



July 15, 2020

Dear St. Mary's Academy Parents,

It is with great enthusiasm that I write this letter on Day 3 of assuming the principalship at St. Mary's Academy. Throughout the interview process and in my first days here at the Academy, I have found each person I've encountered to be warm and welcoming. I am impressed with the wonderful community feel of the Academy and am anxious to meet *all* of the students, parents, faculty and staff. I am hopeful that in the coming weeks, we will find some opportunities to do so, all while practicing responsible social distancing.

I know that each of you, along with your children, were tested this past spring with the unfortunate closure of all schools across New York State. It certainly made all of us appreciate the importance of face-to-face, in-person instruction. It probably goes without saying, that all schools want their students in the building, in-person daily to teach, mold and help grow. The teachers at the Academy are no exception! On Monday, the Governor released a document that you have most likely heard bits and pieces of in the news, entitled "Interim Guidance for In-Person Instruction at Pre-K to Grade 12 During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency". All types of public and private (both secular and non-secular) schools must develop and submit plans for reopening and operating for the duration of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. This 23 page document gave an outline of what topics each school district, BOCES, charter school and private school must include in their plan. Today, a document was released which included additional guidance- both mandatory and recommended best practice- for schools for in-person instruction. As you can probably imagine, I have been doing a great deal of reading (and re-reading!) my first days here at the Academy!

While much of the "what" of our reopening plan has been determined for us by the NYS Education Department and NYS Department of Health, the "how" of our plan really needs deep thought and input from all stakeholders- administration, faculty, staff, and especially, parents! This is where your help and input is needed. If you are interested and available to participate, either through Google Meet, Zoom or through written surveys, please let me know either through email (svanliew@syrdiocese.org) or by calling Mrs. Keeney at (315) 635-3977. Given the tight time frame from the NYS Education Department, I would anticipate this work to begin sometime next week. We are still awaiting guidance on the format of the plan, which hopefully will be coming from the NYS Education Department at the end of this week.

Lastly, I want to reassure you that I take the responsibility for the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff very seriously. Although I take great pride in my years as an accomplished administrator, I always tell parents that first and foremost, I am a mom. As someone who is sending her daughter to high school (hopefully!:) in the fall, I have full trust and confidence that her school will put all of the appropriate safety measures in place to keep her as safe as possible while at school. I hope that you'll have that same trust and confidence in me as well when it comes to the safety and wellbeing of your children.

I look forward to hearing from you, and our partnership moving forward. Please tell your child(ren) hello and that I am anxious to meet them.

Sincerely,

Sarah VanLiew



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