



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Parents/Guardians Regarding the Reopening of St. Joseph School

We know that parents have many questions about the start of the school year. In this document, we have outlined many of the frequently asked questions (FAQs) from parents about the school's reopening plans. These questions are divided up into five sections, each addressing a separate aspect of the reopening process.

The categories are:

1. **Health and Safety:** General health and safety questions, such as social distancing, masks, and facility cleaning.
2. **Infection Protocols:** How we will handle when students or employees become ill.
3. **Academics and Programming:** Questions related to how classes will be taught. This section also includes information on school events (such as Masses or assemblies) and extracurricular activities.
4. **Tuition and Fees:** Questions about tuition payments during the upcoming school year.
5. **Additional Activities and Areas to Address:** Questions that have come up in the past few days that the SJS staff and teachers will be addressing.

Health and Safety

Q: What does "reopening our schools" really mean?

A: Gathering as a school community is an integral part of Catholic education. Our plan is to reopen our school buildings to students this fall. This means that all students are welcome to return to classes for face-to-face instruction. SJS has developed an in-depth plan that addresses numerous aspects of the reopening process, and how SJS will function once reopened.

Q: Will students be safe when school is reopened? Has your plan been reviewed by medical professionals?

A: Safety is always our top priority in Catholic education. Schools have closely studied guidance from Bishop Pates, the Illinois Catholic Conference, federal and state authorities, as well as the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). Each school plan has been reviewed by the Bishop's Task Force comprised of medical

professionals, diocesan facilities, legal and risk management directors and Superintendent Dr. Michael Boyle. We have confidence that our students can return safely in the fall.

Q: Will all students be allowed to return to school at the same time?

A: We plan to stagger our first week of school inviting smaller groups of students for the teachers to guide and teach the new process of entering/exiting the school along with additional health and safety measures we will undertake.

Q: Will students need to wear masks at school?

A: Yes. As per directives of the state, all individuals above the age of two will need to wear masks while at school. Masks may be removed for brief periods of time under certain circumstances (such as outdoor play or lunch). However, when masks are removed, students must remain physically distant from one another (at least six feet). The SJS teachers will be creating scheduled time for additional recess breaks, outdoor learning, and masks breaks.

Q: Do I need to purchase masks for my child?

A: Yes. We are asking all parents to purchase masks for their child. Parents may opt to buy disposable or reusable masks. For disposable masks, each mask must be thrown away at the end of every school day and parents should send plenty of extra masks to school with their child. For reusable masks, masks should be cleaned after every use and students should have at least one extra reusable mask at school. We would like each child to have an extra mask at school.

Q: Can face shields be used instead of masks?

A: No. Face shields cannot be used instead of masks, as per directives of the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). In some circumstances and with medical documentation, a face shield may be permitted for a child with sensory and breathing concerns.

Q: Will teachers teach children how to use masks?

A: Yes. We know that students (especially young children) will need training to learn how to properly wear masks. We will spend time at the beginning of the year helping children learn how to safely keep masks in place.

Q: Will students be required to physically distance at school?

A: While the CDC and state guidelines suggest 4-6 feet apart for desks, we are working to have classroom desks as close to 6 ft. apart as possible in the classroom setting. We will be removing the teacher desk and additional furniture to make this happen.

Q: Will the student's temperature be taken before entering the school building and every day before school?

A: Yes. A high fever is a key symptom of COVID-19. If your child has a fever of 100.4°F, your child will be sent home from school. You should contact your child's doctor. Similarly, you should ask your child if he/she has any of the other symptoms of COVID-19, such as a sore throat, coughing, or nausea. If your child complains of these symptoms, you should keep him/her home and contact your doctor and the school office. Student temperatures will be checked before the students exit the car. Students with a temperature of 100.4

degrees or higher will be sent to the parking lot for retest. If the retest is 100.4 degrees or higher, the student will not be able to enter the school.

Q: How will drop off and pick-up be handled?

A: SJS has a team of parents and staff who are carefully developing drop off and pick up procedures. Details will be forthcoming. Parents will be asked not to congregate near school doors. We will communicate specific drop off and pick up procedures to you ahead of the start of school and create a video for students and parents. In addition, when students enter school every day, they will be asked to participate in three tasks. These are:

1. A temperature check, administered by an adult (please note that parents should also take temperatures every day and check for symptoms).
2. Quick questionnaire of symptoms for the parents to assure healthy children are entering the building.
3. Use of hand sanitizer upon entering the building and classroom. In addition, a schedule of handwashing at a sink will be incorporated throughout the day.

If a student has a temperature of 100.4°F or complains of other COVID-19 symptoms at school, he/she will be immediately sent to the office. Parents will be contacted and asked to pick up the child.

Q: What about safety and cleanliness requirements for school buildings?

