**St. Alphonsus School Opening Plan for the 2021/22 School Year**

**Pandemic Response Team**

Our Pandemic Response Team has continued to operate throughout the pandemic. This group includes the school’s administrative team, the building and office managers, as well as representation from the staff, parents and school board. The school principal, in collaboration with the Pandemic Response Team, has worked to stay current with evolving Public Health Orders and communicated these to the school community as necessary. Staff have been informed of developments through the summer and will review existing Public Health Orders, symptom management and sanitizing protocols prior to the start of the 2021-22 school year. Information on home screening and safety measures in place will be re-issued to parents with direction on reinforcing these protocols with their children. As students return to school, classroom teachers will revisit the processes and public health messages frequently with students.

**Planning for Re-opening**

On August 5, 2021, the Province of Manitoba set forth the guidelines for the opening of schools in September announcing that we will return in September at the **Yellow Level**. In-class learning will resume for students in all public and independent schools across the province. On August 24, 2021, additional Public Health measures were announced that have a bearing on school reopening.

Depending on how things evolve, schools may need to pivot between the different response levels. This may be done at the class, school or community level and will be determined by **Public Health** and **Manitoba Education**. Our school has contingency plans in place for all response levels.

**Key Planning Considerations**

This plan is based on the most current information available and is subject to change. Schools must follow existing public health requirements and educational priorities as identified by **Public Health** and **Manitoba Education.**

**Student and Family Preparedness**

**Communication**

The school has strong mechanisms in place to communicate information to parents and will utilize them to educate and inform parents as school resumes. Our primary method is email making it imperative that families ensure the school has a current email address on file that is checked regularly. As well, parents should confirm that email from the school is not blocked or labelled as junk mail. If there are families that are not responsive via the normal mechanisms, we will look at other ways of reaching out to them.

**Faith, Prayer and Spirituality**

As a Catholic school, we have the good fortune of being able to connect with each other through our faith and spirituality. During these challenging times, opportunities for prayer and faith discussions are even more integral to the well-being of students, families and staff. We will incorporate prayer and faith practice as much as possible at all response levels.

**Attendance and Participation in In-class Learning**

Students are expected to attend in-class learning unless they are ill or exhibiting symptoms. Families will be required to report absences to the school office as per our regular process but must also indicate the reason for their child’s absence (illness, appointment, quarantine/self-isolation, etc.). Siblings may be required to remain home, depending on current Public Health guidelines.

**Illness at School**

Parents will be expected to screen their child at home prior to bringing them to school. If a child should become ill or symptomatic while at school, he or she will be isolated away from the group. An isolation area has been set up in the Community Room, with room for two students distanced from each other. An additional space in the office will act as a reserve isolation area if needed. Students who exhibit symptoms will be given a mask to wear while they await pick-up. Parents will be contacted to take the child home and advised of current Public Health orders pertaining to siblings and return to school protocols. Parents are encouraged to have contingency plans in place to care for an ill child. Parents will be advised to contact Health Links – Info Santé at (204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257) or the child’s health care provider for direction, if required. If the student is young and requires close contact and care while isolated, staff can continue to care for the child until the parent is able to pick up the child. Caregivers are to be mindful of hand hygiene and avoid contact with the respiratory secretions of the student. A medical mask is to be worn by the staff person caring for the child.

**Vaccinations**

Students born in 2009 and earlier are eligible to receive vaccinations. Vaccine clinics will be held at the school (and in all schools) this fall through Public Health. The province is projecting approval for vaccinations for younger students late in 2021 or in early 2022. Vaccinations are not mandatory for students at the current time. Public Health has indicated that this may be considered in the future.

**Contact Tracing and Outbreak Management**

In the event of confirmation of a case of COVID-19 connected with the school, Public Health will lead the response and provide guidance, including ensuring appropriate supports are in place to coordinate the response. Contact tracing involves identifying the contacts of a positive case and contacting those individuals who may have been exposed. Public health may:

• request records that identify cohorts/groups of staff, students, volunteers and visitors in the school for a specified timeframe;

• offer testing following established guidelines to staff, students, volunteers and visitors that may have been exposed to a positive case;

• assess the need for the school to be closed for a period of time.

Public Health will advise staff and students if they have been in close contact and if they need to self-isolate or self-monitor and when they can return to school.

**Before and After School Care**

Childcare is essential for many of our families. To accommodate this need, and in light of the size of the program, we will break the participants into smaller age-based groups and disperse them into multiple spaces in the school.

The drop-off and pick-up from the program will continue as it did last year. The system worked well for families and staff.

