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August 11, 2020

Dear parents and families,

As stated on Friday, the Archdiocese of Washington Catholic Schools Office was reviewing the situation at hand, and we principals were awaiting guidance. If you did not see the press release from the ADW on Friday evening, you can read it [here](#). As you can see, the Catholic Schools Office is leaving it up to each individual school to decide how to proceed with reopening plans.

I know that many of us are ready to return to normalcy, as these past few months have been nothing short of exhausting. Ultimately, having children back in the building is what we all want. I recognize that face-to-face instruction is ideal for our children and imperative to their growth and development. It is obvious that the struggle for working parents to manage their children's distance learning is tiresome and difficult. Teachers miss the warm in-person interaction with their students, and the children miss socialization. I also understand that many of us are nervous and uneasy about this pandemic and its implications. It is clear that the COVID rates, although relatively low in the state of Maryland, depend on the responsibility and caution of citizens. I acknowledge that our teachers and staff who are now being considered frontline workers did not enter the profession to put their lives at risk every day. Additionally, many of our school families and staff members are worried about those at home who are more at-risk than themselves. In summary, whether you share in one or all of these sentiments, they are all valid.

This weekend, I devoted time to examining current data, reviewing recent task force feedback, reflecting on the needs of our community, and praying for the wisdom and strength to make a decision that prioritizes the greater well-being of all involved at Saint Peter's School. With all of this in mind, the reopening plan for in-person learning at Saint Peter's School will be implemented two weeks later than planned – September 28, 2020 (pending steady metrics and continued state/county allowances). The first day of instruction for students will still take place on Tuesday, September 8th, and all grade levels will be in 100% distance learning. As mentioned in previous communication, we are holding live, in-person (with the option of virtual) orientation sessions the week of August 31st for students across all grade levels.

The reasoning for this delayed implementation encompasses all facets mentioned above. The additional benefits of delaying in-person learning are innumerable:

- We can experience distance learning as a whole school and start the school year in a unified manner; distance learning is a very possible reality at any point during the 20-21 school year. Competency with using Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams is essential.
- This time will allow Saint Peter's teachers, staff and families to feel more comfortable and confident as we hopefully watch COVID rates continue to decline.



- I was able to procure approximately \$50,000 for Saint Peter's School through the CARES Act to spend on equipment and technology that will make the virtual learning option a possibility for students. Because the timing of this federal money was out of my hands, the order for this equipment was just placed on August 7th. Three extra weeks will allow for the equipment to arrive, and the school faculty and staff to familiarize ourselves with it.
- This gives us three additional weeks to attain necessary PPE (although ordered long ago, much is on backorder).
- There has been a lack of data about how children are reacting to the virus and the potential for them to transmit it. As more information becomes available, we can use the statistics to enhance our protocols for keeping students of all ages (and those around them) safe and healthy.
- Families who spend summers away from home or even just travel for Labor Day can return to the greater Olney area and practice caution as we prepare to return.

I understand that this is disappointing for some of our parents, students, faculty and staff. We have spent countless hours preparing for the safe return of our students. I am asking for three more weeks of patience as we monitor the situation and continue to take appropriate measures for a safe reopening. Remember, we will be together again, and when that happens, it will be joyful. If all of us can remain positive and optimistic, the children will feel the effects and reap the benefits.

Know that this decision has not been taken lightly; in fact, being faced with this decision has caused plain angst and many sleepless nights. At the end of the day, the question I continually have to ask myself is simple – “What can I do to keep all community members at Saint Peter's School safe and well?” While the answer is quite complex, I feel it illuminates the condensed rationale in choosing to begin the year with distance learning.

Throughout this week, you will receive several communications from the school; these will include details about the student orientation week, preliminary daily schedules for distance learning, intended dates for all reopening phases, student supply lists, guidance on purchasing uniforms and more. Please be vigilant and give each communication your full attention. This information will also be made available on the school portal.

I thank you for your continued patience and support of Saint Peter's School. While we are beginning the school year in an unusual fashion, I am confident that this year will be nothing short of exceptional; I know this because our faculty, staff, and families are strong and resilient. In addition, we have the unwavering support of our pastor, Father Kalita, for whom I am so grateful. I am blessed and honored to be principal of this remarkable Saint Peter's School community.

God bless you,

Kristen M. Cocozzella

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