

**“Welcome Home”**  
**The Academy of Our Lady of Mount Carmel’s Strategic Reopening Plan**

*The Task Force on Safely Re-Opening the Academy*

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*“Children too are a gift from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children born in one’s youth. Blessed are they whose quivers are full.”*

Psalm 127:3-5

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[“Schools Should Prioritize Reopening in Fall 2020, Especially for Grades K-5, While Weighing Risks and Benefits.” July 15 2020. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering Medicine.](#)

[“COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry.” June 25 2020, American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\).](#)

[“The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education.” June 2020. New Jersey Department of Education](#)

## Letter from the Principal

Dear OLMC Families,

I know that many of you have questions about the start of the school year. I wish I had all the answers, which I don't, but I can tell you that we are working hard to bring your children back to school this fall in a safe and welcoming environment. This has definitely been a challenging time, but I have faith in our community that we will all get through this as we adapt to the realities of reopening our school during this pandemic.

We have outlined our plan for the reopening of school with some of the important details. Specific policies will be sent out at a later date. Please be mindful that plans are subject to change as updates come in from state, local, and/or archdiocesan authorities. Flexibility is key!!!

We are proud of all the work that has been done thus far. We are committed to providing you with the best educational services for your children as we embody their mind, body, and spirit.

Stay safe, Warriors!

Ms Verdonck

## Introduction

### We are Mount Carmel

Fifteen years after the Civil War there was Mount Carmel. During World War I when OLMC served one of the largest army bases in the country, there was Mount Carmel. When beloved parents of OLMC students lost their lives on September 11, 2001 there was a Mount Carmel and during this unprecedented time in our history there will be a Mount Carmel. Our proud Catholic faith and commitment to our students has been our guiding principal from the beginning.

In 1873 a group of Catholic families under the leadership of John Harrold, petitioned Bishop Corrigan to start a Catholic parish. On July 5, 1873 the Parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was formally organized. The first mass was celebrated in a wooden barn near the current Wells Fargo in Tenafly. Soon the families bought a piece of land on the Faley Reservation and built a humble wooden chapel.

In 1878 the Bishop entrusted the parish to the Carmelite Fathers of Englewood. The Carmelites have served in Tenafly ever since. Father Theodore McDonald, O.Carm. became the third pastor. He immediately requested the Sisters of Charity to help establish a school. A strong believer in Catholic education Fr. Theodore told the parishioners, "If I must sell my own coat we shall have Sisters in a very short time, and we shall have our very own school." In October of 1879 Mount Carmel School opened with 30 students.

Two Sisters of Charity arrived each morning by train from Englewood and walked from the depot one mile to the school through mud and water, heat and cold. The Sisters of Charity stayed in the parish for 99 years formally entrusting the school, now an Academy, to lay leadership in 1978.

Like those two brave sisters we too embark on a new road during this extraordinary health crisis, and like any journey there promises to be a thousand frustrations, the smallest victories and setbacks along the way, but let us be as clear as possible, we will get through this together and OLMC will be a better institution in the process.

Under the protection and guidance of our patroness, Our Lady of Mount Carmel we more than ever, better than ever proclaim, “we are Mount Carmel.”

### “How Did We Get Here?” Goals of the Committee

#### *Internal Approach*

As early as late spring, then interim principal, Ms. Barbara Verdonck had continuous communication with the Archdiocese of Newark about what a possible reopening may look like. Ms. Verdonck, in collaboration with the Academy’s Advisory Board, convened a working committee, *The Task Force on Safely Re-Opening the Academy*. The Committee is a combination of parents, faculty and staff across a spectrum of backgrounds and expertise to cast the widest possible approach for results. The goals of the committee were as follows:

- Commit to meeting or exceeding CDC/state guidelines
- Provide a healthy and safe environment for the *entire* OLMC Community
- Continue to provide the most effective and safest in-school learning experience
- Recommit ourselves and improve remote learning through additional professional development

In the summer of 2020 we engaged our currently enrolled parents with an anonymous survey to assess parent concerns and thoughts on a possible reopening plan. Ms. Verdonck also met with the faculty and staff, both as a group and as individuals to assess their concerns about reopening - all of which served as a guide to the committee.

