

# DIOCESE OF DALLAS

## CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

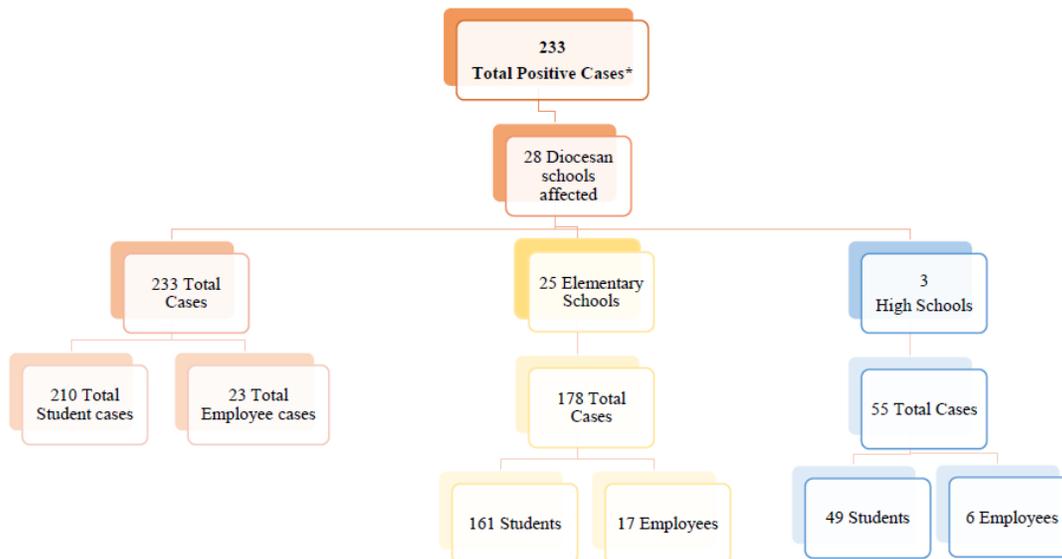
September 16, 2021

Dear Parents:

As it has been a month since our last update, I wanted to reach out and share with you the situation that we are seeing in the first few weeks of the school year. The Delta variant continues to be a major concern since our last update. From the beginning of August until now, we have seen 233 community cases of the virus (which we define as cases that can be traced to occurring outside of our classrooms). The weekly numbers are on par with the worst weeks that we saw at the beginning of January 2021, and our current cases, merely one month into the school year, are about 30% of all cases for the 2020 – 2021 school year. Put another way, we almost saw more cases in this first month than we did in the entire fall semester of 2020.

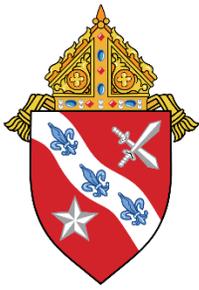
### OVERVIEW OF COVID-19 CASES

Figure 1. GRAND TOTALS [8/2/21 – 9/12/21]



<sup>1</sup>A positive case is defined as a person with a laboratory confirmed case for COVID-19.

We have been averaging approximately 40 cases a week over the past two weeks, and that has stayed consistent even with the Labor Day Holiday. Most of our cases are now among unvaccinated elementary school students.



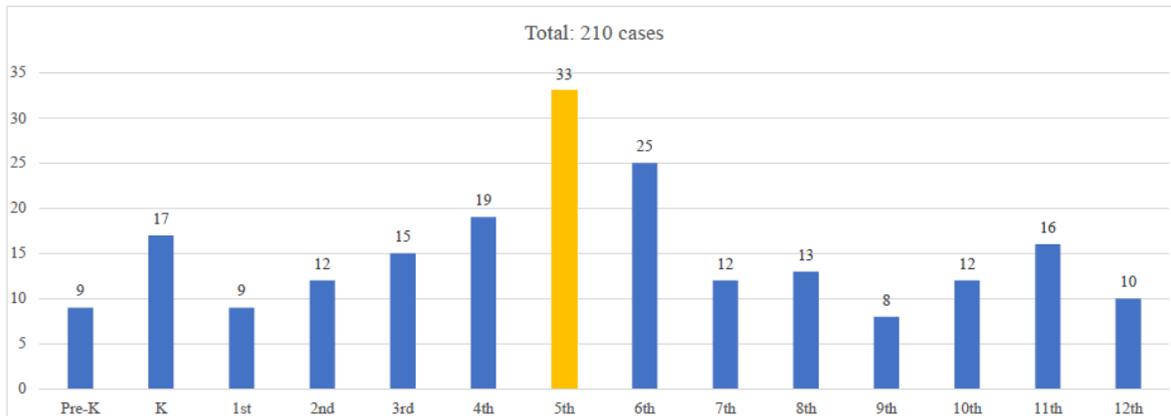
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Sept 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Figure 6. Student Cases by Grade

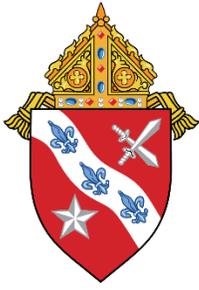


- 5<sup>th</sup> grade reports the highest number of cases.

From a community perspective in Dallas County, we are seeing slight declines to flat numbers in both total cases and youth cases, but both remain high, and youth cases are now representing approximately 27.5% of all cases in Dallas county, which is near the highest proportion that we have ever seen. For context, student cases made up approximately 17% of all cases back in January and February of 2021. In real numbers, there were 10,236 total cases reported last week, with 2,814 of those cases being youth. We are continuing to communicate with the local hospitals as well, and we are aware that UT Southwestern expects hospital capacity to start increasing over the next several weeks.

We are seeing positives in this data. First, we have a high vaccination rate for our faculty, and breakthrough infections are continuing to be rare for them. That data, coupled with much lower high school student cases (all of whom are eligible to be vaccinated) suggests that a high vaccination rate will allow us to offer more flexibility to highly vaccinated schools when community cases decline.

In addition to this, our approach to the masking protocols is a major reason why we are still seeing very few cases of on campus transmission, which is allowing us to keep schools open in spite of the high number of community cases. We continue to have a strong relationship with the health department as well, and the combination of our contact tracing, strong masking and ventilation protocols and responsiveness to the requests of the DCHHS are why we are able to avoid the shut downs and closures reported at many public schools that you see in the news. In addition to the obvious safety elements, keeping schools open will remain a priority for your local principals, and we are all reviewing the data together to determine how and when more flexible policies will allow us to do that. We are not yet prepared to give definitive statements on exactly when that will happen, but we do want you to know that this is a constant review process.



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Despite that uncertainty, we are continuing to share our detailed data with all principals and presidents and are meeting virtually every week to review protocols, the latest updates and to continue to plan for future scenarios. Our primary focus in the coming weeks will be around testing protocols, vaccination rates and flexible frameworks that can be used when we see community cases in our schools decline to more manageable numbers. We will continue to update you when we have solid information, and your local school will be the best avenue for up-to-date data and our latest thinking in between our diocesan-wide communication.

We know that this remains a difficult subject and that we are all ready to return to more traditional learning environments, but we are also weighing that against the administrative burden of rapidly changing policies and protocols as community data changes, the health and safety needs of our local schools, and our ethical and legal responsibilities to our community. We are thankful for the patience you all have shown us as we continue to navigate these difficult topics, and please be assured that we will continue to respond in real time to the DCHHS, the AAP, the CDC and our own local epidemiologists, pediatricians and other health experts to make changes to our protocols. Finally, please continue to support our teachers, principals and presidents who are working every day in their ministry to form your students as Saints and Scholars. They continue to deserve our prayer, respect and praise.

Respectfully,

Matt Vereecke