A: At SJS, we have created specific requirements for the ongoing cleaning and sanitizing of school buildings. We have hired an additional janitor to be on staff from 8:30-4:30pm (responsible for cleaning bathrooms, railings, door handles, etc. all day long) who will be joined by our another janitor from 2pm-10pm for deep cleaning. Generally speaking, the building will be cleaned very frequently, with a particular focus on high-touch areas and common surfaces. Windows and/or vents should be opened to maximize air flow. Our school's plan contains instructions for managing shared areas such as hallways, gymnasiums, cafeterias, and bathrooms.

Q: How will lunch take place when school reopens?

A: Our students will eat lunch in their classrooms, and students have recess in staggered shifts. Cleaning of the student desks will be done before and after lunch with the assistance of the teacher and lunch aide.

Q: What about recess?

A: We will absolutely have recess, but we must fulfill defined safety requirements. For example, classes will be staggered to have recess, and students must be spread out from one another. If recess is outdoors, masks may be removed, but students should stay at least six feet apart.

Q: Can I still volunteer at school?

A: Schools have been asked to minimize the number of volunteers this year in an effort to mitigate risk.

Q: Will extended care (before and after care) be available this year?

A: Yes, we will continue to offer extended care with all health and safety guidelines followed as outlined in our plan. Our Extended Care Plan will be detailed in future communications.

Q: My child and/or another member of my household is in an at-risk group for COVID-19. Should I send my child to school?

A: Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has defined conditions in which certain people may be more at risk for

severe illness through COVID-19. If your child or another member of your household is in an at-risk group, we encourage you to speak to your doctor. Ultimately you should decide whether it is safe for your child to attend school.

Q: What do I do if I do not feel safe sending my child back to school?

A: We have taken every step to ensure the safety of students at our schools this fall. However, we understand that some families still may not wish to return. If you feel you do not wish to return for physical instruction this year (or at least at the start of the year), please contact us. We are working on a remote and at home learning program and more information will be provided.

Infection Protocols

Q: My family has traveled to a state on the restricted list. Do we need to self-isolate for 14 days?

A: No, at this time the isolation guidelines for travel from restricted states only applies to residents of the City of Chicago.

Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

A: The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has identified several [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, including high fever (above 100.4°F), sore throat, coughing, nausea, headache, muscle aches, loss of taste or smell, runny nose, fatigue, diarrhea and difficulty breathing.

Q: What should I do if my child has symptoms of COVID-19?

A: If your child shows [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, you should contact your doctor. Your doctor may ask that your child participate in a COVID-19 test. You should alert your school's main office and not send your child to school. If the symptoms occur during the school day, your child will be immediately sent to a designated area and you will be contacted to pick your child up from school.

Q: My child had COVID-19-like symptoms but tested negative for COVID-19. When can he/she return to school?

A: If your child does not have COVID-19, but has another illness, you should keep your child home until the illness' symptoms disappear. Your school will require you to provide a negative COVID-19 test and/or a doctor's note before your child can return to school.

Q: What should I do if my child tests positive for COVID-19?

A: You should immediately contact your doctor for additional instructions. You should also contact your school's main office. You should not send your child to school.

Q: When can a student return to school after receiving a positive COVID-19 test?

A: If a student tests positive for COVID-19 or does not seek medical attention, students must isolate and not return to school until they have met [CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation](#).

Q: What should I do if a member of my household (who is not my child) tests positive for COVID-19?

A: You should immediately contact your school's main office. Your school will ask that you keep your child home for at least 14 days. If your family member recovers from COVID-19 (through meeting the criteria in the previous question) AND your child shows no COVID-19 symptoms for the 14-day period, your school may allow your child to return.

Q: What happens if my child's teacher tests positive for COVID-19?

A: Should any employee have COVID-19 symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, we will follow the same protocols used for students (see above). If your child's teacher becomes sick and is unable to work, we will provide a substitute teacher.

Q: What happens if another student in my child's class tests positive for COVID-19?

A: Your school will make all parents aware that a student has tested positive for COVID-19. Those who had contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 or is suspected of having COVID-19 should isolate at home and monitor for symptoms for 14 days. Close contact means the individual was within 6 feet of the individual with symptoms for more than 15 minutes.

Q: Could my child's school building be closed due to COVID-19 this year?

A: We will do our best to ensure a safe and healthy environment in the coming year. We hope to stay in school in a safe manner for the year.

Academics and Programming

Q: Will my child's curriculum be changed this year?

A: We will still deliver high-quality instruction in core subjects (religion, language arts, math, science, and social studies). Additional requirements will be in place for departmentalized classes and special area subjects (see sections below). The implementation of safety and health requirements (outlined earlier in this FAQ) will create new complexities in instruction, but our commitment remains to provide your child the best possible faith-based education.

Q: Will my child's classroom look different?

A: To minimize the risk of any infection in the classroom, we have spread out desks in classrooms to achieve physical distancing to as close to 6 feet as possible. To maximize floorspace, we have asked teachers to remove non-essential furniture and other items. The desks and tables have been arranged so that they face the front of the room.

Q: Will students share school supplies?

