



## ST. MARK CATHOLIC SCHOOL

WHERE FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE MEET

Dear Parents:

In light of the new face mask mandate implemented by the Diocese of Dallas yesterday, I'd like to take a moment to share some important details with you.

As Dr. Vereecke (Superintendent, Diocese of Dallas Catholic Schools) mentioned in his letter to parents, the Diocese made the decision last May to allow individual parishes and schools to set their own COVID protocols for the 2021-22 school year while providing them with pertinent data. Over the summer, the Diocesan school Principals met frequently to discuss reopening plans. Ultimately, the Catholic schools located north of I-635, including St. Mark, settled on a policy of "highly recommending" but not "requiring" face masks, and that is the plan that we communicated to our school families in July.

Throughout this time, the Diocese of Dallas has continued to monitor the situation and to work closely with local, state and federal health agencies and medical personnel. As you probably know, our area is now seeing cases of the Delta Variant increasing and hospital capacity decreasing at a rapid rate. As a result, the Diocese of Dallas made the decision that all Catholic schools must require face masks for everyone inside school buildings regardless of vaccination status. We received this notification from the Catholic Schools Office yesterday at 3:30 PM, and were provided with Dr. Vereecke's letter at 5:00 PM. As has always been our practice, we immediately informed our community.

Last year, St. Mark identified 12 total COVID cases among our community members. Contact tracing showed that these cases were spread to children by their parents or other family members. Maintaining school safety protocols resulted in zero spread within our school building. As a result, St. Mark was able to remain open all year without interruption. Our community enjoys a strong partnership among student, school and family. By continuing to work together, we can help achieve our goals of keeping our children and staff safe, remaining open again this year while returning to as much "normalcy" as much as possible:

- \*All School Mass will take place every Friday at 8:30 AM in the church.
- \*The Prayer Partner program is coming back (they will simply maintain some distance between them).
- \*Extra-curricular activities are returning.
- \*DPL sports are returning.
- \*Students will return to eating lunch in the cafeteria with their friends.
- \*Students can mix with friends at recess.
- \*Middle school students will continue to enjoy electives and home base class.
- \*Lockers will once again be utilized in grades 4-8.
- \*Our traditional uniform shoe policy is returning.
- \*Visitors and volunteers are once again welcome on campus.



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Please note that the new policy change will affect upcoming back-to-school events. Out of an abundance of caution, we have made the following adjustments:

### **Pop-In Meet & Greet – Friday, August 13**

To allow for more spacing between families, we ask that you visit campus during the assigned timeslots below. If you already have firm plans and are unable to change them, we understand, and you can visit when convenient.

8:30-9:00 AM: A-G last names  
9:00-9:30 AM: H-M last names  
9:30-10:00 AM: N-S last names  
10:00-10:30 AM: T-Z last names

### **First Day of School – Monday, August 16**

- \*School doors will open at 7:30 AM.
- \*Parents may still accompany children to their classrooms on the first day.
- \*Everyone entering the school building must wear a face mask.
- \*The Cafetorium doors will open at 7:15 AM for those who must drop-off their children early. Children will be spaced, and there will be no toys/games available. If your child will be dropped-off early, please send a book to read.
- \*If anyone in your household shows any signs of illness, please keep everyone home and contact [rene.oconnor@stmcs.net](mailto:rene.oconnor@stmcs.net) about the absence.

### **Parent Information Nights – Wednesday, August 25 and Thursday, August 26, 6:30 PM**

These events will now be held virtually via Google Meet. Please watch for login instructions from your child's teacher.

We continue to be grateful for your flexibility and support during these unprecedented times. Change, especially last minute change, is frustrating and inconvenient for our students, parents, teachers and staff. We all want to return to "normal" as soon as possible and are doing our best to make that happen within the constraints of this pandemic. May God continue to bless our community with strength and health. **We are #stmarkstrong.**

Pam Steinkirchner  
Principal