsibility for contact tracing in the event of a positive case of COVID-19 within our school building. Mrs. Fleury or Mr. McNabb will notify families of those students deemed to be close contacts and will provide directions for quarantine and/or testing.

Quarantine

Individuals who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days are exempt from quarantine requirements. In the event of a close contact with COVID-19, they should monitor for symptoms for fourteen days from the date of exposure.

Unvaccinated close contacts of individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 must quarantine for at least seven days and may return on day eight with a negative COVID-19 test taken on day five of quarantine or later. All close contacts should continue monitoring for symptoms for a full fourteen days.

Isolation

Individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 must isolate for a period of ten days from symptom onset (if symptomatic) or from the date of the positive test (if asymptomatic). Symptomatic individuals must also be fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine and have improved symptoms prior to return. Anyone with questions or uncertainty about return following a positive COVID-19 test should contact Mrs. Fleury.

Testing

If testing, for COVID-19, we strongly recommend the use of K-12 testing sites, which can be contacted by calling 844-857-1814 or visiting portal.ri.gov. This provides the smoothest communication should we need to take action based on the test results. **Please avoid home tests as they can be extremely difficult to document.**

Travel

We ask that any family planning to travel inform our school nurse so that arrangements can be made for a safe return to school. Should your child become symptomatic or you believe that her or she was exposed to COVID-19 while travelling, please make arrangements to have your child tested **prior to returning to the school building** and remain at home until those test results are received. We will not be making remote learning available either during travel or during any necessary quarantine following travel, nor will we provide assignments in advance of trips. Students who have missed days of school because of travel will be able to make up assignments upon their return. We will return to our travel policy throughout the year as we attend to public health guidance and changing requirements. *It is possible that additional quarantine requirements may be instituted as the year progresses.*

Operations

School Schedule

Dismissal on Fridays returns to 2:30 pm from the temporary 1:00 pm dismissal we had instituted last school year. Please see below for arrival and dismissal procedures.

Arrival

Arrival procedures will function in the same fashion this year as they did last year, with the adjustment that we will not take temperatures as students enter the building. For the safety of students within our traffic flow, however, **students must stay in their car until a staff member comes to open the door and let the student out**. Each staff member will only supervise students exiting one car at a time, and parents may not permit students to exit their car without a staff member present to supervise the student into the building safely.

In all of these windows, each stable group will dismiss separately, ensuring a minimum of six feet in between stable groups at all times. Parents may come to meet children, but we ask everyone to clear the parking lot quickly after picking up.

Bussing

Bussing is a service provided by public school districts to the students living in those districts. Questions about bussing are best directed to those school departments. It is reasonable to expect disruptions to bussing services this school year and to plan for alternate transportation arrangements. We do, however, remain ready to facilitate arrival and dismissal by bus for students who are able to use that transportation method and will continue actively working with local and state agencies to help facilitate bussing for our students. By federal mandate, masks are required on busses and other forms of public transportation.

*Please note that in the event of a positive case in a student riding a bus, RIDOH will quarantine the students sitting in the same row as the child who tested positive as well as all students sitting up to two rows in front and two rows behind the student. These decisions to quarantine are made by RIDOH and the school is not able to influence them. **Families who choose to have their child(ren) ride the bus to or from school, choose to accept this risk of quarantine. ***

Lunch

To begin our year, lunch will be held either in classrooms, with students distanced at their desks, or outside, weather and space permitting. We will not use the cafeteria. We are making this decision to limit instances in which students are sitting across from each other without social distancing and without masks, and we will revisit it, with the possibility of returning to the cafeteria if public and school health metrics permit. **Please consult with your child's homeroom teacher regarding food items that may not be permitted due to allergies in the classroom.**

Enrichment Classes

Enrichment classes are returning to their classrooms this year, with students travelling in stable groups to those classrooms.

They are also returning to their previous schedule and away from the trimester blocks that we implemented last school year. Students will have each of their enrichment classes throughout the year rather than for one trimester only.

Lockers & Cubbies

Middle School students will again use their lockers and PK-5 students will use their cubbies for storage of materials.

Classroom Parties

Parents may consult with homeroom teachers to send in treats for special occasions. **Any food items sent in for the class must be pre-packaged and individually wrapped.** Please also take into consideration the allergy restrictions of any students in the classroom so that all may participate.

Extended Day

Before and After-School Care will continue to be available for those families who require it. However, these services must be signed up for beforehand and cannot be used on an ad-hoc basis. This will ensure that each group in either Before or After Care remains consistent and can be considered its own stable group. Because these groups are distinct from grade-level stable groups during the school day, **masks are required for all students and teachers while indoors during before and after care, regardless of grade level or vaccination status.** We continue to ask all families to only use this service when truly necessary so that we can avoid over-crowding classrooms and we can reserve the program for those parents whose schedules necessitate its use. Thank you for your continued cooperation!

This year, we ask families to sign up for Extended Day on a per-trimester basis rather than a monthly basis. Please note that signing up for Extended Day does not obligate a family to make use of the service, but it does make them eligible to use it.

Before-School Care will be held in the Extended Day Room across from PK. Parents will drop off students directly at Door C3, closest to that classroom.

After-School Care will be held in three rooms throughout the school, one for Grades PK-2, one for Grades 3-5, and one for Grades 6-8. These will be considered their own stable groups and will not mix with one another after school. Parents will go to the door corresponding to their child's grade span in order to pick them up when they arrive.

Please recognize that the use of the Extended Day poses additional risks of quarantine as students come into contact with more people outside their normal stable group.

Extracurricular Activities

Our cross country program has now re-started, and we are actively working to bring back additional after-school activities as the year progresses.

Spiritual Life

We will return our entire school to weekly Mass in person this year. During Mass, we will maintain distance between stable groups and require masks for all students and teachers.

Confessions will continue to be offered on a quarterly basis.

And we will of course continue daily prayer over the loudspeaker and in classrooms, as well as our Virtues in Practice program, through which students learn how our forebears in faith have witnessed to God's love through their actions, and how they can follow suit. We have just finished the year of charity, and we are now embarking on the year of faith. May God fill us with both!

