



November Full On-Campus Learning Presentation by Bob Gregg Q&A Responses from September 30 Parent Zoom Meeting

Opening Remarks

- We are succeeding in our hybrid model which was designed with input from the administrative team, faculty, the COVID reopening team and the Board's Risk Committee task force-- which included SMPA leadership, parents, board members, and two physicians.
- Our COVID mitigation protocols are working: zero student cases, one faculty case BEFORE students arrived on campus in August.
- The purpose of this program is to expand upon the update that we promised at the end of September.
- An overview of the intended full on-campus instruction program:
 - Physical space and personnel preparation in October/November
 - Week of November 2: communication to families about these and other plans
 - Faculty/staff move days and classroom prep: November 23 and 24
 - **November 23 and 24 are now student holidays --so the Thanksgiving Break for students is now November 23-27. This is a change to the master calendar.**
 - Monday, November 30: launch of full on-campus instruction
- Still under consideration:
 - Classroom use designations (not section changes that I am aware)
 - Schedule adjustments
 - Final determination on physical distance
 - Lunch, carpool, exact arrival/dismissal times
 - Remote learning options (synchronous, asynchronous, facilitation)

Please explain why a hybrid scenario was chosen. What prevented us from starting the school year with full-day on campus instruction and what has changed?

First question

- Density concerns - We arranged our classrooms to meet the VDOE guideline to provide 6-feet of distance as possible. Moving forward, and with heightened confidence, we will shift that position, but specifically where and how remains to be seen.
- Mid-summer virus infection rates and concern for the burden on the healthcare system were considered. And, of course any cases/outbreaks here at St M and in area schools are/would be factors we consider.



Second question:

- Infection and burden rates seem to have stabilized, and we now move forward each day with increasing confidence that we're keeping the virus out of our community.
- Had the infection rates dropped further, or had there been an early vaccine by now, we may have opted to open even sooner.

Why the timing?

Why wait until November 30 for change to take place and not October? Why not now? Why not after the holidays? What is preventing us from a quicker return to full day on-campus learning? Please provide specific actions/steps that need to be completed.

- Some say it's too soon, some say it's too late. Others have agreed with our decision. Perhaps we have chosen the sweetest spot. On many levels, we can not rush this process.
- We will use the two-month period to:
 - observe school reopening successes and failures on the regional, state, and national levels
 - observe the upcoming “regular” flu season and the combined COVID/flu impact within the St M community and beyond
 - observe the current pandemic status, as determined by the VDH, measuring the extent of transmission of COVID-19 in the region (When determining the pandemic status each week, VDH considers both the current infection burden and the trend in infection metrics. While trends in our region are fluctuating, we hope to see a consistent downward trend.)
 - prepare operational, personnel, and facility changes needed to resume the School’s “normal” operations. The execution of the transition is substantial.
 - acclimate to a more stressful model and the density issues
 - make any personnel adjustments
 - suffice to say, there is a lot of work to do in so many ways.....
- It has been our goal to give the community an *update* to our status and intentions beyond October 5, not necessarily to shift to any specific new model. Now, we have determined our intentions to shift, on November 30, pending our ability and success to remain healthy.



Why pivot from the safest option -- the hybrid model? “If it’s not broken, why fix it?”

- To fully deliver on our mission and program in the manner in which the school was designed, it has been therefore, and will continue to be, our intention to have students back all together when it is safe, prudent and responsible to do so. Staying the current course, we intend to do so on November 30.
- Our mission: St. Michael's Episcopal School strives to provide children with superior academic instruction in an environment that acknowledges and develops Christian values.

Why did St M not survey parents about scenarios under consideration?

- Fair question; input from surveys we conducted in the late spring and early summer, though not for proposed models, was factored in all decisions and preparation.
- We have heard personally and via email from lots of families - feedback from all different perspectives through the summer and September. **What we do know is that our parent population is very split and passionate, with many diverse points of view.**
- The incredible diversity of perspective: we’ve heard all of it through active listening and observation, and we’ve weighed everything carefully.

