

Dear St. Paul's families,

The health and well-being of the St. Paul's Episcopal School community of students, faculty, staff, and families is our highest priority. Given this guiding principle, the leadership of St. Paul's Episcopal School has been closely monitoring the emerging threat from the steady spread of the novel "COVID-19" coronavirus. We recognize that it may eventually affect our community and are taking precautions to plan for such an eventuality. It is important to remember that arresting the spread of a serious contagion like the coronavirus is primarily a task for public health agencies. Any directives from the World Health Organization, Center for Disease Control, or other national, state, or local governmental agencies should be followed.

In some ways, the flu season of the past few months has actually been a benefit to the school's preparedness for an epidemic such as the coronavirus. The action steps we took at that time to minimize the impact of the influenza season help to protect a community against any airborne infectious respiratory agent:

- Encouraging sound cough and hand hygiene practices in the classroom;
- Cleaning and sanitizing classroom surfaces frequently, during and after the school day;
- Assessing all students who have signs of illness or report symptoms of illness to their teacher;
- Strictly following protocols regarding return to school following illness; and
- Using school breaks to thoroughly clean and disinfect the school.

Fortunately, our facilities management service, National Management Resources, has already stockpiled copious amounts of hospital-grade cleaners and sanitizers, so we are well-prepared in this area.

The leadership team of the school met Monday to begin contingency planning for all foreseeable eventualities. We seek to balance vigilance and readiness with a calm and steady adherence to best practice. Together with a strong school-home partnership, these will allow us to continue our mission of educating our students and caring for our families. Specific steps to our planning include:

St. Paul's will continue all environmental and hygienic practices as outlined above;

- School leadership is closely monitoring [Center for Disease Control](#) and [Alabama Department of Public Health](#) communications and will respond appropriately to their instructions;
- We are closely monitoring [guidelines](#) from the National Association of Independent Schools;
- We are in continual communication with our school associations and sister schools to share ideas and plans;
- We are planning for the possibility that community events where large numbers of people gather may be negatively impacted; and
- We are creating a school continuation plan in the unlikely event that the physical campus must be closed. We are fortunate that our 1:1 laptop program and Microsoft resources greatly facilitate this planning, and we have already established dates for faculty & staff training to ensure that such a virtual learning scenario would proceed as smoothly and effectively as possible.

In situations like this, a strong school-home partnership is vital, and each of us has a role to play in keeping our community healthy. We ask that families

- Reinforce hygiene practices at home;
- Adhere to school policies and guidelines regarding illness. As a reminder, these are:
 - Students must stay home if they are confirmed to be ill or if they have a fever (100.4 F or higher) associated with viral symptoms.
 - At a minimum, students who have been diagnosed with illness must be fever-free for at least 24 hours before returning to school. It is not appropriate to treat your child for fever at night and send him/her to school the next day, even if he is fever-free when he awakens. The 24 hour-rule begins upon the first fever-free temperature reading.
 - Students who develop fever or other symptoms consistent with viral infection during school hours should be picked up from school by their parents as soon as possible to be evaluated by their pediatrician.
- Communicate with school personnel about any family illness or travel plans;
- Follow the [CDC Guidelines for Travel](#) especially given the upcoming Spring Break. As the international situation is likely to be a fluid and continually developing situation, the impact on traveling families cannot be known at this time. **St. Paul's will follow all governmental policies and recommendations regarding home self-monitoring/quarantines. This includes enforcing isolation periods for those who have traveled to regions where coronavirus outbreaks have led to CDC Travel Warnings.**
- In the event that students or their close contacts test positive or are being tested for COVID-19 we ask you to follow your physicians' advice and to avoid sending your child to school until attendance is approved by a physician according to CDC guidelines. In addition, please notify the school so we can take other necessary precautions.
- Knowledge is power, so stay educated. You can track the most up-to-date international coronavirus situation [here](#).
- Please note that St. Paul's reserves the right to separate students or family members from the physical school environment for health concerns until they are cleared to return by a physician or health agency after proper testing is completed.
- If not already received, we encourage families to receive flu and pneumonia vaccinations as appropriate. While neither vaccine directly protects against the coronavirus,
 - Healthy individuals are better able to fight the virus;
 - Many severe effects of the coronavirus center around pneumonia; and
 - It helps to ensure that hospital beds remain free for coronavirus patients should that scenario develop.
- Given the pervasive news coverage of the epidemic, a sense of anxiety is natural. If your child is (or you are) experiencing significant anxiety or distress, please let us know. Our counseling staff stands ready to assist, and may be reached at 251-423-4147.

As head of school, I can assure you that we will be as proactive and transparent as possible, and pledge to communicate regularly as events may warrant. Early in my tenure, a teacher once told me that “St. Paul’s is a great place to have a crisis.” I quickly learned just how right she was; we are a community in the deepest sense of the word. We support each other, and we look out for each other. If we continue to do so, we can face any test with confidence. Please feel free to contact me with any questions, concerns, or suggestions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "N. Blair Fisher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "N" and a stylized "Fisher".

N. Blair Fisher, *Head of School*

Coronavirus-Related Information Resources

- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) Coronavirus Information Website](#)
- [Center for Disease Control Coronavirus Information Website](#)
- [CDC Travel Advisories](#)
- [How to Talk to Children about the Coronavirus](#)
- [School Protocols](#)

About St. Paul's Episcopal School

You can know everything in the world, but if you don't know what matters, then nothing does. At St. Paul's Episcopal School, we know what matters. Our academic program is outstanding. Just as important, though, are the values we teach: character, scholarship, creativity, and above all, **love**.