



July 31, 2020

Dear Third and Fifth Grade Parents:

The safety and health of our students and faculty is a top priority for Saint Ambrose School. Since my arrival at Saint Ambrose School at the start of July, I have worked with members of the school faculty, leaders of the parish and school community, the Diocesan Office of Catholic Schools, and Fr. Fisher, to look at every possible option to not only open our school in August for in-person instruction, but to do so in a way that ensures a safe environment for all. Over the past few weeks, we have studied CDC safety guidelines, looked at what practices other parish schools have implemented, and evaluated the implementation of these guidelines in our parish and school facilities.

Although the implementation of the CDC safety guidelines will affect every class at Saint Ambrose School, the safety guidelines will have their biggest effect on the Third and Fifth Grade classes, which are our school's two largest classes. Due to the required spacing of student desks, the use of a regular classroom for each grade was not possible.

One possible option was to have the two classes moved to the Parish Hall and Parish Library. However, as each class is being quarantined with no interaction with other groups, the parish hall and library would then be reserved for that class's singular use. This would effectively shut down all parish organizations, RCIA, Bible Studies, Legion of Mary, Youth Group, Young Adult Group, and gatherings after Masses such as funerals or baptisms. Those parish organizations would have no place to hold their meeting in the school or parish facilities. Further, due to VIRTUS policy, no adults can use the student restrooms. If the students held daily class at the parish hall, the parish office staff and visitors to the parish office would have no restrooms. This was not seen as a viable option.

A second possible option was the use of rented mobile classrooms (trailers) that could be put in the parish parking lot. Due to the size of both the Third and Fifth Grade classes, and the required space mandated in between student desks, we would need to rent four trailers (two for each class). This would necessitate hiring additional teachers and/or teaching assistants so that each trailer would have the proper adult coverage. St. Ambrose would also need to obtain permits and inspections from the county for use of the trailers. Further, classroom trailers can only be rented by the year, and were estimated to cost \$28,000 for each of the four trailers (this does not include the cost of permits and inspections). This was also not seen as a viable option.

The third option we considered is to make use of the school gym for the Third and Fifth Grade classes. The large space allows for the mandated placement of student desks, use of active boards and technology, a fixed space reserved for only that class, and easy access for cleaning crews to

sanitize each day. Several local parish schools have moved forward with plans to use their school gym as a classroom for two classes simultaneously. Those schools have erected large barriers fixed with cloth to absorb excess sound, and plan to make use of audio devices to help students.

Lastly, a consultation concerning these options was made with both Miss Mallery Holleran (Third Grade Teacher) and Mrs. Bridget McCormack (Fifth Grade Teacher). As you know both are respected teachers with years of experience, and well-loved members of our school community.

After careful consideration, Saint Ambrose School has decided that our best option is to make use of the School Gym for the Third and Fifth Grade classrooms. Please be assured that this set-up is temporary. When the Commonwealth of Virginia moves to a new safety phase, allowing for additional students in classroom, these classes will return to their usual classroom. In the meantime, this set-up ensures that these classes can go forward in-person, and we are compliant in all CDC guidelines ensuring the safety of both student and faculty. Lastly, both Miss Holleran and Mrs. McCormack are excited to begin in person classes, have prepared for this special set-up, and believe that classes will remain effective and fun.

In the days ahead I hope to continue to give updates to our school community both in emails and postings on the school website. It is also my hope to have a meeting with the Third Grade and Fifth Grade parents where Miss Holleran, Mrs. McCormack, and I can answer questions. However, in the meantime, please feel free to contact me at the school office.

Yours in Christ,

Maria Teresa Tejada

Principal