#### *External Approach*

In assessing the situation of reopening it is important to appreciate how OLMC is a unique learning environment. Unlike our colleagues at local non-denominational private schools, or local public school districts, OLMC is governed by the Archdiocese of Newark and therefore must follow any guidance from that organizing body. While we consulted with our neighbors and fellow educators, our reopening must consider the fact that we are a regional school with students and staff from over 25 local municipalities and two states. This particular reality brought many advantages and some unique challenges to the committee.

The fact is individual communities don't know where the virus will be in September. Everyone in the OLMC community wants our students back in school, in a traditional brick-and-mortar setting, but that has to happen safely based on local science and data.

### “Why are We Prioritizing Reopening in the Fall?” Goals of the Committee

Our guiding philosophy is that students of OLMC student body age groups learn best through in-person learning. Our overarching goal is to have as many students as possible physically present in school in the fall. The importance of in-person learning is well documented. With this in mind, returning to school must be done safely. It is important to make the school environment safe for all those in the building. We followed guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and the Archdiocese of Newark's School Office as well as adhered to health monitoring and cleaning/disinfecting protocols as much as possible.

The philosophy that leads us in all we do at OLMC is that we, the community of the Academy of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, are committed to the Catholic education of our youth. We strive to provide a comprehensive education experience that develops the spiritual awareness, intellectual talents, personal responsibility and social consciousness of each child. We endeavor to foster the values of servant leadership in our students and staff, and are dedicated to educating the mind, heart and spirit of each child with a deep appreciation of each person's uniqueness.

## **Executive Summary**

### The Four Pillars of the Reopening Plan

#### *Health and Safety*

A variety of stringent health and safety protocols will be followed. Some protocols, like student and faculty daily temperature checks, mandatory mask wearing, limiting visitors and events, hourly disinfecting protocols as well as a complete overhaul of all learning spaces to provide social distancing of schools and faculty are examples of these new safety protocols.

#### *Reintroduction and Phased Reopening Timeline*

- Reintroduction Period – Tentatively September 8–September 17

A two-week hybrid period with classes scheduled in the building and some staying home, introduces students to the new procedures of the building, including arrival and dismissal procedures as well as mandatory mask wearing according to Archdiocesan protocol. In order to study several options of learning, like fully remote learning should the need arise, we will have alternating schedules with some students home and others on campus. Socially distanced AfterCare and BeforeCare will be available to all students. All students will eat in their classroom though lunch will not be available for purchasing. All students must bring their own lunches. Mirrored remote learning will be available. Recess will continue in a manner that allows for all safety procedures to be followed.

- Phase 1 – Tentatively September 18–End of First Trimester

All aspects of the reintroduction period remain, though, under Phase 1, OLMC will be fully open to all students whose families wish to attend in-person learning.

- Phase 2 – Timeframe TBD

During Phase 2 of reopening, all students will continue to follow safety procedures, while beginning to provide more flexibility for students and families. Manipulatives may be used, lunch will be available for purchase by OLMC, though delivered to the classrooms.

- Phase 3 – Timeframe TBD

When OLMC is available to move to Phase 3 of opening, all procedures in Phases 1 and 2 will be followed but OLMC will begin to reintroduce after-school opportunities and social and community events like clubs (e.g., Student Council) and in-house enrichment (e.g., Shakespeare Club, Get Fit!, etc.) as opposed to outdoor vendor led activities such as Golf.

- Phase 4 – Timeframe TBD

Our final phase of reopening would continue all the safety procedures and mirror all reopening benchmarks found in the previous phases but include limited guests entering the building and introduce community activities like theater, concerts, band and limited enrichment activities from outside vendors as well as a return to limited, but shared lunchtime in the cafeteria and in-person Mass attendance.

