

August 20, 2020

Dear Parents,

I hope that this email finds you enjoying the last precious days of summer, and I pray that your families have stayed healthy and safe.

Another school year is upon us, and it will look far different from any school reopening we have had in the past. If each member of our special school community supports each other and works together to follow the mandates provided by DESE and the CDC, it will help us to keep Saint Mary School a safe learning environment for our students.

We are welcoming many new families this year, some who come to us from school closures at Immaculate Conception, St. Stephen's and St. Mary's in Worcester and other families who have transferred from various public schools in Central Massachusetts. Almost all of our classrooms are at the new capacity limits that we set for social distancing, and we are very excited that many of our homerooms will have some new friendly faces. Unfortunately, we will be unable to hold many of the important social events that help our new families recognize the warm, welcoming community atmosphere that pervades Saint Mary School. Please consider becoming a Host Family this year to assist these families with their transition. Click [here](#) to find out more about becoming a Host Family.

It is critical that parents stay updated by reading all communications that are sent out by Saint Mary School. Now more than ever, communication between home and school is an essential ingredient in helping our school operate efficiently and effectively. Please direct any questions or issues to me so that they can be resolved. Mrs. Dolan and I will always try to make ourselves available in as timely a manner as possible. Visitors are not allowed in the building as stated in the guidelines, so emails and phone calls will be the primary vehicles for communication with parents.

Here is some information that you will find helpful for the start of the new year:

1. Please read the links below for important information needed for the start of school:
 - [Orientation schedule](#) by grade level for our Phased Reopening the week of September 8th
 - [September Hot Lunch News](#) and [Menu](#) (must be submitted no later than Friday, August 28th), Grades K - 8 only
 - [After School Program September Sign Up](#) (must be submitted no later than Friday, August 28th), Grades K - 8 only
 - Private School Bus Registration for Shrewsbury Residents: Click [here](#) for information on registration, Grades K - 8 only
2. On Wednesday, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health issued guidelines stating that beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, influenza vaccine will be required for all students in Kindergarten through Grade 12. Children must receive the vaccine by December 31, 2020. Click [here](#) to read the update on the new vaccine requirement for school age children.

3. An amendment was made to the uniform policy that was embedded in the Fall Reopening Plan. In case you missed it, we have provided the details below. If you have any questions, please email Mrs. Dolan at Cheryl.Dolan@stmarysparish.org.

Uniform Policy Amendment

- To allow for increased student comfort, a more relaxed uniform policy will be implemented for the 2020-2021 school year.
 - Students may wear the summer uniform until the end of October.
 - Gym uniforms can be worn any day of the week, not just on gym days.
 - Beginning in November, students may wear any combination of Saint Mary School approved uniform pieces with the exception of gym shorts, shorts and skorts. (for example, navy pants can be worn with the golf shirt).
 - Sweaters, sweater vests, fleece vests, ties and belts are not mandatory.
 - Please refer to the Parent/Student Handbook for all other uniform-related guidelines.
4. We announced the addition of new faculty in June, and as the summer months have gone by, two of those staff members decided to take positions closer to home rather than relocating to the area. We reposted both openings and interviewed a number of qualified candidates. We are delighted to welcome Ms. Sarah Strohecker as our Grade 7/8 ELA teacher. Sarah will also be involved in our project-based learning initiative for the middle school as well as acting as a liaison to some of our middle school students who will be receiving remote instruction. Sarah received her Bachelor of Arts and Masters of Education degrees from the Lynch School of Education at Boston College and is licensed in MA for English Grades 5 -12. She completed student teaching positions in Boston area schools including St. Joseph's Preparatory, North Quincy High, Arlington High, and Brighton High. For the past two years she has held the position of seventh grade ELA teacher at Herberg Middle School in Pittsfield, MA. We also pleased to announce that Ms. Leah Gaudette has accepted the position of Kindergarten teacher. Leah is a graduate of UMASS Amherst with Bachelor of Arts degrees in both Early Childhood Education and Psychology. She holds a Massachusetts teaching license for grades PreK-2. Leah was a preschool teacher for the Center for Early Education and Care in Amherst and completed student teaching practicums in Kindergarten and first grade classrooms in western Massachusetts. Leah's youthful enthusiasm and love of children are the perfect combination to bring out the best in our kindergarteners. Be sure to extend a Saint Mary School welcome to these young women when you meet them.

Parents and teachers are the role models that children look to during challenging times like these. Each of us needs to be a calm presence that communicates to our young children that we are there for them and that we are always looking out for their social-emotional well-being. Please remember to approach each situation that might arise during this atypical school year with patience, grace, and understanding. We ask God to bless us with his strength and wisdom as we begin this journey, knowing that He is there to guide us each step of the way.

As always, please reach out to me with any questions or concerns.

Stay well,
Jeannie MacDonough