



SAINT ANN'S SCHOOL

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Head of School

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Dear Saint Ann's Community,

We are deeply grateful for your patience, trust, and partnership as we continue to develop our plan for the reopening of school in September. The ongoing pandemic presents daunting challenges that all schools are facing as they undertake this task. If one thing is clear, it is that little will be “normal” this year. In the face of that, we are making decisions guided by our mission and by giving paramount consideration to the health, safety and well-being of our students, faculty, staff, and families. We also sought to approach the reopening of school with attentiveness not only to considerations of public health but to matters of equity and racial justice that are an inseparable aspect of our national crisis. This situation asks a lot of everyone involved.

We had targeted this week as the date when we would announce a decision about the reopening of Saint Ann's in September. This was premised in part on the expectation that Governor Cuomo would announce on August 1st which regions would be permitted to reopen schools in the fall. That announcement has been postponed, but in consultation with the Board of Trustees we have decided to share with you the plan that we reviewed with the Board and submitted to the New York State Department of Health on July 31st (the date when all schools were required to submit reopening plans). Families, faculty and staff need to be able to plan, and we did not want to delay any further in sharing our plans with you.

Our reopening plan is now available on [our website here](#). As you will see, **while we cannot make a final determination in the absence of knowledge about whether schools in New York City will be permitted to reopen for any level of in-person instruction**, we have refined our plans for reopening with *significantly* reduced density across our campus buildings, in a learning model that relies primarily on online learning in most divisions through the end of our first semester on December 18. Specific plans have been developed for each division, and you will find information about each of them both in this letter and in more detail later today from each division head to families with children in those divisions.

We have heard from families in many different circumstances who are concerned about their children returning to school in person this fall, and have decided to offer a *fully remote learning option* for families who are not comfortable having their child return to campus for health or any other reasons. If you would like to select this option, please log in to the [Parent Portal](#) and click the link labeled “School Reopening Survey” to let us know by August 7th. (Login using the same email address and password you used to complete your enrollment contract. You can recover your password by using the *Can't access your account?* button.) Because crucial decisions around staffing and teaching spaces in Preschool, Kindergarten, and Lower School will depend on how many families choose remote learning, please note that selecting this option in those divisions will commit your child fully to remote instruction through the entire first semester, which will end on December 18. We will communicate plans for the second semester with all families in November. This may include an option to continue with remote instruction for the remainder of the year or to return to school in person.



The Rationale for Our Plan

Our plan encompasses every element of school operations: physical plant, health screening, protocols when or if a suspected or confirmed case of Covid-19 were to occur among students, faculty, or staff; separation of the student population into discrete segments by division, grade, or classroom. We are confident that this plan centers on the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff across our campus. We convened a group of Saint Ann's parents who are experts in public health and from various medical specialties (infectious diseases, pediatrics, pulmonary medicine, and epidemiology) to review and comment on the plan before we finalized it.

While we know the many challenges and drawbacks of online learning, we have made the decision that it is in the best interest of our school community, the health and safety of its members, and the continuity of the student learning experience for the school to rely heavily on distance learning and to adopt an altered hybrid learning model through December that significantly curtails the number of students, teachers, and staff on campus each day.

For schools in New York City, plans to reopen rely heavily on public agencies and other entities to provide rapid and reliable testing, assistance with contact tracing, responsiveness, and guidance were a case to occur in our school. As of today, there are few indicators that such assistance can be relied upon. While each of those agencies include dedicated public servants who are doing their best under difficult circumstances, they have not gotten the resources and support they need. With the prospect of a million students returning to schools in the city in September, the risks seem enormous that any more ambitious plan for in-person learning will founder on this reality, leading to extended periods in which multiple children and staff across divisions must be sent home to wait a week or more for test results (though we are working to secure access to more rapid testing), all the while navigating between distance learning and in-person classrooms. The fact that our curriculum relies on faculty teaching across divisions makes us more susceptible to those disruptions.

While the current health metrics in New York City are largely stable and encouraging, the situation nationally has deteriorated dramatically and rapidly over the past two months, to the point that New York State now requires travelers from over 30 other states to quarantine upon arrival. This crisis has now claimed more than 150,000 lives in the United States and shows no signs of being contained in much of the country. No country in the world has attempted to reopen schools without the virus being contained, and the virus has shown time and again that it can leap from one part of the country to another in a matter of days or weeks.

In a normal year, our teachers and staff come to school even when they don't feel well, on behalf of our school and their students. This year, we would have to require even those with mild symptoms (coughs, fever, runny nose) to stay home. And while some of them could in some circumstances teach from home, each successive fall day seems likely to bring an unprecedented level of disruption and uncertainty to the learning experience and environment of our students. Many teachers (due to age, underlying health conditions or other factors) will have to teach exclusively online. Other faculty and staff who are not in these categories have expressed deep misgivings about whether it is safe for them to return to in-person school in September, even as many of their colleagues are eager to resume teaching in person.

Schools across the country and here in New York City are being asked to take part in an enormous experiment, with serious illness and death a risk that cannot be ignored. We know how critical schools, including ours, are to the steps we all so desperately wish to take towards a restoration of normal life. We are eager to resume in-person learning to a greater extent when the risks of a mistake in judgment are less severe, knowing that risk will never be entirely eliminated.



I know from our experience last spring what our teachers and students can accomplish together, and I know that all of our teachers and staff—while deeply and rightfully concerned about the risks we face—want to throw themselves into the task of teaching our students. They have already been applying the lessons of last spring, attending workshops over the summer to master additional tools for online learning, and developing curricula that will engage students in the midst of this tremendous uncertainty.

