

2020-2021 School Year

Information for parents and students

July 8, 2020

Dear Parents of SMCS Students,

First, we want to reiterate our sincere appreciation of your adaptability and commitment to our school during the Spring 2020 semester. The sudden closing of our school took us all by surprise and we did the best we could to adjust given our circumstances. Now, as we are looking forward to returning to school in August, we are working diligently to be prepared for whatever the school year may bring. Though typically off during the Summer, our teachers will be working throughout July to prepare for the unique challenges of the year ahead.

As are all schools, we are closely following the decisions and recommendations of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), as well as watching the plans being made in both our local public schools and in Catholic schools around the state. Decisions specific to SMCS will be made in accordance with the Diocese of Little Rock.

We anticipate that more information will be shared over the coming weeks, but for now, we want to share the following information with you. We will communicate final plans as we receive guidance from the above-mentioned organizations.

When is the first day of the 2020-2021 school year?

Students' first day of school is on Thursday, August 13th, 2020. The only revision would be based on ADH requirements, which is not expected.

What are the requirements for face coverings?

We are receiving weekly, if not daily, updates on many COVID topics, including face coverings.

Guidelines are expected to be revised soon at the state level, and requirements will be shared when those details are finalized. We do expect that teachers will wear face coverings when they enter school and may remove it during instruction, but must maintain adequate distance as feasibly possible when covering is removed.

What will the school week and school day look like for my child?

We plan that students will attend school each day on a very traditional schedule as in the past to the highest extent possible. Our goal for students is to establish a sense of normalcy. We also will make every effort to ensure safety, beginning with school drop-off. Both drop off and pick up will be curbside only and parents **will not be allowed** to enter the buildings. Each morning, students will be met in the car line by a staff member who will take their temperature before exiting their car. Anyone with a temperature of 100°F or higher will be asked to return home until they are 72 hours fever free without medication.

School leaders will work diligently to create a schedule and transitions to minimize close physical interactions and adhere to social distancing recommendations, while also allowing for normal school activities. More details about daily schedules will be provided later, including recess and PE. It is our intention to keep these activities as close to normal as guidelines allow.

Will social distancing guidelines be observed?

To the degree that is feasibly possible, social distancing recommendations will be observed based on the guidance we receive from ADH. Reorganization of classrooms and other learning spaces will also

take place in order to increase space between students. We will balance this with not limiting students' need to interact and communicate with their teachers and classmates.

Where will my student eat lunch?

We would like to continue service in our cafeteria but, this may not be possible with new guidelines. In the event we cannot use the cafeteria space, we are preparing for our students to eat lunch in their classrooms. Students may bring their lunch or the cafeteria will deliver lunches to the classrooms.

What special cleaning and sanitation procedures will take place?

Disinfecting and sanitizing continue to be the top priority, with extra attention to high touch surfaces and restrooms throughout the day by our staff. Time will be provided for hand washing/sanitizing. Students will be asked to sanitize their hands each time they leave and enter a new space; we are looking to place dispensers outside each classroom door. Desks will be sanitized between class periods. Teachers will monitor children to ensure handwashing is occurring properly. Our curriculum will also include education for our children on proper hygiene. Students will be asked to bring their own water bottles in lieu of using the water fountains.

What will happen if a student comes to school sick?

CDC and ADH guidelines for self-isolation as well as ending self-isolation will be utilized upon arrival at school and/or if a student becomes ill at school; therefore, if a student presents with a

fever and if the temperature is over the ADH guidance, the student will be sent home and will need to be fever-free for 72 hours without medication before returning to school.

What will happen if an individual tests positive for COVID-19?

If this occurs, we will contact ADH directly and follow ADH's most up to date guidance, which may include testing/quarantine of additional students and briefly closing for additional cleaning and disinfecting. The safety of our students is a number one priority and we will work closely with parents.

What if a student becomes sick during the school day?

If a child is exhibiting symptoms that could be related to COVID they will be quarantined in a designated location on campus.

