

July 31, 2020

Dear St. Philip's Lutheran School Family,

We pray each of you are well, and like us, getting excited to start a new school year! It has been a busy summer preparing for many possible scenarios that may occur during the coming year. **We thank you for your patience** as we have worked through various plans and options amid a continually changing situation.

We also want to **thank you for the helpful feedback** many of you provided on our recent school survey. We are especially **grateful for the words of encouragement** you shared **and** for your **prayers**. Please know **God used your words to lift us up** during this challenging time of preparation for a year that promises to be unlike any we have experienced before. Your words were a strong reminder of what we love about St. Philip's and our entire school family.

**What follows below is an overview of our plan for starting the 2020-2021 school year:**

### **Our Plan to Start the Year**

- The Board of Education, taking into consideration the current situation and timeline as well as feedback from families, faculty, staff, and health authorities, has decided to **begin the year fully virtually for all students**.
- Our scheduled first day of school is **Wednesday, August 26th**.
- Each student will be provided a Chromebook or tablet by St. Philip's for virtual learning.
- Teachers will work with each family to explain how virtual learning will be set up because it will be different than it was last spring.

### **Critical Rationale for Decision**

- Essential health and safety protocols have not yet been released to us and certain guidance is vague. St. Philip's does not want to put anyone in a position where a rushed decision needs to be made that could potentially increase the risk to the health and safety of our students, staff, and families.
- Key details, critical to implementing routines and procedures that will help keep students, staff, and families safe, have not yet been released to us. We do not know when more complete guidance will be shared by the Milwaukee Health Department.
- Guidance on the safety of reopening varies among health authorities and is continually changing.
- Although our desire remains to be able to reopen for in-person learning as soon as possible, we cannot say with certainty that our plan will be approved by the Milwaukee Health Department before our scheduled first day of school, Wednesday, August 26. Families and teachers need to be able to plan now for a successful start.
- Beginning virtually is the only way to guarantee we will be able to start our year on time and help keep students and staff safe while doing so.

### **Current Situation in Milwaukee:**

- The Milwaukee Health Department has stated they will be releasing a new phase called "Phase 4.1" which could allow a school to reopen at 50% capacity prior to the city being in "Phase 5."
- In order for schools to reopen in "Phase 4.1", they need to have a plan approved by the Milwaukee Health Department.
- The Health Department has not yet shared the specific details of "Phase 4.1" or the specific criteria that need to be included in a reopening plan. The timeline for doing so is uncertain, but could happen next week.

### **Where in the process of reopening for in-person learning is St. Philip's?**

- St. Philip's has created a detailed reopening plan based on the most current health and safety guidance from the State of Wisconsin, CDC, AAP, and the Milwaukee Health Department.
- We intend to review the criteria for Phase 4.1 once it is released, adjust our plan if necessary, and seek approval from the Milwaukee Health Department to reopen for face-to-face instruction.

### **What will happen after St. Philip's has their plan approved by the Health Department?**

- St. Philip's will assess the current health situation in Milwaukee, the internal situation among our St. Philip's family, and any mandates in place to evaluate the feasibility and/or risks of reopening.
- St. Philip's will ensure it can meet all of the health and safety requirements of our approved plan.
- St. Philip's will discuss and communicate a timeline and details for reopening for in-person learning and any additional learning options that may be offered.

### **What if I do not feel comfortable with my child returning once St. Philip's transitions back to in-person learning?**

- Although we believe the most effective form of instruction happens face-to-face, we understand that not all of our families may feel comfortable sending their children back to school right away. Please know St. Philip's will work with those families to find a solution that will work for both the family and the school until they are able to make the transition back to in-person learning or until other circumstances necessitate a full return for all students.

### **What should families do next?**

- Your child's teacher will contact you soon to set up a time to discuss the virtual learning plan for the start of the year and arrange the pick up of a device for your child.
- Please continue to think of ways we can support you and your child as we begin the year virtually. We encourage you to share your thoughts with us at any time or with your child's teacher when you meet.

We know the decision to open virtually will impact each of our families in different ways. It certainly was not an easy decision to make. Please know that although all students will start the year virtually, we are committed to offer in-person learning as soon as the Milwaukee Health Department approves our plan and tells us it is safe to do so.

May we all find encouragement in the inspired words of the apostle Paul to the Philippians in 4:4 where Paul writes: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" It is easy to look at all of the challenges around us and do just the opposite of what God, in his word, encourages us to do. Let it be our prayer that each of us can find reasons each day to rejoice, especially as we remember what our Savior has already done for each of us and as we look forward to the heavenly home we are assured is waiting for us.

As always, please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns. Take care and may God bless.

In Christ,



Jason Schapekahm  
Principal