



July 31, 2020

Dear Cotter students and families,

I am writing to you today to share our tentative plans for re-engaging Cotter students in the learning process for 2020-2021. As many of you know, Governor Walz announced his “Safe Learning Plan” for Minnesota schools yesterday. Central to Walz’ plan is the directive that local school districts develop a safe learning model that responds to the current level of community transmission of Covid-19 in their area, and that recognizes the constraints of the local institution for implementing all of the safety protocols. During the past few weeks, the Cotter administration and staff have been doing just that, and today, I want to share with you the basic model that we have designed and that was affirmed by the Cotter Board of Directors this morning. Many, many other details will be forthcoming, but I want you to have our general approach.

Because we are reimagining our mission, we plan to implement what we are calling an **Age-Appropriate Blended Learning Model**. Using data about the current community transmission level – which for Winona County is 16 case level rate per 10,000 – and the recent data that suggests that students over 15 years of age transmit the virus similar to adults, while younger children are less likely to transmit the virus – we are planning to implement two separate learning models. The first model, for grades 5-8, will be primarily an in-person cohort model, while the second model, for grades 9-12, will be an enhanced online model. We are confident that we can – with everyone’s help and commitment – deliver both models safely and with a high level of quality.

In-person Cohort Model for grades 5-8

- Beginning on **September 8**, students in grades 5 and 6 will engage in in-person learning for **five days a week** from **8:00am to 2:30pm** in the John Nett building; students in grades 7 and 8 will be assigned to larger rooms in St. Teresa and meet **four days a week** from **8:00am to 2:30pm** (Wednesdays will be online.)
- Students will be in a consistent 15-20 person learning cohort that they will remain in for the whole day.
- Classrooms will be arranged with six-foot separations between desks, and students and teachers will be required to wear masks when moving through common areas or closer than six feet.
- Teachers will remain constant with each cohort, except for some extra activities to safely get the students outside and moving.
- All students will bring a cold lunch and eat in their classrooms (or outside when possible).

On-line Learning Model for grades 9-12

- Students will begin with an **in-person orientation for three days over two weeks** starting the **week of August 24**; they will be assigned to a small group of 10 or less to meet their teachers and get needed texts and technology.
- **Beginning September 8, students in grades 9-12** will meet on-line every **Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm.**
- **Wednesday** will be reserved for additional online work time for students, as well as in-person learning activities.
- Some students will report for face-to-face meetings in the afternoons based on academic need. Teachers can request students to attend face-to-face sessions and will communicate with students/parents in advance to ensure students can get transportation to and from school.
- In-person activities will utilize social distance spacing strategies to decrease contact with students who may be infected but not exhibiting symptoms.

Obviously, **we would all love to be in school**, free of safety constraints – and we will be again, as soon as conditions warrant. Until then, all of us need to be open, flexible, and adaptive. During this pandemic, we have learned that life can change in a moment – and it will change again. Our plan now is to implement these two models for the first quarter and evaluate our transmission status in early October to see what changes might be needed. If conditions warrant a less restrictive model, we are prepared to implement that; if conditions become worse and we need to be more restrictive, we are prepared to do that.

I recognize that there are different opinions on this pandemic within our Cotter community but this plan is our best effort to: 1) keep as many people safe as we can; 2) provide as much learning as we can; and 3) use our resources as effectively as we can. We will be continually re-evaluating, but we also want stability and routine for our students and their families.

For the next month, I will provide a weekly update on the details and specifics of these two models as we continue to develop them. I will also be hosting an online Q & A session event on **Tuesday, August 4, at 7:00pm** where I will give further information and take questions via the chat feature. We will share details of the event and log-in information soon. I encourage you to tune in and learn more about our plans.

We are creating our future in the midst of this crisis together. Please know that I and every Cotter staff member are committed to providing the safest and highest quality learning experience for your child. We are giving our lives to it. God's love and mercy will be with us now and in the days ahead.

Blessings for safety and health,

Sister Judy

Sister Judith Schaefer, O.P., PhD
President, Cotter Schools