Social-Emotional Well-Being

The social and emotional well-being of our students, faculty and staff is essential and a priority. During any period of hybrid or remote learning, the school psychologists and student support staff at Saint Ann's will be available as usual to meet with students, parents, faculty and staff either on the phone or via Zoom or Google Meet for consultation regarding mental health concerns of any member of our community. To ensure that all of the adults in the school are able to identify social-emotional concerns when they arise in children, the school psychologists and student support staff will provide guidance and support to faculty and staff through workshops and readings. They will visit Health classes to talk directly to children in grades 6 through 12 about their emotional well-being. For children in preschool through 5th grade, school psychologists and student support staff will meet regularly with teachers and administrators to make sure that all students are supported. As always, any adult in our community can reach out to a school psychologist at any time to discuss their own emotional well being. Support and referrals will be provided as needed.

Divisional Overview

Later today, you will receive information from the appropriate division office(s) with additional details about how the overview plan and the fully remote option will translate at each age level, along with additional details about our plans for orientation and the phase-in schedule. Please note the screening and other health requirements that will be in place in every school building for all students, staff, and visitors. In brief, the student experience in each division will be as follows:

Preschool (where online learning is least suitable) will begin the year with two days a week of in-school learning, two days of online learning, and a fifth day of optional online workshops and activities. After several weeks of allowing students, parents and teachers to acclimate to the many new routines and restrictions that our health and safety protocols require we intend to move towards four days of in-person instruction and a fifth day of optional online content and activities.

Kindergarten will begin with each Kindergarten classroom in-person one day a week and three days of online curriculum, supplemented by a fifth day of optional online content and activities. On in-school days students would spend most of the day in the enclosed outdoor play yard, in the Peace Garden, or in the Kindergarten gym.

Lower School will begin with each grade in-person one day a week and three days of online curriculum, supplemented by a fifth day of optional online workshops. On in-person days, students will gather with their class for community-building activities, outdoor lessons, and playtime, programmed by homeroom and specialty teachers and held in outdoor spaces on and around the Saint Ann's Campus. Details on our in-person programming, *Fall Field Days*, are forthcoming.



Middle School (4-8th) will begin with five days a week of online learning based on our existing schedule. For students whose families are comfortable with them coming to school, there will be an opportunity to be with classmates **one day each week** for 5-8th graders and **two days each week** for 4th graders. Students will be supervised by division and other staff during any classes that are taught remotely.

High School will begin with five days a week of online learning based on our existing schedule and, for students whose families are comfortable with them coming to school, there will be an opportunity to be **in school one day each week** with classmates. Students will be supervised by other staff if their teachers are teaching their class remotely.

Child Care: We understand that for some of our families, particularly the families of younger children, finding safe childcare options during remote learning may be a problem. We are working to see if we can provide a safe place for children to be on campus from 9:00a.m.-3:00p.m. if their families cannot find an alternative option. A survey to assess such needs for families with children in grades Preschool through 6th grade can be accessed via the [Parent Portal](#). Click the link that says “Fall Reopening Survey.” (Login using the same email address and password you used to complete your enrollment contract. You can recover your password by using the *Can't access your account?* button.)

Travel Restrictions: As you make family plans for the remainder of the summer it is important to bear in mind that you should be frequently checking [New York State quarantine requirements](#) that could impact your children's return to school. At present, travel to any of more than thirty states must be followed by a 14-day quarantine, and it is our expectation that anyone coming to school will abide by those requirements. Similarly, any travel plans for Thanksgiving or winter break should be made knowing that quarantine restrictions are likely to remain in place for both domestic and international travel.

Our reopening plan was created by the school administration and reviewed by the Board of Trustees following guidelines from the CDC, the New York State Department of Health, the New York State Department of Education, the New York State Association of Independent Schools, and the expert group of medical and public health professionals mentioned above. It reflects Covid-specific guidance issued by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers in assuring that our buildings and teaching spaces are code compliant and meet the standards that are part of the New York State guidelines for school reopening that were issued on July 27th.

As was the case during this past school year, our approach continues to be informed, but not determined by, the New York City Department of Education and its reopening plans. We will continue to consider factors specific to Saint Ann's, such as the wide age range of students we serve, our cross-divisional teaching model, and the limitations of our physical plant. We plan to make full use of those outdoor spaces that we have, and are exploring additional options (street closures, parks, etc.) so that any school activities that can reasonably be moved outside can take place there.

We must acknowledge the reality that circumstances may change in a matter of weeks or a month or two, and we will need to adapt. Our plan is meant to enable us to transition quickly to full distance learning if that becomes necessary or is mandated.

Each division will hold information sessions for parents in the second half of August to answer questions, address concerns, and share additional information. We expect by then to know that the state will permit us to open under this scenario.



In spite of all that remains uncertain and unsettling I am certain of one thing: Saint Ann's in 2020–21 will depend more than ever on our shared commitment to one another, to this unique and enduring community of learners, explorers and adventurers. I will do all I can to see our students thrive, to keep our community safe, and to help my colleagues and our students find the joy in learning that is our reason for being. Our success in this will depend on all of us sharing a basic set of commitments: to keeping children home when they are sick, to continuing to practice and model social distancing and other safety measures in our lives outside of school, and to staying current on vaccinations, health forms, and other things that in other times might seem merely bureaucratic but in these times are critical to our community and to our mutual well-being.

Yours,

Vince