For drop-off, you and/or your child can buzz at the parking lot entrance for access. If you are uncomfortable with your child making their way up to the program, Miss Sinclair will send a friend down to walk upstairs with them. The exception to this is Nursery students who attend the program; parents can come up with their child. If you have any concerns, please speak to Miss Sinclair.

The afternoon program is much busier as a general rule, so the children will be broken into smaller groups to allow for greater social distancing. When you arrive to pick up your child(ren) buzz at the door and ask for your children to be sent out. The staff have walkie-talkies to coordinate children in different areas of the school. Once again, if you have concerns or feel an exception needs to be made, please speak to Miss Sinclair.

**Alternate Kindergarten and Nursery Afternoon Care**

As said above, we know that childcare is of great importance to parents. The Alternate Kindergarten and Nursery Afternoon Care Programs will continue to operate this fall to support families.

**Community Mental Health and Well-being**

Attention to the mental health and well-being of our school community will be a priority over the coming months. Professional development for staff regarding anxiety and other mental health concerns has been scheduled for early fall. In addition to ongoing work with Project 11, we have arranged for our clinical support team to present to students in the fall. We hope to arrange sessions for our parent community as well.

**Operational Preparedness**

**Cohorting**

In order to accommodate full classes of students, we will be using a cohorting system as identified by Public Health. This fall, restrictions on physical distancing within cohorts have been relaxed. This will allow for a greater sense of normalcy for children’s interactions. However, we will still work to have increased space between students’ independent workspaces. If Public Health orders shift, we are prepared to implement 1 M and 2 M of physical distancing. For our purposes, we will consider each class a cohort, which reduces the number of contacts for students and staff. Cohorting is required from Kindergarten to Grade 6; our system keeps cohorts separate to Grade 8. Additional individual workspaces will be added to classrooms to supplement existing classroom set-ups. Extraneous furniture is in temporary storage to allow for increased space for physical distancing.

**Cleaning and Disinfecting**

Although provincial guidelines permit us to scale back sanitizing, our building staff will continue with the increased cleaning and disinfecting regimen implemented last year. This included more frequent cleaning of washrooms and high touch surfaces, as well as sanitization of spaces during class breaks using the electrostatic sprayer. This device will also be used for shared items such as manipulatives and toys. Doors of washrooms will be set open to allow for less contact. Other high touch surfaces including handrails, push-releases, counters and light switches will be cleaned with greater frequency. Hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies and disinfectant have been secured for this purpose and will be restocked as needed.

**Hand Hygiene**

All entrances, rooms and spaces are equipped with hand sanitizer. Anyone entering the building will be expected to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer. A schedule for class hand washing will be in place (before eating, after recess, after wiping their nose and additionally as needed) with students receiving direct instruction on hand washing and use of hand sanitizer.

**Screening**

The school has a screening protocol based upon the screening tools developed by the Province of Manitoba. Families will conduct self and child screening before leaving home in the morning. Staff members will also self-screen for symptoms. Children and staff who are ill or showing any symptoms must not come to school. Information on school screening, along with current Public Health requirements when symptomatic, will be circulated to families prior to the start of school.

**Remote Learning**

Remote learning will be offered for immune-compromised students (or those with immune-compromised family members). The school has the capacity to livestream lessons and will implement this process as needed.

Undoubtedly, there will be students who must remain home for short or long periods of time during the pandemic. Our school staff will determine when to implement temporary remote learning for these students, as we will not routinely stream classes as the school year begins. The decision to shift to temporary remote learning will be based on the length of the absence and/or the age of the student.

In all cases of remote learning, frequent email, video and phone communication with students and parents will be in place to ensure engagement in learning. This will be facilitated by the classroom teacher but may also require involvement from support staff.

**Physical Distancing in and Around the School**

Signage has been installed around the school encouraging hand hygiene, physical distancing and listing symptoms of COVID-19 for all to be aware. All traffic flow through the building will be “keep right” as students and staff move through the building. This will hold true for the main staircase and at the Munroe entrance as well. The other staircases are narrower and will require users to cede the right of way to groups already using the staircase. Review of this practice will be part of the education for students.

Each grade has been assigned a specific entrance to the building (below) and arrival time will be a window of arrival, as opposed to a set time, from 8:15-8:30 AM. This will reduce congestion and allow for physical distancing. Pavement markings are in place outside each entrance to remind people of spacing as they arrive. Everyone will sanitize hands upon entry to the building. Teachers will continue using routines for locker and coat hook access to avoid crowding in these areas.

Munroe Entrance: Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 5 and Grade 6

Parking Lot Entrance: Grades 2, 3 & 4

Music Room Stairwell Entrance: Nursery, Grades 7 & 8

Departure time will be staggered, using the same exit as in the AM, with staff members escorting younger groups out to the designated pick-up area. Parents are asked to exit their vehicles and receive their children on the grassed area directly east of the church parking lot.