Will students and adults be screened daily?

Visitors will need to check-in at the school office and will have their temperature checked and be required to answer screening questions. In general, visitors will be very limited in order to reduce the opportunity for contamination.

Following temperature checks prior to entering the buildings for all staff and students, teachers will review the following questions with students once they are in the classroom:

- Have you had a fever of 100.0°F or greater in the last 2 days?
- Have you had a cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or loss of taste or smell?
- Have you been in contact with a person known to be infected with COVID-19 within the previous 14 days?

Will we have an open house/registration for 2020-2021?

We will organize a modified version of our traditional open house and registration, which will take place in August. More information will be shared closer to that time.

What will happen if SMCS is required to close again?

It is critical that no matter where learning occurs, our students continue to receive the quality education expected at SMCS. Regardless of the method of delivery, new learning will occur, engagement will be expected, and grades will be taken.

“Blended learning” allows for students to receive direct instruction (whether in person or through recorded lessons) in combination with digital content and lessons. SMCS is creating a detailed blended learning plan for all students to move from on-site to at-home instruction at any time. Blended learning will become part of our “new normal” on campus as teams work to greatly increase and improve our digital content on Google Classroom, including resources and recordings of lessons.

Our blended learning approach will also allow students who become ill or must be quarantined for a short amount of time to continue learning grade level and content standards even when they cannot be physically present in the classroom.

We do recognize that some students need additional assistance, and we are currently considering options for how we can best meet the needs of all SMCS families.

Our teachers are working now to prepare for the year ahead. We will be sharing more information as we get closer to August. Our expectations for AMI will entail:

- Teachers will utilize a consistent format to better enable parents to understand and monitor what is expected of students;
- Administration will be monitoring to ensure adequate quality/quantity of instruction;
- In addition to Google Classroom, instruction will occur across multiple platforms, such as video and Zoom, etc.

If at some point I feel it is not in my child's best interest to return to school, what are my options?

SMCS is a small school and we plan to capitalize on our small size to best serve the individual interests of all students. Please reach out to us if you need to discuss options.

What about school Mass?

SMCS will follow capacity limits for Mass attendance. This may mean dividing our students into two Mass times. We know that many of our parents and grandparents enjoy and value attending school Mass and we will do all we can to accommodate you if space is available.

What about learning gaps from last Spring?

We want to assure you that we will do all we can to make sure that your child(ren)'s needs are met. We have heard concerns from our parents and we will conduct student assessments for those to identify areas of deficiency. This information will help our teachers prepare based on the needs of the students entering their classes.

In the event of an extended AMI period, what about tuition?

We know that you have options and we are committed to our preparations to still provide the high academic standards as well as focus on faith that you have depended on at SMCS. We also recognize that an extended AMI period may cause additional financial hardship and stress for some

of our families. We are committed to keeping our SMCS students. During this pandemic, our children are under much uncertainty and stress. We are a family at SMCS, and we know that it is in our children's best interest to keep them in a familiar environment. We are evaluating the best ways to assist these families. Please be assured, it is our highest priority to work with these families as needed to ensure their children remain at SMCS.

Can our school financially survive the pandemic?

Yes! The School Board finance committee has completed a balanced budget for 2020-2021.. We are in good financial shape. Thank you all for your support. Rest assured, SMCS will weather this crisis and come out stronger than ever. That's what families do.

Why choose SMCS during this time?

We know that you chose SMCS for your children because you value Catholic education and our high academic standards. We remain committed to delivering both, even if we have to move online for a period of time. In addition to working with our teachers to prepare for at-home learning, we are also developing ways to enhance opportunities for Catholic faith formation and build community among our SMCS family. We ask you to join us in the endeavor if you have an interest in doing so. It remains paramount to our mission to "enlighten minds, enrich souls, and inspire hearts."

We sincerely hope this information is helpful. We are looking forward to the 2020-2021 school year!

SMCS Family