#### *Socially Distanced In-Person Learning*

Students will experience the same rigorous academic curriculum they would receive prior to the pandemic. Classes remain separated throughout the year depending on which phase of reopening OLMC is currently in. All learning spaces have been reconfigured to allow for social distancing. Teachers, not students, will move classroom to classroom.

#### *Remote Learning*

A full-time remote learning option is available for those families who feel they are not ready to attend in-person learning. At appointed times parents will have the opportunity to revisit their optional remote learning decision.

OLMC teachers have committed to hours of professional development in the areas of remote pedagogy and all classes, in full, will be broadcast live for students learning from home and remote students will have renewed rigorous protocols to follow at home, guaranteeing all students similar learning experiences. Also, our facilities have recommitted to providing equipment and needed Wi-Fi for such remote learning.

### **“Welcome Home” A Way Forward**

### *Health and Safety Procedures*

- **Mask Wearing**

All individuals above the age of two must wear a face mask while on campus. Masks may only be removed during designated activities (such as lunch and outdoor activity) and only then if individuals remain at least six feet apart. Any request by an individual to be exempt from this requirement must be supported by a note from a doctor.

Students will be expected to come to school each day with two freshly laundered masks and to be wearing one of them when they exit the car on arrival. Staff will be in drop-off areas to ensure compliance. OLMC will provide additional masks, if needed. All staff will wear masks during instruction and may wear additional PPE, such as face shields, when appropriate.

We want to make clear that the staff of OLMC understands that masks are the best way to prevent COVID-19 transmission from person to person, but also that masks are very hard for children to wear for extended periods of time, particularly our youngest students. Parental cooperation in helping children understand the role of masks on campus will be essential.

- **Social Distancing**

Tremendous work has been put into the facilities over the summer, both to upgrade our building and to ensure each classroom can offer the appropriate amount of social distancing from desk to desk.

Spaces outside the classroom, like the hallways, are marked so students will understand how to maintain their distance from each other. Moving between spaces, only when necessary, will be done with appropriate distancing.

In our outdoor spaces, the grounds will have markers so everyone can be mindful of their distance.

- **Temperature Scans**

As each person enters the school for the day, they will have their temperature checked. Depending on which entrance they enter in, this can be either via handheld temperature monitor or thermal scanner. A temperature that exceeds 100 degrees will trigger an alert. OLMC recommends that parents might add a temperature check to their morning routine, to avoid bringing a feverish child to school.

- **Quarantine Protocol**

OLMC will establish an isolation space for students and staff with suspected symptoms related to COVID-19. OLMC will safely and respectfully isolate them from others. Students will remain in isolation with continued supervision and care until picked up promptly by an authorized adult.

- **Sanitizing**

The entire OLMC community will be engaged in the constant cleaning of spaces to ensure multiple levels of sanitization. Our facility staff has tested and approved safe



cleaning products to use on all shared surfaces (e.g., hand railings, door knobs, bathrooms, etc.)

Students and staff will sanitize their own spaces throughout the day with supplies provided by OLMC. Hand washing will be encouraged and, based on age, monitored. Hand sanitizer stations are now plentiful throughout the campus.

- Technology

OLMC continues to make major investments in both hardware and software to better aid our efforts this year. Following CDC guidelines we will be sanitizing all devices. Students will not be sharing devices; the same device will be used continuously by the same student. Students may use their own personal device in the building after signing a proper usage and insurance waiver. As a shared OLMC learning community, we are continuing to invest and utilize Google Suite products like Google Classroom for our remote learners.

- Sharing Materials

Great thought and planning has gone into acquiring all the materials each classroom will need to ensure that students are not sharing materials. Whether iPads or scissors or instruments, OLMC has put in the effort to ensure that most materials will not pass from student to student. Where appropriate, bins will be utilized to help students maintain their supplies and belongings safely.

- Campus Visitors

Beginning the first day of school, parents will no longer be allowed to escort children into or out of school. This means that when children are dropped off or picked up all visitors must remain in the properly marked areas.

Generally, visitors will be prohibited from entering campus to protect the community. This includes vendors and mail and delivery personnel. Periodically, for those visitors who must enter the building, all procedures like temperature checks and mask wearing will be enforced.

