



# THE FRANCES XAVIER WARDE SCHOOL

July 13, 2020

Dear Parents,

Speaking on behalf of many of my colleagues, we have turned the calendar to July, with both anticipation and some residual anxiety, as we continue to navigate the pandemic. But we are also quite eager and excited to see our students walk through the doors of our Holy Name and Old St. Patrick's campuses on September 8 for full weeks/days of school under Phase 4 of the *Restore Illinois* Plan. More information is forthcoming on what programming will look like if we move between phases.

Since early March, we have relied on information from the Centers for Disease and Prevention (CDC), the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), as well as guidelines provided by [Restore Illinois](#) and [Be Safe. Chicago](#) to create plans to return to campus. Just last week, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) released their guidelines for a transition back to school. It is important to distinguish between the requirements the state or city issues and the recommendations from other agencies. FXW has decided to take a very conservative and precautionary approach to our Back on Campus (BoC) planning and we will continue to work assiduously throughout these summer months with the intention of providing a timely and comprehensive communication. Next week, you can expect a more detailed account of a typical day, our programmatic enhancements (shared in brief below), and the measures we are taking to return to campus safely and maintaining a clean learning environment.

## **Task Teams for Re-Entry**

In early June, we assembled several [Task Teams](#) that have guided, affirmed, and supported our scenario planning. In prioritizing a safe return to our campuses, the School has drawn on the insights and expertise of members of the FXW community to assist us in our re-entry plans from a Health and Hygiene, Facilities, and Technology perspective. In continued consultation and recommendation from the Health & Hygiene Task Team, we are confident we can return to campus safely. I am appreciative of the time and efforts of the Task Team members and more details will be provided as we finalize the plan that adheres to the requirements and recommendations.

Our decision to return to campus on September 8 was judicious, we were cautious, and we are conscious of the varying comfort levels within our community. When we return, in an intentional manner:

- We will all wear face coverings (masks);
- We will adhere to protocols for entering and moving throughout the buildings;

- We will physically distance in classrooms by adhering to the recommended guidelines;
- We will have processes for addressing any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID;
- We will have plans for delivery of our educational program; and
- We will have plans to “pivot” if we move from Phase 4 to Phase 3 or if new compulsory guidelines are shared through ISBE, *Restore Illinois* or *Be Safe. Chicago*.

Regardless of the Phase—we will be ready!

### **After-School Survey**

As we continue to discuss a safe return for students, staff and faculty, we are cautiously balancing our re-entry with an understanding of the needs of our community as it relates to after-school activities. One of the major guidelines from the CDC, IDPH, *Restore Illinois* and *Be Safe. Chicago* is for students to remain in specific “cohorts” during the day. While this poses less of a challenge to keep a cohort together during the school day in a class or outside—for example, it is more challenging in terms of an after-school program. To that end, we need to consider whether, or how, athletics, busing, and our Extended Day Program (EDP) can operate while limiting the mixing of cohorts of children. Please take a moment to complete this [survey](#), as it will assist us in the planning process.

### **Student Assessment in August**

It is important to note, the feedback we have received from the parent survey in May indicated that Learning off Campus (LoC) worked for most of our students. We are cognizant that it may not have worked for all students and their learning styles. Our time on campus this fall is intended to address and enhance how our students use technology in preparation for a pivot to a different learning environment. As was mentioned on our Listen to Learn calls this past spring, we believe it is important to have academic indicators from which to start the year. **To that end, we will conduct NWEA MAP Assessment in math and reading for Grades K through 8 the week of August 10.**

We believe an assessment day in early August will allow us to provide data to teachers prior to students entering. It is important for your child’s teacher to have time to analyze and prepare for their individual learning needs during our August professional development prior to school beginning and it allows teachers to start the year building community and focusing on social and emotional growth and needs of students.

More information regarding dates of specific grade-level assessment will be forthcoming and while we ask that families make every possible effort to have your child come in during this assessment week, we understand that there may be circumstances beyond your control that might prevent your child from being available in August. Because the data collected will be incorporated into refining our instructional goals for the 2020-2021 academic year, we will offer make-up testing sessions that will be scheduled on a date soon after the beginning of school.

(Please remember, due to the [Chicago Emergency Travel Order](#), if you have traveled to any of the states listed in this ordinance, you will need to have returned to Chicago by July 27 and quarantined

for 14 days to participate.)

### **Blended Learning-Ready to Return to Campus**

As we optimistically believe that we will start the school year in Phase 4, and with indications that we may return to Phase 3 at some point in the school year, we are prepared to operate our school day as close to a typical day as possible. Both Phase 3 and 4 allow for us to be in the classrooms physically distanced. While Phase 4 most reflects a typical school day pre-COVID, we are confident that Phase 3 will work for FXW because of the size of our classrooms and the lengthy planning to implement all measures necessary to ensure our learning environments are safe

What seems to be consistent among many independent schools is that our work is guided by core principles such as knowledge of child development and all its variations; flexibility for families and teaching staff; and a shared sense of purpose. What FXW developed and delivered in March was emergency off-campus learning. There was no intention for LoC to replace the in-person instruction and learning—and nothing can replace the student-teacher interaction face-to-face. Often, learning is confused with instruction, and now with the benefit of more time, we continue to discuss, develop, and implement what we aspire to deliver.

The FXW Leadership Team is preparing and planning for what the educational program will look like for any Phase of *Restore Illinois*. Central to this is alternative schedules and programmatic enhancements that we are excited to share in more detail in the coming weeks. While the School has been discussing a Blended Learning Model for years, the timing of rolling this out is fortuitous. Our intent is to leverage our technology to be used with intentionality to support, enhance and transform instruction and student learning. The use of technology can be instrumental in prioritizing connections, social emotional well-being, and deeper learning experiences when models such as asynchronous learning are situated within an in-person lesson.

The Blended Learning approach is a combination of online instruction and face-to-face learning in the classroom. It creates a mindset that redirects attention solely on the teacher and puts attention on the learner and learning by involving a flexible combination of different models for learning. Students should have some element of agency over time, place, path, and/or pace of their learning. These are common instructional practices that are rooted in research and provides flexibility between our two possible learning experiences—face-to-face and remote learning. Again, we are excited to share these models in a few weeks. Regardless of the Phase—we will be ready!

Finally, on a recent long walk, I thought about the past three months as we look ahead to the next two. My wife Colleen and I ended up in the Fulton Market District, in the west loop, a long way from home I must admit. For those not familiar, the Fulton Market District is a trendy area of our city and serves as a representation of how one part of our wonderful city has been transformed and improved upon. Many of the buildings in Fulton Market were repurposed over the last decade or so, from old warehouses and meat packing companies to restaurants, offices, and event spaces. This area was ideal for this transformation because the buildings are structurally sound and have “good bones.” Much like these buildings, FXW has a solid foundation from which we can continue to build upon our programming, our processes, and now new protocols we will have in place. Because FXW’s

structure is built on our committed faculty and staff and with the enthusiastic support of our families, we will emerge from this pandemic a stronger school and community.

Regards,

Michael

P.S. If you can, please do not forget to support our FXW-owned businesses this summer. Click [here](#) to see our list of businesses and e-mail [loc@fxw.org](mailto:loc@fxw.org) to add yours to our list.