2:55 PM : Kindergarten, Grade 2 and Afternoon Nursery

3:00 PM : Grade 1, Grade 3 and Grade 8

3:05 PM : Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6 & Grade 7

Supervision at pick-up time will be maintained and increased if needed.

Although playgrounds and structures are open to the public, we ask families to avoid playing on the school structure either before or after school. We are working to keep the number of contacts that each student has to a minimum, attention to keeping separation between children and grade groups will support us in this goal.

**Water Fountains**

Our water fountains are all equipped with touchless water dispensers for filling water bottles. The touch buttons have been closed off. Students must bring a water bottle to school each day. Water bottles will go home for families to disinfect at the end of each learning day.

**Outdoor Learning and Play**

Outdoor learning and play are considered by Public Health to be the safest choices and will be part of teachers’ planning in the fall, at least until winter weather arrives. Students must come to school prepared to go outside, both for Physical Education and other classes. Hand hygiene will take place before and after outdoor play.

**Shared Supplies and Personal Items**

Teachers are actively planning on ways to limit sharing of school supplies, such as pencils, scissors etc. Although families have always been asked to label personal items, this is of increased importance.

## Play is an integral part of the learning in the early years, as reaffirmed in Manitoba Education’s publication *Learning and Joy in the Pandemic: Manitoba Kindergarten Practice Resource.* Consideration will be given to how to mitigate the risks of interactive play. Staff have assessed the toys and other items used in the classrooms and have put away items that are not easily disinfected, including: stuffed toys, costumes, hats, etc. An electrostatic sprayer will be used to disinfect the remaining items. Proper hand hygiene will be reinforced before and after using cooperative supplies and toys.

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

As communicated to families, our school had made the decision that masks will be required for all students (N-8), as well as for staff, volunteers and any school visitors. This decision was reinforced by Public Health orders announced on August 24th requiring masks in all indoor spaces, which extends to schools. The school will provide a reusable cloth mask for all staff and students. Students are also welcome to use their own personal mask from home. The school has a supply of medical masks for any staff or students who exhibit symptoms while at school. Staff will use their discretion to provide occasional mask breaks, following Public Health guidelines.

Staff will have access to face shields and eye protection for use when working in close proximity with students. Instruction on proper use of PPE will be part of staff development prior to school start.

The use of PPE, including the use of masks for all students, staff, and people entering the school, will be evaluated periodically as Public Health recommendations evolve.

**Desk Shields**

The school has a complete set of desk shields on hand that were used last year. We will begin the year without the shields installed, as they have an impact on learning and teaching, along with socialization. Allowing clear sightlines and interactive lessons and activities is important for students’ academic growth and mental health. However, we will implement them through the year depending on information from Public Health regarding school safety, physical health concerns and virus transmission. There is no requirement or recommendation from Public Health for desk shields to be in place.

**School Transportation**

Our bus transportation is provided by River East Transcona School Division. The limits on bus capacity have been removed, which will allow for our students to use the service again this year. If restrictions change over the course of the year, we will update parents. As communicated last year, there is now a fee for service in place for all students who wish to use the bus service.

**Limiting Non-essential Visitors**

Although we welcome parent involvement in our school community, we will continue to limit the number of non-essential visitors in the school for the time being. Parents are asked to conduct school business via email or telephone. Parents may accompany their children to the school doors, but we ask that parents refrain from coming into the school.

**Facility Use and Gym Rentals**

The school facility is normally used on weekends by the parish catechism program. As we begin the school year, the parish will resume its catechism program at the school. The School Administration will meet with the Catechism Supervisor to outline protocols for use of the school during pandemic, including mandatory self-screening for catechists and participants, marking used areas for proper sanitation and ensuring that all attendees for each session are recorded.

Additionally, community groups and school families use our school gymnasium in the evenings and on weekends. At this point, we may begin allowing outside users to rent our facility. Approval of permits will be dependent on a number of factors, including the level of sanitation required after an event, the need for a record of attendees, and the increased burden on custodial staff.

Our School Board, Parent Association and Gala Committee will be able to use the facility to meet at their discretion and in consultation with the school administration. These groups will be made aware of the current Public Health rules.

**Food Handling/Sharing**

The school has a well-established policy on “No Sharing” of foods brought from home, originally set as an allergy measure. Students will be reminded of this rule and its increased importance through the pandemic.

Shared food as part of a class celebration, including birthday treats, was suspended over the last school year. This included special lunches, as hosted by our Parent Association. School Staff and Administration will re-evaluate this decision and determine how to proceed this school year. We will advise parents of whether food will be allowed at class celebrations by the end of September.