A: No. Our students will not share school supplies (e.g., books, crayons, technology, etc.), including for such subjects as art and music. Exceptions may be made for activities outdoors. If it is impossible to avoid sharing supplies, such supplies must be cleaned after every use.

Q: I have a child in preschool or kindergarten. Is high-quality learning possible?

A: Yes. Our early education teachers will continue to provide the best possible quality of instruction in preschool and kindergarten. While health and safety requirements are in place, our teachers will continue to work hard in the coming year to ensure your child grows intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

Q: Will students still change classes?

A: Our students remain in cohorts (each homeroom stays together) and teachers move into the classes rather than the students moving to classes.

Q: Will schools still offer classes in special subject areas (e.g., art, music, PE, etc.)?

A: Yes. Special subject area teachers will travel to each class' homeroom for instruction whenever possible.

PE classes will be held outside. Art will be in the classroom. At this time, we are not able to offer Music. We will be reviewing teaching Music outdoors with increased distancing in the future.

Q: Will tests still be given this year?

A: Yes. It is important that we continue to gauge student academic growth throughout the school year. As such, you should anticipate tests including standardized tests to be administered in your child's class. We will be conducting additional assessments at the start of the school year to gage the student's abilities.

Q: Will students participate in field trips?

A: No. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools will not participate in in-person field trips during the 2020/21 school year.

Q: I need to meet with a teacher or my school principal. Can these meetings occur?

A: Yes. To minimize visitors in the building, these meeting may take place virtually via phone or video chat.

Q: Can we still have meetings of stakeholder groups, such as the School Board, Parent Club and other organizations and clubs? What about fundraising events, such as the Auction and Oktoberfest?

A: Such meetings will be at the discretion of the school. Meetings can be held in person with capacity limitations, social distancing, and masks, or can be held virtually. We will be evaluating our ability to host annual fundraisers individually as the year progresses.

Q: Will school Masses still take place?

A: The diocese has defined a specific plan for parishes that allows for the celebration of mass under very specific conditions. Schools will follow this plan, in close coordination with Fr. Greg, in determining how and when Masses may be celebrated.

Q: How will extracurricular activities be impacted this year?

A: At this time, Athletics has been suspended along with our Chess Club. As the year progresses, we will work with the Catholic Schools Office to determine our ability to restart these activities in a safe manner. We are unable to continue the Band Program at this time.

Tuition and Fees

Q: Will schools still collect tuition this year?

A: Yes. While this school year may look different, our school will continue to provide a rigorous academic experience while supporting the moral and spiritual development of each student. Our Catholic schools depend upon tuition revenue to compensate our employees who do this work and support other school-related expenses. St. Joseph counts on the tuition to pay our teachers.

Q: I am having difficulty paying tuition, what do I do?

A: Some families may have difficulties paying tuition due to the loss of income during workplace closures, and we are ready to support those in need of assistance. Please contact our school office for assistance. We understand your situation and will do our very best to work with you.

Q: Will fees be changed this year?

A: At this time, we do not have any additional fees from our current contract.

Additional Areas to Address

Q: How will the St. Joseph Religious Education Program for the fall?

A: Currently, the St. Joseph Religious Education Program is awaiting their approval for reopening plan. The program is much smaller than past years. The program will be open only on Wednesday evenings, and the time has been changed to meet at 6pm instead of 4:30pm to allow for additional deep cleaning. As more information becomes available, it will be shared with our families.

Q: What about special days and treats for students?

A: We will have a new set of “food” rules for the future. We may not celebrate birthdays with home-made treats this year, but our teachers will be creating special ways to celebrate each child. Our special SJS Parents Club events will be reviewed and changed to meet the standards set by our school.

Q: What about uniforms?

A: We will wear our uniforms, but plan to wear our comfortable PE uniforms for the first month of school. The uniforms will be reviewed as we progress through September.

Q: Will the school host a Christmas Program?

A: We sure hope so! Music classes may resume in October after further review in September.

Q: Will the students be able to use the library?

A: We are temporarily pausing Library time. We will review the library usage later in the fall.

Q: Will we have traditional Back to School Night and Open House events?

A: We will do many of these events virtually as we start school. While we hope to offer smaller events, we will evaluate these events on an event by event basis.

Q: Why does SJS and the Diocese feel comfortable returning to school when neighboring public schools are not returning to 5 days of face to face instruction?

A: After careful review and risk mitigation by the Diocesan Review team, St. Joseph is ready for the return to school. Most Catholic schools are smaller in nature and have no access to busing. Some of biggest challenges for public schools are the ability to bus children to school and the large number of students to socially distance for the school day. Simply put, they do not have the room or space. At SJS, our class sizes are small enough to manage and all students are dropped off by parents or a carpool. We have a staff who is 100% dedicated to the return to school plan and willing to clean, disinfest, and maintain social distance for safety of our children. Our teachers are committed to creating an environment that is creative and engaging through the many challenges that we face. Our continued mission will be to bring your children closer to the Lord and live the gospel message. We look forward to your partnership and commitment in prayer to guide our efforts and abilities this year.