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Dear St. Agnes School staff and families,

I want to begin by thanking you for your unwavering support and efforts during the 2020-2021 school year. While it was an incredibly challenging year, our school community remained unified and determined to reach our goal of maintaining in-person education throughout the year. We were blessed to be able to do so and I know our students are better because it.

It was our hope that when we returned for fall classes in 2021, that we would not be facing the same things as last fall, but data shows us that COVID is far from over. With the Delta variant raising its ugly head and seeming to be even more contagious and worrisome for its effects on children, we must take time to consider yet again, what measures need to be taken to ensure the health and safety of the students, staff and families of our school. I recognize that as a diverse community, there are different opinions about what measures should be taken when we return to school on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. I respect your views and understand that each family wants what is best for their children and family. Although no plan will make everyone “happy”, nor will it meet the needs of all individuals, it is important as a Catholic School community that we remain compassionate and considerate of all lives and remember that the protocols put in place will be done so keeping in mind the best interest of our entire school community in mind.

We cannot ignore that the virus remains active and case counts continue to rise both locally and across the country. Mixed messages are being presented as to what needs to be done to keep kids in school and safe. St. Agnes School Advisory Council met and agreed to use the guidance of the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD) and our local primary care physicians to determine which protocols we need to keep in place from our original return to learn plan. We fully realize that these plans may be subject to change during the course of the year and intend to re-evaluate them monthly at our advisory council meetings. We ask for patience and flexibility as we progress and ask all in our St. Agnes community to do their part to protect themselves and others by using the layered prevention methods of: washing hands, maintaining social distancing, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, wearing masks as directed and consult your medical provider about vaccination.

If we learned anything last year, it is that our plan is subject to change when new guidelines and information are presented. However, two things remain steadfast, first and foremost, our staff’s commitment to safely educating students in person and the second being that our Catholic school community remains strong and vibrant. Together we will weather the storm relying on God the Father to guide our path as we continue on this journey. We remain grateful for your support and cooperation and ask for your continued prayers as we move into the new school year.

In Christ,

Mrs. Brown

**Please take time to read carefully the Safe Return Plan**

# St. Agnes School Safe Schools Plan- 21-22

## Guiding Principles

- Protect the health and safety of students, staff, and the St. Agnes School Community as we return to in-person learning
- Ensure the social, emotional and mental health of our students and staff
- Deliver the highest educational and spiritual experience to each student to prepare them for future success
- Promote equity and opportunity for each student and their family
- Thoughtfully prepare for future decisions from the Panhandle Public Health Department, the Nebraska Department of Education, and from State and Federal officials related to schooling for the coming year
- Remain faithful to our school mission of providing our students with a quality education in a faith-filled environment

## COVID Tracking & Prevention

- St. Agnes School will closely monitor and respond to the changing conditions and risk within our community in an effort to remain in an in-person learning environment.
- Local Public Health will continue to monitor and report on the current case counts hospitalizations, vaccination rates, and positivity rates. They will provide guidance to schools regarding positive cases involving our students.

## School Drop Off & Pick Up

### School Drop-off:

- All students will enter through the front (#1) or back (#4) door entrances for start of school at 8:00 a.m. Doors will open at 7:45 and will lock at 8:05.
- Students needing to arrive early may use **Morning Club**, which opens at 7:30.
  - Enter through the back playground door (#4)
  - Sanitize hands
  - **Masks required**
- Parents wearing masks may enter the building as needed. This will be monitored and may change if community conditions continue to rise.

### After School Pick Up:

- All students will be picked up at 3:15 on the back playground.
- Students not picked up by 3:25 will be placed in **After 3**.
  - After 3 will be in operation all days that school is in session.
  - Hours are 3:15-5:45
  - This program will run out of the A3 room and 1 or 2 classrooms upstairs.
  - Snack, homework time activity time and outdoor time will take place.

## Facility Safety

- **Cohorting:**
  - Cohorting will not be as stringent as last school year but will occur in some situations including: Mass seating, cafeteria seating, school assembly seating.
  - Recess will occur in small groups: Pre-K, K-2, 3-5
- **Social Distancing:**
  - When conditions allow, the recommended 4-6 feet social distancing will be used
- **Large Assemblies:**
  - Large group assemblies will be held if it is deemed safe. Concerts, quarterly award ceremonies etc. are currently scheduled as whole-school events, but this will be monitored closely and is subject to change if conditions merit.
- **Mass:**
  - Mass will take place on Wednesday mornings at 8:15.
  - Individual classes will be socially distanced in a seating arrangement that includes 5-6 per row.
  - Masses will be live streamed for parents who want to join in that fashion.

- Some seating will be available in rear of church and balcony for parents who desire to attend in person.

**Masks will be required**

- **Handwashing, Sanitizing & Respiratory Etiquette**

- Proper handwashing, cough and sneeze etiquette will be taught, reinforced and monitored.
- Sanitizing stations will be located at all entrances.
- Sinks are available in all classrooms for handwashing. When hand washing is not feasible, hand sanitizer will be provided and used.