Conversely, why open right after Thanksgiving when everyone has traveled and could spread germs?

- The break gives us time to refit the buildings for the greater number of students.
- The break allows families and teachers to return to school in a new model after some much-needed rest
- We did consider waiting until January, (i.e. after MLK weekend), but that seemed a long time before implementing a full return.



Will there be restrictions or quarantine requirements related to Thanksgiving travel?

- As in August, we continue to encourage people to engage in safe practices while traveling or gathering in groups. If you are going to a high-risk area, please be sure to be vigilant in your use of PPE and make a family-based decision as you self-monitor for symptoms. (See the CDC's Travel Advisory at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html)
- Families who are concerned about possible exposure should decide if they need to quarantine upon return. Any COVID-type symptoms or known direct exposure to a COVID+ person would indicate that quarantine is advised and may be required. REMEMBER: Advance notice to Division Directors will be necessary if a family opts for remote learning for their child. Stay tuned for further details on the remote learning options.
- Any COVID-type symptoms or known direct exposure to a COVID+ person would indicate that quarantine is advised and may be required. Any questions regarding this may be directed to Nurse Maben at smaben@stmschool.net.
- **REMEMBER... your off-campus choices can affect the entire St M community. We urge you to continue to prioritize safe health practices so that we have the best chance of keeping our community healthy and our school doors open. Please be respectful of this and be careful. We cannot overstate how important this is.**

Why are we not like other schools-- who have fully reopened?

- St. Michael's makes the most of its resources, but those resources, particularly in the areas of facilities, finances, and staffing, are limited. What we do share in common with other schools is the steep nature of the learning curve. Though the information about COVID and its transmission has been conflicting, we came to our best determination of what **our** practices should be to keep our community safe within the limits of our resources. **All** of our spaces are being used to get the greatest physical distance between students, and **all** of our faculty members are working to the limits of their ability. The decision to bring all of the students on campus in November was a difficult one, requiring us to increase student density in some classrooms - - and frankly still to be measured, but make no mistake, our model will not resemble other area independent schools. In some areas, our model may more closely align with the facility density of area parochial schools.



What are the metrics you are using to make decisions?

- It's a fair question which requires a multi-layered answer.
- During the summer, we convened two groups. First: a **Risk Committee Task Force** composed of administrators, board members, SMPA leadership and medical professionals. Second: a **COVID Reopening Team** of administrators. Along with listening to concerns from faculty and families, these teams created a plan to address the topline needs. As for the metric for the decision to return to full time, we have paid attention to feedback from parents and faculty which both challenged and supported our plan. The success of our return to school along with declining area-wide [Daily PCR](#) (percent positivity rate) for the past few weeks, and which we'll continue to carefully watch, have encouraged us to attempt to have all students on campus safely. ([The Daily PCR data may be found here: www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/key-measures/pandemic-metrics/region-metrics/](#))
- We've carefully observed our COVID positive/suspected/exposure cases. While other nearby larger schools have had a few more cases than our 1 confirmed positive case, and still others are similar to us, we have not endured an outbreak.
- Some people have asked whether there is a threshold number that would cause us to close the campus. Our answer is that we are **looking at a set of numbers** (not one single number) about community trends, burden, and transmission in partnership with VDH and government guidance.
- **COVID Tracking Dashboard:** Out of an abundance of caution and transparency, we will begin releasing a weekly COVID Tracking Dashboard **on Friday, October 16**. Again, to date, we have had ZERO student COVID cases and ONE faculty case that occurred in August before students arrived on campus.

Who quarantines and when?

- St M's August [Reopening Plan](#) outlines our quarantine/isolation expectations.
- On our school website (www.stmschool.net/news-events/covid-19-information), you will find two handy flowcharts that outline protocols regarding how to respond if someone in your family has a known COVID exposure or is experiencing COVID-like symptoms with no known exposure. **The first steps should always be to stay home, call your doctor, complete our COVID Reporting form, and contact Nurse Maben at smaben@stmschool.net or 804-272-3514, x110.**



Density concerns: How can you keep 6 foot distance in most classrooms?

