



Tuesday, August 24, 2021

Hello Stella Niagara Families,

We are incredibly excited and eager to welcome back your children for the 2021-2022 academic year. We return to school right after Labor Day, on Tuesday, September 7th. Our reopening committee and school administration have been meeting and working diligently to set a reopening plan. Last year we were able to go to school for the entire academic year. We can do this again, but only if we continue to be vigilant. Sister Margaret and our committee have been reviewing the latest available data and monitoring guidance from the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics as well as meeting with other local school officials.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, child cases of Covid-19 have increased steadily since the beginning of July, with children representing nearly 20% of the most recent reported cases nationally. The high level of transmission of the Delta variant has also increased the level of pediatric hospitalizations and experts are bracing for an uptick and possible new surges to hit among children as schools reopen. The reality is that the vast majority of our children at Stella are unvaccinated, simply due to age eligibility.

It has always been the mission of SNEP to nurture our children's heart, mind and body for life. For the past 18 months, the Covid-19 pandemic has been putting this to the test. Yet we remain resolute and are 100% committed to keeping our children and our school community safe. Therefore, we are implementing maximum safety procedures to ensure a safe and successful start to the school year.

The CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status and community transmission levels. Thus, Stella Niagara will maintain a policy of universal indoor masking. We understand that masking is a controversial topic, but the health and safety of our entire community must be at the forefront of all our decisions. There is almost universal consensus that face coverings worn in public, when applied and worn properly, is the simplest way to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. We are very hopeful that by starting out with strict adherence to recommendations, we may be able to loosen this rule as soon as it is safe.

Our vigilance with these precautions will allow us to normalize, as much as possible, the majority of the school day as well as our students' experiences. Though things will not be completely back to normal, we greatly look forward to those things that we can do as we have done in the past. Specifically, we will be moving away from the cohort model, as students will be able to move about the building in a more normal manner and travel from class to class rather than staying in one classroom all day. We will welcome students back into the library and the music room, and we will see the return of traditional after-school clubs where students can mix with other students and pursue areas of interest to them. Fall sports will return, though we are still awaiting guidance on interscholastic competition, and hope to provide more information on that in the near future. We will also resume the use of student lockers, although those details are still to be worked out. Once again, it is because of our adherence to universal indoor masking and other recommended safety protocols that we are able to offer students these enrichments to the curriculum.

Additional steps that have been taken to maximize health and safety include:

- The Sisters at Stella Niagara have announced mandatory vaccinations for anyone who is working on the Stella campus including all teachers and staff at SNEP.
- As part of our overall cleaning strategy, the school has made an investment to purchase high quality ventilation units for every classroom. Our sanitation and housekeeping staff are ready to go.
- In most cases, our classrooms will exceed the recommended 3-foot spacing, and our lunch protocols will still include 6 feet of social distancing.
- Consistent with last year, SNEP is not permitting visitors at this time, but we continue to welcome parents who need to drop off items during the school day. The table inside Door B will remain; simply buzz the school office to gain entry, drop the items on the table, and we will get them to the student.
- We will once again stagger drop-off and pick up times, and those full details will be provided in a future communication.
- Students will continue to use three doors (Door A, Door B and the Montessori Door) to enter the school building.

In conjunction with these changes, daily health checks and temperature screenings (i.e., Kinsa app) are no longer required, though we ask all parents to keep children at home if they are displaying any symptoms that can be attributed to COVID-19. Our health clinic will remain on the first floor and set up the same way it was last year with similar protocols should students experience symptoms during the school day.

We know that there are lots of additional details to share, and those will be included in future communications. These include clothing protocols (gym and outdoor ed), drop-off and pick-up details, extended care, lockers, and much more.

We also want to let you know that students and parents will, once again, have the opportunity to drop off school supplies prior to the first day of school. While we will confirm the exact times in our next newsletter, we are planning on Wednesday, September 1st and Thursday, September 2nd in the late afternoon or early evening.

Finally, we are aware that there are re-opening materials from last year still posted on the school website. Those will soon come down and be replaced with the most current documents and guidance that we can offer.

As this situation is rapidly evolving, we will keep our fingers on the pulse and monitor any changing conditions as well as any forthcoming guidance from the State of New York.