- **Masks**

- **Masks will be required for all people inside St. Agnes School beginning Open House Night on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and continuing until further notice.**

*CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend masks for all students but specifically those who are unvaccinated. This is the entirety of our student population due to their age. St. Agnes School Advisory Council agrees that this is the best practice to ensure the safety of our students. This protocol will be monitored and discussed monthly at our Advisory Council Meetings.*

- Masks will be provided by the school to ensure that they are properly fitted for a child and can be easily identified as theirs. (*Kerri Schaff will make the masks again this year*)
- School masks will be laundered on a regular basis.
- Students will be taught the appropriate use of the face covering and this will be reinforced regularly.
- Students will be given breaks when the teacher deems it appropriate. Masks will not be worn at recess, during physical education or while outside for class activities.

- **Bottle Filler Fountains:**

- **Each student is asked to bring a personal water bottle labeled with their name to be left at school.** (*Small children struggle to keep their mouth off of the fountain so we will continue to use our bottle filler fountains. This also encourages students to drink lots of water*)

- **Visitors:**

- Visitors will be allowed in St. Agnes School at this time.
- All visitors **MUST be masked.**
- Non-essential visitors and volunteers may be limited if case levels increase.

## **Maintaining a Healthy Environment**

- **Symptom Screenings:**

- Daily health screenings will not be done at the school entrance.
- Families will be encouraged to screen students for COVID symptoms and follow PPHD's guidance regarding testing and quarantine. (see the attached document)
- Students exhibiting 2 or more of the following: fever (measured or subjective) chills, cold/shivering, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

**OR:**

At least one of the following: new cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, loss of taste or smell

**OR:**

Has at least one symptom and answers yes to: Is there someone in your household who is currently in quarantine or currently positive for COVID will be sent home immediately.

- PPHD will facilitate contact tracing, isolation and quarantines. St. Agnes School will cooperate with all efforts.
- St. Agnes Schools' normal health procedures will be followed:
  - Students and staff who are sick must stay home. A fever is defined as 100.4 F or above.
- Students and staff must be fever-free for 24 hours without medication before returning to school.
- If COVID cases rise, onsite symptom checks may be reinstated for everyone entering our facility.

- **Parent Responsibilities:**

- Please keep your child at home if they are ill, if they have been exposed to someone testing positive for COVID, or if anyone in your household is having symptoms.
- We ask that if your child has been exposed to someone testing positive for COVID, you communicate this to the school office as soon as possible.

- **While attendance at school is very important, we ask that you be diligent in assessing whether your child is well and should be at school. Please keep sick children at home. Absences related to quarantining and illness will not affect absenteeism.**
- **School Cleaning:**
  - High touch surfaces will be cleaned frequently and routinely.
  - Shared supplies and equipment will be sanitized regularly.
  - An Ionizing Gun will be used at the end of each day to sanitize throughout the building.

## Food Service

- The Meat Shoppe will provide hot lunch. **ALL** students may eat hot lunch free of charge, as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has extended the pandemic universal free lunch waiver during the 2021-22 school year.
- Lunch will be split into 2 lunch periods.
  - **Lunch #1** – 11:10-11:35 – Pre-K, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> (65 students)
  - **Lunch #2** – 11:50-12:15 – K, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> (52 students)
  - Parent helpers will be needed to serve lunch.
    - Lunch #1 – 10:45-11:45
    - Lunch #2 – 11:45-12:45

## WHY MASKING???

We know that the question of masking is likely one of the biggest ones for starting the school year. This is also an area for mixed messages. While we would all like to think that the pandemic is over, this is far from true. Case numbers are on the rise and statistics show a much younger population is now being affected. Our advisory council considered the following things before determining it best to start the school year wearing masks:

- The CDC's most recent recommendation is that all people, vaccinated and unvaccinated, wear masks indoors when in a crowd. Schools are certainly filled with people and we know that the largest portion of people in our facility are not vaccinated due to their age. While about 90% of our staff is vaccinated, they too will be masking to set the example for the kids and to ensure their student's safety.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics as well as the CDC have recommended that ALL students vaccinated and unvaccinated return to school wearing masks in order to ensure the best opportunity for schools to remain open.
- PPHD reports that the Delta variant is active in our community and COVID cases have continued to rise since we left school in May. We are currently about ¾ of the way in the yellow zone. If this trend continues, it will only be a matter of weeks or maybe a few months before the orange zone is reached, the spot where all schools will mandate masks.
- Young children are creatures of habit and thrive on routine. It was deemed more sensible to start the year in the routine of masking, which looks to be the inevitable, versus start without masks then have to try to retrain the students to wear them at a later point.
- We recognize our local public schools are returning to school without masks or are recommending masks for those who are unvaccinated. First, we must remember that they are working with a K-12 population so it is possible that a good portion of their grade 6-12 students could be vaccinated. Recommending that unvaccinated students mask would include all elementary students as they are under the age of 12 and are not eligible for the vaccine.
- In reading the public school's plans, you will note that they mention being prepared to close classes, wings or individual schools if outbreaks occur. It is our belief that masking could help prevent this from happening. If this small piece keeps our kids in school and our parents working, then we deem it an important sacrifice.
- Finally, we know that our students are able to handle this request because they did so with grace and dignity last year. They were proud to be doing their part to be part of the solution. This is because they are great servants of the Lord and know of their need to *Love One Another*.

**Please direct questions and concerns to Mrs. Brown, Fr. Konka or any advisory council member.**