



ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE SCHOOL

Under the direction of the Basilian Fathers

January 11, 2022

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Good afternoon. I hope you are doing well as we all await the next steps in a return to in-person learning.

Although this is technically the first week of Ordinary Time in our Church, it is certainly far from ordinary.

Today's update is to answer some questions regarding next week and requests regarding online access to classrooms.

Assuming we are returning to in-person learning on January 17, we hope all families understand the risks the current Omicron variant presents. Provincial positivity rates are as high as 30%, severity of illness appears to be less than previous variants (certainly in those vaccinated), and keeping staff healthy and available at work will become problematic with a possible absenteeism rate of 30%. All these factors increase the likelihood of further online learning. Every effort we make to return to in-person learning and living carries inherent risk. Please know that we believe in the value of human connection in person and are working to mitigate risk with layered supports to promote safety; however, Omicron will impact our school and people will be infected, as we experienced late in December. We have done well, but we are not immune.

We understand that everyone will have varied opinions on the most prudent course of action in managing COVID-19. We have been trying to outsmart a virus for two years and hope that our next best efforts will bring us closer to moving beyond it. For now, it is still with us and impacting our world.

In preparation for the return on January 17,

1. **Our daily screener (smcsscreener.com)** has been updated to reflect current Toronto Public Health (TPH) guidelines. This is our first line of defence. Please do not attend school if you are experiencing symptoms or someone in your home is experiencing symptoms.
 - a. We ask that you begin informing Mrs. Ottavino on Wednesday, January 12 of any COVID-19 related illness in your home. You can email attendance@smcsmail.com
 - b. If you require or would like to request online access to the classroom (for reasons related to COVID-19), please send your request to Mrs. Ottavino at attendance@smcsmail.com
 - c. You can begin utilizing the screener to become familiar with the questions this week.
2. **Online Access to Classrooms**
 - a. As schools open to in-person learning on January 17, continued online access to the classes can be requested.
 - b. Please note that we will provide access and support, however, we know this does not replace the value of in-person learning.

- c. We reserve the right to arrange and safely accommodate in-person attendance at the school for select evaluations when necessary.
 - d. Longer-term requests for access to online learning will be reviewed monthly.
- 3. Rapid Antigen Test**
- a. We would ask that students take advantage of the rapid antigen tests that were provided before the break and complete a test on Sunday, January 16. We do not yet know if there will be future access to provincially provided rapid antigen tests. This is still being explored as an additional mitigating strategy.
 - b. For those who are on a regular rapid antigen test programme, please be sure to complete and upload results this weekend.
- 4. Masks**
- a. With the ease at which Omicron spreads, mandatory masking for students at all times during the day while indoors or outdoors when 2-metre distancing is not possible will be strictly promoted and enforced.
 - b. We require students to provide and wear 3-ply surgical masks, (cloth masks are no longer sufficient). This is on the recommendation of TPH. N95 masks can provide further protection but are not required.
- 5. Return to play**
- a. There are many questions regarding sport and co-curricular activity. We have no clear direction on the return-to-play guidelines, however, TPH has put a hold on indoor high-risk activities such as basketball and cross-cohorted choirs/bands/musicals. We are only projecting, but the first week back will see a continued pause on activities to ensure the spread of COVID-19 does not impact our ability to safely staff the school. We will return to our co-curricular programming as soon as possible and will keep you posted on the resumption of activities when these details are available.
- 6. Uniform**
- a. With a return to in-person learning in January, we have previously committed to a return to our regular, traditional winter uniform of a white shirt, tie, and blazer (or SMCS zip-up if your blazer is back-ordered)
- 7. Lockers**
- a. Students should check that they can recall their locker number and combination (it has been a few weeks).
- 8. Morning Drop-off**
- a. We encourage families to use the north Bathurst St. entrance for morning drop-off to accommodate congestion to start the day.
- 9. Cohorts and Contact Tracing**
- a. Further details regarding contact tracing and cohort dismissal protocols will be forthcoming following further discussions with public health.
- 10. PCR testing**
- a. Further details regarding requirements and access to PCR testing for symptomatic individuals will be forthcoming. The school does have limited access to take-home PCR tests which will be utilized as necessary for staff and students.

Please know we all want to get back at it! We had a great fall run from September to December. Omicron has changed the narrative once again. We hope that this is the beginning of a shift in strategy, based on the evolving data and research, to planning for endemic living. This virus will be with us for some time and we will continue to utilize

every tool possible to mitigate risk. This includes improved ventilation, promotion of vaccinations, screening, masking, cleaning, distancing where possible, and providing online access to the classrooms for a limited time when deemed necessary.

I close today's message with an assurance that we will do everything we can to provide an enriched learning experience as safely as possible. Viruses spread when large groups of people gather for extended periods in close spaces, which is life at school. Our school has only missed one instructional day since March of 2020 when this pandemic began. Although not perfect, our students and families have responded to the demands delivered by our dedicated staff to always keep moving forward toward success. We will do so next week as well.

We expect future government announcements and follow-up operational guidelines that may impact our plans. We are committed to moving forward in the engagement and education of your son(s).

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Mr. James McKinnon
Principal