### *Reintroduction and Phased Reopening Timeline*

We are grateful to have begun the process of reopening and welcoming our families back home again, but must do so in the safest way possible. That in mind, OLMC will be opening in four distinct malleable phases. While each phase has tentative dates to begin and end we want to manage our families' expectations, it is possible we do not reach a new phase in the coming academic year. Phases may overlap, continue or change at a moment's notice depending on a variety of situations. Flexibility is key.

- Adapted Learning Environment

While we are still in the planning stages of understanding how additional spaces, like the Titus room, gymnasium and other rooms, may be used safely, we are greatly adapting our learning environments. OLMC, due to the hard work of countless pastors, Parents' Guild members and staff, is blessed with a modern and expansive campus compared to other

parochial schools in the Archdiocese of Newark. We will be maximizing the campus in a variety of ways.

### *Socially Distanced In-Person Learning*

The academic roadmap is just as rigorous as was planned before the pandemic, where teachers will teach classes over a full day of learning.

We are proud of our academic achievements, and will not pare down the rigor of our planned teaching because of the changes we've needed to make. OLMC, whether for pre-kindergarten 4 students or eighth graders is not childcare. We are an academic institution. Instead, we will continue to move forward with the engagement of each child with the full spectrum of our educators' deep experiences and skill sets.

### *Remote Learning*

OLMC recognizes that each family must make decisions for the physical and mental health of their children, and as a result, some students may elect to remain remote for the majority of the 2020-2021 academic year.

As educators, we want to be clear that we believe strongly in the evidence that the best learning environment for children is the one provided in person. Children are social creatures and isolation at this age presents real challenges to development. We also acknowledge that children are unique individuals, some of whom may thrive in an online learning environment.

While remote learning is not the same as in-person learning, the academic rigor is no less engaging. Parents should know that remote learning is a longer term, not temporary, solution for the 2020-2021 academic year or until COVID-19 circumstances dramatically shift, i.e., vaccine readiness). While we will allow for students and families to evaluate remote learning and in person experiences and shift at times, they may only do so at appropriate times in the calendar when announced. As families are painfully aware from the experiences of spring 2020, constant changing and shifting of arrangements have significant effects on the student, family, classroom peers, and staff and should be minimized.

In remote learning, parents are important partners in education, and the commitment for those parents cannot be understated. There are additional technological, space, and support requirements for remote learning and they should be carefully considered. There will be renewed expectations of students learning from home including but not limited to mandatory on camera attendance, full participation with teachers and students on campus, wearing of required uniform and maintaining a clean and efficient learning environment. For example, students will not be able to be in bed or eating during remote learning. OLMC is committed to supporting our remote learning students with all the emotional support and intellectual rigor our on-campus students enjoy, and as much social interaction as we can.

Families may ask, “Why do I have to pay full tuition this year?”

The pandemic’s toll in terms of lost lives has been—and continues to be—devastating and we will be coping with those losses together for the foreseeable future. This crisis has also had a continuing economic toll on individuals, families and nonprofit organizations like our Academy.

We have been fortunate so far to weather this storm without laying off any staff. That has been an enormous blessing as this crisis in many ways required more from our staff than usual.

The parochial school system, which OLMC is a member, functions as a quasi-public educational network, in parallel to the state-school systems, the key difference being that parochial systems are largely supported by tuition and donations to the school, while state schools are funded by taxes. Out-of-pocket costs to the student’s family attending a parochial school are usually greater than an equivalent public school. Although it costs parents more for their children to attend, teachers are generally paid less than those at an equivalent public school. For example, in 2008 they were paid about 45% less than public school teachers.

OLMC still offers arguably the best academic and social experience of a school our size. All who graduate with an OLMC diploma add to a rich tradition of alumni attending the nation’s best high schools and universities.

### **Important Information That Will Be Announced Soon**

Virtual Principal Meetings TBD

Class Assignments Announced

Arrival and Dismissal Protocol