- Every school's "student/square foot" measurement is different. St M is a school with strong and consistent enrollment **and** with indoor space limitations.
- We continue to meet VDOE guidelines - 6 feet of distance if/where possible and mask use when less than 6 feet. At St M, we require indoor mask use and desk shields.
- Schedules and room usage in the Middle School **have not** been ultimately decided. We are evaluating scenarios that may allow 6 foot distancing and others that might not quite meet that level. There are advantages and disadvantages to all of the models. In any scenario, we will do our best to maximize physical distance.
- In the Lower School, we are also considering the use of non-traditional classroom spaces, thereby reducing student density in grade-level rooms.
- Kindergarten and First Grade typically use tables instead of desks. The Transition Team (select teachers and admin) is considering the use of plexiglass dividers on these tables as well as the best arrangement of furniture, with physical distance, safety, and instructional goals in mind.

Will student movement be restricted?

- Depending on the final classroom usage/configuration, Middle School students may stay in their existing cohort/classroom, but may change locations for some classes; this remains to be determined.
- We will continue to incorporate as much movement as possible in all our classrooms as well as out of doors, which we will use as often as possible. All grade levels are currently making exceptional use of the outdoors and will continue to do so.

School Schedule/Curriculum:

How will St M go about aiding teachers in playing "catch up" with their curriculum?

- The Division Directors and I trust our teachers to determine where there may have been any learning loss during the spring - - and even summer melt. Teachers are meeting the students where they are right now to determine where the teachers may need to review material - - and continue to focus on strong foundational skills.
- All schools are managing/adjusting to this reality-- even the secondary schools and their admission offices.
- In the current hybrid model, the 3-¼ hour of concentrated focus on the core academic program has maintained our ability to provide superior academic instruction.
- Students nationwide are sharing that their learning in their hybrid model has been very efficient. (Source: NAIS-National Association of Independent Schools)



What are the benefits to students for full day vs. half day?

- There are social/emotional benefits for the students to be amongst their peers and schoolmates all day. Children thrive with social interaction.
- Though our nearterm return to a full day program will not be to something that is “normal,” the expanded day does give us additional opportunities to deliver our program.

With the weather getting colder, will students still spend big portions of the day outside?

- Yes. Students should be prepared for their classes and instructors to use our outdoor facilities at short notice and should dress for the weather.

Will outdoor spaces be upgraded for colder weather?

- We are exploring the purchase of additional tents and picnic tables for Extended Day and all-school lunch needs going forward.

How will enrichment classes be handled?

- Students will stay with their current cohort or homeroom and enrichment teachers will likely travel to students for enrichment classes. An enrichment class or two may also be delivered virtually. Students will go to the gym for P.E.

Middle School Questions

What will a typical day look like in Middle School?

- A revised Middle School schedule is being developed to be implemented on November 30. We will share schedule details by the week of November 2.

Will cohorts be combined?

- At this point it seems most cohorts will stay as they are. We may combine one or two.

Will Middle School students change classes/travel the halls?

- We are still formulating our plan but likely not, with the exception of going to the gym for P.E. Otherwise, student classes will be in their assigned cohort homeroom. Teachers will rotate.



Will Middle Schoolers use lockers?

- No. Avoiding the temptation to congregate is part of our mitigation efforts.

Will we have ERB testing this fall in grades 3-8?

- No, but maybe in the spring.

Remote Learning: What will be offered and what will it look like? Will St M offer a full day, live-feed of teachers giving remote classroom instruction if a family is not comfortable sending their child?

- Yes. We will have a remote learning option. If you opt for remote learning for your child, you will need to commit for the **November 30 through January 22 timeframe (which is the end of the semester)**. Further determination will be made for winter months.
- Again, there are a number of remote learning options we continue to explore -- both for a quarantined student, as well as for a family who chooses to keep a child home.

