

PANDEMIC TEAM UPDATE
MAY 30th, 2021

Our final Town Hall Meeting was held last Tuesday, May 25th. It was an opportunity for the team to express their gratitude to all of our stakeholders - the parent body, teachers, and children. With only 11 days left in this school year, we want to acknowledge the Herculean effort contributed by everyone to get us through the year safely. Truly we have a special community! The symbiotic partnership exhibited throughout the year highlighted the love that we have for our children. May the summer give everybody much-needed respite and may the numbers continue to decline to the point of normalcy.

During the meeting, answers were provided to several questions that were submitted to pandemic@svmsnj.org. Please know that the COVID-19 situation is still very fluid and the information given here is based on what we know now. We do not develop our school's protocols in isolation. We are expected to comply with regulations distributed by the CDC, the NJ Department of Education, The Madison Department of Health, and the Schools Office of the Diocese of Paterson. Everything that we did these past 14 months kept us in compliance and ultimately directly contributed to SVMS being able to be in school each day. We have been highly commended by the Diocese for the minimal number of disruptions to our calendar throughout the year. The sense of community, which is a hallmark of our school, radiated brightly during this pandemic.

Does the school want to know which families/parents are vaccinated? Will SVMS require students to be vaccinated? Has our faculty been vaccinated?

Currently, the Pfizer, Moderna, and J & J COVID-19 vaccines are not mandated by the State of New Jersey. All of these vaccines are still under the EUA, (Emergency Use Authorization) status, by the FDA. If the vaccine does become a requirement in the future, there are families who have Religious Exemption or Medical Exemption status at SVMS. These exemptions are built into laws in the State of New Jersey and we are required to honor those choices at SVMS.

If parents choose to get their child vaccinated now or in the future, that is their prerogative. If they would like to tell us they can, yet if they choose not to divulge that information to us, that is their decision and we accept that decision.

Have some faculty members been vaccinated?

Yes, yet others have chosen not to get vaccinated. That is their right and is acceptable at SVMS.

We will not divulge who is vaccinated, whether it is a student, faculty or staff member. We've covered this during the last two town halls and that hasn't changed. We hope we can put that issue to rest, as it will not change in the future.

Additionally, it must be noted that being vaccinated or having had COVID-19 in the past year and a half, does not preclude someone from contracting the virus, becoming ill and spreading it to other people. There are reports of breakthrough COVID-19 in vaccinated individuals, as well as people being infected again after having had COVID-19 in the past year and a half.

I'm wondering if the PreK-3 students will be required to wear masks in school next year, or if that will be left to the parents' discretion? Will masks continue to be required in school in the Fall? Will vaccinated older students still be required to wear masks? Will unvaccinated children under 12 years old need to wear masks in school?

We are unable to predict or finalize any guidelines for the opening of school at this point in our planning. Come this fall, SVMS will follow the guidance of the State of NJ DOH, the Madison DOH, and the Diocese of Paterson in regards to mask-wearing. If the guidelines state that students need to wear masks, whether vaccinated or not, we will need to follow the guidelines. The main prerogative will always be the safety of the students, the faculty, and the staff at SVMS. Going into the summer, we should all assume that mask-wearing will still be a part of our return to school plan and we will update the community in the coming months as the State of NJ DOH, the Madison DOH, and the Diocese of Paterson recommendations are solidified. We will have more definite information on mask-wearing as we approach the new school year.

Springtime colds and sniffles are upon us. Can you explain the absence and readmittance process again as it relates to the next few weeks of school? (There is confusion on this in the younger grades) Do you anticipate the same process for Fall?

There are clear symptoms of allergies, such as sneezing, a runny nose, itchy eyes, and even sore throats in some cases, especially combined with the aforementioned symptoms. There are allergy symptoms that overlap with COVID-19, coughing and sore throat, coughing, and congestion. If these symptoms persist for two or more days, especially frequent coughing alone or combined with a sore throat and/or congestion, you need to contact your child's pediatrician. Your child's pediatrician will determine if COVID-19 testing is warranted. Since we are in the "yellow zone" right now for the transmission rate, your child's pediatrician can give alternative diagnoses such as allergies or a virus other than COVID-19. Your child can return to school if they are up to it as long as they have not had a fever for 24 hours, without the help of fever-reducing medications, and their symptoms have improved. If your child's symptoms do not improve with the usage of allergy medications or on their own and their symptoms become worse, testing for COVID-19 will need to be done.

Right now if anyone becomes "sick" or you think their allergies are acting up, please contact the school nurse for guidance. This will likely be the same for the fall.

Assuming the color coding of this past year, green, yellow, orange, and red for transmission rates continue for the 2021/2022 school year, alternative diagnoses' will likely not be acceptable when we are in the orange and red "zone".

The State of New Jersey will likely provide more guidance over the summer months that will be updated or stay similar in some instances. This information will be reviewed over the summer by our school administration and further guidance will be shared when decisions are made.

Is there a reason why the ministry parking lot is blocked off from pickup? Parking is very difficult in town, especially since this is taking place at lunchtime, and having those extra spots would be extremely helpful. Especially for those parents/grandparents who can't walk far.

The ministry center parking lot has always been off-limits for pick up as it is an active driveway used by the parish staff and visitors who have meetings/business to attend to in the parish offices. For the safety of our children and the reason stated above this parking lot is not ours to use. Our parish staff kindly adjusted their working hours this year so pre-school can be dropped off safely in the morning. Having Kindergarten students picked up earlier frees up many spots for other grade levels on Wilmer Street. Consider coming a bit later to pick up and park in these open spots. The activity of our parking lots is recorded and unfortunately, we witness violations of the above and some dangerous situations involving our students. We ask all to respect the use of our parking lots during pick up and drop off. The use of the nearby Presbyterian Church lots on Wilmer and the lots on Green Village Road is prohibited.

Do we plan to go a full day with lunch in the Fall?

Yes, we plan on being in a full day and having lunch using the cafeteria and some classrooms. No-Fuss Lunch will slowly be introduced back at SVMS once we can identify space for them as we will need to add more tables for students in the cafeteria at the start of the school year.

Will students move classrooms or will teachers come to them?

At this time we are planning to have students move to go to their various classes unless the guidelines for schools dictate something different.

Will we offer a remote learning option next year?

Governor Murphy stated last Monday that Executive Order #175, which allowed school districts to provide remote instructions, will expire at the end of this current academic year.

Will virtual parent-teacher conferences continue post-Covid?

The plan is to have in-person parent-teacher conferences in the Fall.

Will we offer all specials next year?

The plan for the Fall is to reinstitute all of the specials that we had pre-pandemic

Do you anticipate the return of parent volunteers and visitors to the school?

The plan for the return of volunteers will be based on security guidelines and directives from the state and the Diocese.

Will enrichment programs be offered after school next year? Sports?

Enrichment falls under the purview of Student Life, a committee of the Education Council. If we can secure a coordinator and volunteers, then we will reinstate enrichment programs in the Fall. To offer a Sports Program, we will need an Athletic Director who will secure coaches for the various sports.

Again, we thank you for your faithful cooperation and look forward to being together in as normal a school setting as is possible. Let us pray that God will make this happen for SVMS!