



COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

April 24, 2020

VIRTUAL LEARNING AND FINISHING THE SCHOOL YEAR

Q: Why aren't all classes held as live sessions?

LOWER SCHOOL

A: Lower School lessons are delivered in a blended model that balances screen time, synchronous class schedules across the division, and device-use demands. Our model allows for regular interaction and real-time instruction coupled with online lessons comprising teacher-created videos, original activities, and other web-based resources with ongoing, regular feedback provided by teachers. The synchronous opportunities provide student connection and teacher interaction while the asynchronous activities allow for families and students to set their own work schedule tailored to meet their individual needs.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

A: As a Middle School faculty, we evaluated multiple options for conducting virtual learning. Consistent with our philosophy of balancing the academic, social and emotional needs of 10 – 14-year-old children, we chose to create a blended virtual learning model rather than recreate a schedule traditionally associated with physical school. A blended model allows teachers the flexibility to engage students in real-time instruction, share teacher-created videos and other resources in support of assignments, and use office-hours meetings to provide direct assistance to students as they work on assignments. Three factors weighed heavily in our decision:

- the ages and developmental maturity of our middle school students,
- the emphasis on projects and project-based learning vs. straight lecture in many of our classes, and
- the stamina required for early adolescents to maintain a school day conducted fully online.

Two other considerations also informed our approach: the reality of adolescent sleeping behaviors and a unique opportunity to promote student choice. Although our school-day hours are from 8 a.m. – 4 p.m., we believe it important to provide students with choice in how they approach their days. Scheduling required classes and office hours gives students a framework to operate within, but still allows them time to either sleep later and work late-morning through the afternoon or to begin early in the morning and have more free time later in the

day. This flexibility gives students a small measure of control at a time when much of their situation is beyond their control.

Q: How is St. John's maintaining its high academic expectations? How will my child be ready for the next grade?

LOWER SCHOOL

A: Whether instruction takes place on our physical campus or our virtual campus, St. John's maintains high expectations for learning. When we return to school for the 2020-21 school year, emphasis will be placed on reviewing core curriculum from the previous year of school prior to embarking on new curriculum. This review period will reinforce skills that have been taught, remediate skills not yet mastered, and provide enrichment opportunities to prepare students for a successful academic year.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

A: In adapting curriculum to virtual learning, teachers have focused on instruction of key skills. The A/B-day schedule allows teachers time to create instructional videos, identify key resources to use, build creative and engaging assignments, hold live classes, conduct office-hours sessions and review student work. The schedule allows students concentrated time to devote to each subject. Teachers are also using Microsoft Teams functionality to provide individual feedback to students on their work, and they are allowing for multiple turn-ins to help ensure students are mastering skills and content. If students are attending their class sessions, seeking additional help when needed during office hours, completing assignments, and revising work based on feedback, they will be prepared to transition to the next grade. If a teaching team has concerns about an individual student, we will communicate directly with the student's parents. We are also working on a transition model to guide our start to the 2020-21 school year.

Q. Will Lower School students receive report cards?

A: During virtual learning, our focus has been on maintaining the students' engagement with their learning. Grading and assessment in the Lower School will focus on a student's engagement with essential learning and core content curriculum. The Lower School report card will be modified to reflect this focus. For this final trimester, we are suspending numeric grades for fourth grade. Please see the [Lower School Engagement Rubric](#), which will be used to evaluate student participation for Trimester 3.

Through our virtual learning platform, report card comments, and during the upcoming parent teacher conferences, teachers will continue to give detailed feedback to support student learning. This feedback will provide valuable insight into a student's understanding, guidance on how to improve, and motivation to continue learning and growing over the summer.

Q. Will Middle School students receive grades during virtual learning?

A: To balance the School's goal of extending learning to the home with students' varying abilities to attend to schoolwork in a self-directed or family-supported environment, we have adjusted our grading policy for the third trimester of 2019-20. Our goal is for students to work toward or achieve mastery of each concept taught. If a student receives a failing grade on an assessment or project, he or she will have a time-bound opportunity to rework the assessment or project to demonstrate appropriate mastery and earn a passing grade. At the end of the third trimester, if a student's overall grade in a class is lower than it was in the second trimester, we will carry forward the second trimester grade as long as the student has no failing grades after April 14, which is when the virtual learning grading policy went into effect. We have chosen this approach rather than pass/fail because we believe the additional support and feedback provided by teachers, as well as the opportunity to rework assessments, will lead to greater mastery of concepts and will help keep Middle School students engaged in their learning. Final report card grades for 2019-20 will be available in June. [Read the Middle School Virtual Learning Grading Policy.](#)

Q: Will Middle School students take term exams?

A: Sixth, seventh and eighth graders will not have traditional end-of-year exams; however, their teachers are continuing to assess their progress with quizzes, tests and other measures. Class gradebooks have been adjusted to redistribute the 20% allocated to end-of-year exams across the other gradebook categories.

Q: What will the School do about eighth grade graduation and other ceremonies?

A: We value our eighth grade traditions and recognize the important role they play in marking milestones for students and families. We surveyed our eighth grade students and parents to get their perspectives on these events, and our administration and faculty are working on plans to blend virtual, hybrid and in-person events celebrating eighth graders' accomplishments. Once we finalize the plans, we will share them with eighth grade families and the St. John's community.

Q: How is the school maintaining social connections among students?