What will remote learning look like?

- In the Middle School, remote learning may look a little different than what we've done for limited students so far this fall, and more information will be provided once we are finished refining our class schedules for both the Lower and Middle Schools.
- Remote learning models will vary in the Lower School depending upon the age of the child. It is unlikely that the best model will be "Zoom into the Room." We are piloting a program right now that includes a mixture of individual Zoom time with teachers, materials sent home, online platform-based lessons, and frequent communication with the child's Virtual Instructional Team. As we work our way through this process, we will be able to fine-tune our remote learning model.
- As for virtual (i.e. Zoom) classes, this is very tricky with challenges that we are trying to address. More information will be provided. The field of education's concern with the hybridization of remote and face-to-face instruction is growing exponentially. We are learning that this model of instruction has both anticipated and unanticipated challenges. Any success a school can achieve will be a direct result of extensive training, trial and error, and a growing understanding of student virtual learning styles. Because this is such a new area of study, all educators nationwide are working to create effective hybrid programs with varying success. As such, some schools are abandoning them entirely in favor of either all face-to-face or all-virtual.



What are the plans for lunch and mask breaks?

- We eat outside as much as possible, we go outside as much as possible for mask breaks, and walks in the woods are common for those in class or in Extended Day pods.
- We will have plexiglass shields on desks if students need to eat inside due to inclement weather.
- Quiet activities will occur during lunch so as to minimize talking and prevent air transmission.
- Middle school students will stay with their cohort for lunch.

Are we going to hire kindergarten aides or any additional faculty?

- One kindergarten aide has been hired and we will be adding a second kindergarten assistant for the benefit of the transition and for all of us.
- We are open to bringing on more instructional support should we need it.
- We are actively interviewing for a Middle School math teacher. (In the interim, we are thankful that Leslie Eckmann has come out of recent retirement --after teaching math at St M for 15 years-- to be our math teacher until a permanent math teacher is in place.

Dress Code: Will the relaxed pandemic dress code stay the same this year?

- Yes. We do plan to get students outdoors as much as we can, so please dress children appropriately for colder and rainy weather.

Extended Day

Will Extended Day be open for students on Monday and Tuesday for Thanksgiving week?

- Unfortunately, no. We need all faculty/staff hands on deck and a campus free of students on those days. There is lots of furniture to move.

When will we know if we have been accepted into the Extended Day program?

- All families who applied for their child(ren) to be in one of our existing Extended Day pods should have already received notification.
- **Registration for our traditional Extended Day program (to commence on November 30) will begin on October 19 and close on October 30 in order to plan for staffing and logistics. Stay tuned for registration details, pricing, and information.**



Social Emotional Health of students and teachers

Students and faculty are stressed by all of the COVID-required changes. How is St M supporting social-emotional health during this time?

- Thank you for asking.
- We've added a counselor to our staff. Many of you have already contacted Dr. Hilton and she has met with a number of students one on one. She is also visiting classrooms to get to know the children.
- Dr. Hilton is also supporting the faculty with her time as well as regular mental health tips.
- As you may know or can surmise, this is a very challenging time for educators and students everywhere. To that end, schools are building in some calendar days when school will not be in session to the benefit of everyone in this new model. St M will do so as well, and we will communicate these calendar changes ASAP.

Closing

- We will continue to communicate on a regular basis. We intend to have our revised reopening plan distributed during the week of November 2.
- This has been the most challenging and difficult time for all schools. At St M, we have met this challenge successfully, though none of it is perfect and our decisions impact each of us differently and unevenly.
- Thank you, parents, for joining our webinar, for your support and participation, and for your questions.
- Thank you, teachers. You are a very important part of this equation and all of our considerations. Your interests and ideas have been very helpful and your dedication to our students and our St M community is greatly appreciated.