



ST. JOHN'S
EPISCOPAL SCHOOL

**Transcript of "Fireside Chat"
with Meshea Matthews, Head of School**

What has happened since we last saw each other?

- In late February and early March COVID-19 became a household term and overnight our country transitioned from only 3% of our students in some type of home-based learning, to 100% of students in virtual home learning environments. The reality of this is that our faculty and parents became first-year teachers in a new and uncharted educational world.

What have we learned to date? How will we fulfill our mission this fall when school is scheduled to resume?

- We are considering a St. John's education for **each student**, whether on or off campus, and the additional strain on our families and staff during this pandemic response. In preparation for our return we have broken our strategic planning groups into several categories with specific action plans.

First, Teaching and Learning:

- The focus will be on preparing for a smooth transition from in-person to remote-learning and creating new blended learning environments.
- This new model of teaching will require new lesson plans and the entire educational experience to work for both students and staff physically present and those working from home.
- We are aware that this spring was an experiment in emergency virtual learning, but in the academic year ahead we will have a more comprehensive approach to a different kind of learning experience. Several modifications will be made including the following, to name a few:
 - o Increasing the frequency of face-to-face instruction in the LS
 - o Addition of small group instruction in LS
 - o Extending opportunities for connections between students across divisions

- The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) has defined schools by three categories during this response and we see ourselves with elements of all three:
 1. Continuity
 - Some schools will attempt a return to the way things were before COVID-19 as soon as possible. *We will hold to our mission, values and tenets as we approach new teaching and learning models.*
 2. Evolution
 - Other schools will adapt and incorporate the best lessons from the COVID-19 crisis. *We will take what we have learned from this spring and make modifications to ensure whether in-person, fully virtual or a hybrid model – students will be provided with the best of a St. John’s experience.*
 3. Transformation
 - A few schools will fundamentally reimagine their future. *While retaining the most important elements of a St. John’s experience, we will seize this moment to think strategically with new vision for St. John’s future.*

Next, Focusing on Operations:

- While our academic working group is focused on teaching and learning, our operations group will focus on the support roles necessary to deliver a St. John’s experience safely and with the highest standard of care for our community in the months to come.
- We are collaborating daily with local, national and international independent schools to share and learn best practices learned from their experiences.
- We are using several scenarios and modeling tools to imagine different approaches to our return to school – whether on campus, a hybrid model or fully virtual.
 - o Our scenario planning protocols for a safer campus environment include compliance with our local and state government orders and state education regulations, guidance from our local health authorities, and the partnership of our peer schools in the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest.
 - o Our checklist for preparation includes criteria for re-opening school, plans for both preventative safety measures and response action plans. Some considerations include:
 - Screening measures
 - Cleaning protocols
 - Physical distancing protocols
 - Response plans for a potential COVID-19 diagnosis in the community

Finally, our Board of Trustees, is assembling to fulfill their strategic and fiduciary roles, thinking beyond the challenges to what opportunities lie ahead for St. John’s.

- As you will read in the letter from Melissa Eakes, President of the Board of Trustees, our School is in a strong financial position, but we must be prudent at this time.
- We believe it is our time to not just SURVIVE, but thrive!

What can you expect from the School during this time?

Our commitment to each element of our mission and the tenets of an Episcopal Education:

“We are dedicated to a program of academic excellence designed to train the mind, strengthen the character and enrich the spirit of each student in a Christian environment.”

- Dedication to academic excellence
 - Listening to feedback from our parents and students, applying what we have learned and returning to the fall with a more holistic and refined approach to this new learning environment.
- Enrichment of the spirit through corporate worship and religious studies
 - Whether in-person, blended or virtually – holding our community together through corporate worship, Lower School Godly Play and Middle School religious studies.
- Strengthening character and service to others
 - Seeking new and meaningful ways to serve our community
 - We need each other more than ever now, and we will seek ways for our community members to be difference-makers through small acts of kindness and growing our hearts with compassion for others.
- And, celebrating an inclusive community where the dignity of every human being is respected.
 - We are called by our Episcopal roots to this tenet, and we have a tremendous opportunity ahead of us, as these unimaginable challenges push us further and further. Let’s continue to have realistic expectations of each other, give grace, walk in each other’s shoes, and express our gratitude for this special community.
- Beyond fulfilling our mission, we offer our commitment to communication and transparency.
 - Updates on our planning process to the community will continue throughout the summer.
 - Our next planned updates will occur on May 29 and June 19.
- We are ramping up our support systems – for parents, children, faculty and staff.
 - Financial Review and Adjustments
 - The board has approved the establishment an emergency fund for families experiencing financial difficulties and a recent campaign to alumni and alumni parents is underway. More than \$10,000 has already been raised in under two weeks.
 - The board has also approved waiving finance charges for monthly tuition payers.
 - Parents may change their tuition payment plans from annual, to semi-annual or monthly any time and without penalty.
 - Tuition insurance is required for monthly payment plans and optional for annual and semi-annual payers.
 - More information about seeking financial assistance from the emergency fund is provided in the newsletter and on our website.
 - Supporting social/emotional needs – our connections and relationships have become even more important now during this time of physical distancing. We need to collectively have our eyes on our children, have greater touchpoints and teach and lead with intentionality.

- Planning for technology needs – we will focus on our efforts on ensuring that all our constituents feel supported in using our platforms so that our students can flourish.
- With a new learning environment, new learning challenges for our students have been discovered. We are committed to working with families as our learning services team identifies needs, collaborates with outside tutors and seeks new pathways for students.
- Heightened focus on the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff:
 - As this situation evolves, we cannot yet speak in detail about new protocols and procedures that will be implemented in the fall until we receive final guidance from our state and local health and government authorities, you can be assured that we are committed to exceeding the minimum standards in caring for our community and each member's welfare.
 - New protocols for entry into the building, screening and such have already been implemented as teacher's are returning to campus.

Ultimately, we believe our role is to....

Partner with our parents in developing our students' emotional maturity, academic preparation for the next steps of their educational journey, character growth, and spirit and emotional intelligence so that each of our students can realize their full potential.

We are grounding this important task in both the REALITY of these uncertain times and in VISION – knowing that these difficult days too will pass until we see a time more familiar to us. With hope, we look forward to this journey for new opportunities.

We remain St. John's Together.

Thank you for your continued partnership!