LOWER SCHOOL

A: Lower School classes meet multiple times each week via Zoom to maintain peer connections, share experiences, and allow for student/teacher interactions. Specialists and other guests, including Ms. Darlene and Dr. Johnson, join these meetings to provide students an opportunity to remain connected to adults in the St. John's community. Depending on the grade level, class meetings include show-and-tell, sharing a "sunshine and cloud," scavenger hunts, lunches with their classmates, playing games, and more. Our weekly *Friday Fun! Lunchtime Livestream* provides another touchpoint for students to engage in a shared experience with others. StuCo officers have also created *Lions Live*, a weekly video that shares news and fun activities with students.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

A: Since virtual learning began, Middle School advisories have met via Teams conferences every day. As students and teachers have become more comfortable with the virtual format, advisors are introducing games, show-and-tell, scavenger hunts and other activities. Advisories are beginning to join one another for meetings so students can spend time with peers they may not see as often. Each grade-level will also be using Zoom to explore beyond the classroom. Fifth graders will begin preparing to host fourth graders in their annual “Welcome to Fifth Grade” meeting; sixth graders will take a virtual field trip with naturalist Ben Sandifer; seventh graders will have live visits to Elephant Havens, a wildlife sanctuary in Botswana (fifth graders will experience this, too); and we’re in the process of planning a variety of special culminating activities for eighth graders. In addition, Middle School will hold a virtual Hall Meeting, which will be followed by grade-level Zoom activities planned by Student Council. StuCo officers have also created *Lions Live*, a weekly video that shares news and fun activities with students.

Q: When will we end the school year?

LOWER SCHOOL

A: The delivery of core curriculum for Pre-k through fourth grades will conclude on May 15. The following week, May 18-22, homeroom teachers will hold parent conferences while other Lower School faculty members provide activities to keep students engaged. Information on parent teacher conferences, along with a sign up link, will be sent to Lower School parents on May 1.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

A: Fifth, sixth and seventh grades will continue with virtual learning through May 22. As scheduled, eighth grade will conclude its classes May 15.

Q: How will we close out the year for students?

A: We recognize the need for an in-person (albeit socially distanced) conclusion to the academic year and are working on a plan that will acknowledge students’ accomplishments in the current grade, allow for pick-up of classroom and cubby/locker materials, distribute this year’s art portfolios, provide an opportunity to return library books, textbooks and school-owned iPads, and help us welcome students to their next grade level.

When the School clears employees to safely return to campus, teachers and/or advisors will pack each student’s materials into a labeled bag. In Middle School, P.E. teachers will do the same with items in P.E. lockers. Parents will need to gather and return any library books, School textbooks, or School iPads that are currently at home. The School will communicate book/iPad drop-off and belonging pick-up dates and procedures to parents once those are finalized.

Q: Why can’t we just stop school now?

A: St. John’s is required to meet accrediting standards set by the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest and tracks the number of instructional days per year as mandated

by the Texas Education Agency. The Governor's Safer-at-Home order requires schools to continue instruction in a virtual environment; it does not direct schools to end the school year.

SUMMER AT ST. JOHN'S

Q: Will camps be offered this summer?

A: As of today, camps are temporarily postponed until we receive further orders from the Governor or Dallas County Commissioners. We know that many families rely on summer camps for childcare assistance and enriching activities, and we remain hopeful that we will be able to provide Summer at St. John's for all or part of the summer. We will follow the guidance of Dallas County Health and Human Services and of the CDC for safety protocols to ensure the health and wellness of our campers and staff.

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR

Q: Is our projected start date still August 25?

A: Through our experiences since the March shelter-in-place order, we have clearly learned that we must be prepared for outside influences to affect school operations and for the possibility that the decision about *where* school takes place may be made by government officials. The guidance we are now receiving calls for schools to be prepared for multiple scenarios in August and throughout next school year. With that in mind, we must consider options for our August start-date, and those options include the possibility of starting school in early August to allow scheduling flexibility if schools are faced with required closures or disruptions throughout the year. We have not made a decision to change our start-date; however, we want families to know that it is a consideration as we evaluate our best course of action for next year. We understand that this is a departure from the norm and may affect families' summer plans, and we are working closely with local ISAS schools to minimize impact to families with students in multiple schools. We will share our decision about the August start-date as soon as we have fully vetted the alternatives.

Q: When the campus reopens, what measures will be taken to ensure the health and safety of students and employees?

A: We are working closely with Dallas County Health and Human Services and the CDC and will follow all guidelines to ensure the health and safety of our students, faculty, and employees. These protocols are changing daily, and we will update families and employees as we draw closer to reopening campus.

Q: Will virtual learning continue in the fall?

A: In many ways, St. John's was poised for the pivot to virtual learning this school year due to the existing integration of technology with our core curriculum. We feel fortunate for the opportunity to share our experiences with other schools that were not as prepared or that lacked the necessary training and resources to continue teaching. As we look ahead to 2020-21 – and with the guidance of our regional and national accrediting organizations – we are preparing for a variety of possible scenarios, including learning that occurs on campus, at home and in a blended environment. This summer, we plan to work on creating a model that allows us to transition seamlessly between those three possibilities. With additional time to prepare and with the knowledge gained from our spring experiences, we will continue to refine our virtual learning model to fulfill our mission, irrespective of where learning occurs.

Q: When will tuition be due for the 2020-21 school year?

A: Tuition is due June 1, and statements will be sent mid-May. There are three payment options that families can choose from: annual, semi-annual and monthly. Monthly tuition payment plans require the purchase of tuition insurance. Annual and semi-annual payers can purchase insurance as well. Please contact [Lani Jones](#) or [Linda Wilson](#) with questions.

Q: Does the School have a way to help families who are experiencing extreme economic hardship?

A: We know that many families are experiencing uncertainty during this health and financial crisis. The School is actively pursuing outside donorship to increase the financial assistance budget for families experiencing extreme economic hardship.

Our Finance Office is ready to assist families with requests. Please contact [Lani Jones](#) or [Linda Wilson](#) with questions.