The Milk program will be available for students. The procedures for the program will be reviewed to ensure that there is little risk involved to the students and staff.

**Learning Preparedness**

**Recovery Learning**

We have been fortunate to have reported a high rate of student engagement through the remote learning period in the spring. That said, there are students who will need additional supports as they re-enter school again this fall. Transition meetings took place in the spring to communicate information on students’ academic, social and emotional needs to the receiving teachers. We anticipate that there will be some additional needs that surface as we begin classes in the fall and through the subsequent months. Our Resource team will provide assessment and additional supports as needed.

**Technology Education**

Our school community is committed to moving towards one-to-one technology for students. Through the prior school year, we achieved this goal for students from Grade 3-8, with a 1:2 ratio from Kindergarten to Grade 2.

All users will be asked to clean hands before using a school device. Staff and students will be instructed on the method to disinfect devices between users.

**Music Education**

Allowances have been made to increase the range of activities, including singing and wind instruments. Our Music program will include activities deemed safe along with those that present less risk for students, including: body percussion, non-movement activities, individualized manipulatives etc. Smaller class groupings, use of larger spaces (gym, parish hall), assigning instruments to individuals or classes, spacing between classes to allow for sanitizing and students traveling with personal supplies will all be taken into consideration. To reduce travel within the building, some music classes may be held in homerooms.

**French Education**

French class will resume this fall. Different methods of reducing risk in French classes will include students traveling with personal supplies and a buffer between classes to allow for disinfecting. Again, to reduce travel within the building, some French classes may be held in homerooms.

**Physical Education**

Allowing students to be physically active will be an important part of the school’s reopening, as it is important for mental health and social emotional connection in addition to physical well-being**.** Our PE program will incorporate activities that allow for increased distancing and will endeavour to allocate equipment to particular cohorts to reduce the amount of disinfection necessary between classes. Students will be expected to clean hands before and after gym class. Changing for gym class will be held off and gradually reintroduced beginning with the Grade 6-8 students once a process has been developed to ensure distancing and sanitation. Students should be prepared to be outside for some Physical Education classes.

**Nursery Program**

The Nursery Program will continue in the fall, following guidelines set out for schools, as well as childcare centres. Nursery parents will be allowed to come into the school and drop-off/pick-up their children. Physical distancing markers will be in place in the hallway outside the room as a reminder for everyone.

**Shops Programming**

Our Shops programming is delivered as part of a shared services agreement with RETSD. As we begin the school year, Grade 7 & 8 students will be welcomed back to this programming at Munroe Junior High School.

**Assemblies and Other Gatherings**

Public Health Orders have increased the size allowances for indoor gatherings, although not to accommodate the size of our entire student body. This will impact our ability to gather as an entire school. In order to maintain our sense of community we will gather smaller groups for Mass and assemblies and have the remaining students participate via livestream using the projectors in each classroom. Larger gatherings may occur outdoors while the weather allows.

**Field Trips**

All field trips for the 2021-22 school year will undergo careful evaluation before they are approved. The Field Trip plan will include information about the venue’s physical distancing and other health and safety measures. Transportation for field trips will also be reviewed for health and safety and to ensure all Public Health recommendations are in place.

**Recess Time and Lunch**

Outdoor play is important for children’s health and well-being, so daily recess periods will continue. Staggered recesses will be scheduled, as well as assigning play areas to specific groups to minimize the crossover between groups.

Our lunch will be split so that while one group is eating the other will take recess, and then the groups will switch. Class cohorts will be kept separated outside.

**Extra-curricular Activity and School Sports**

Our school community values extra-curricular opportunities, including sport, and has historically offered a wide variety of options for students. Extra-curricular activities will be gradually reintroduced as the school year begins, with thorough assessment of each activity to ensure the safety of all participants.

**Staff Preparedness**

**Vaccination or Frequent Testing**

Provincial Public Health has determined that all staff working in schools must be vaccinated or undergo frequent COVID testing and provide negative results.

**Symptom Management**

Our staff has a very high attendance rate, which speaks highly of their professional commitment. In this pandemic, they have been mindful of the necessity of remaining at home, even when mildly ill. If a staff member becomes symptomatic while at work, they have been instructed to immediately isolate themselves from other staff and students and notify the Principal.

**Personal Risk Factors**

Staff members who have personal risk factors or require medical accommodations must advise the Principal of the issue. Each case will be dealt with according to Manitoba labour law and the school’s employment guidelines.

**Staff Well-being**

Staff members have experienced a great deal of stress through the pandemic. Emphasis on personal well-being and stress reduction will be a feature of our professional dialogue through this year and beyond.

In conclusion, by working together as a community we hope to offer our students, staff, and families a safe environment in which our students can thrive.