



# DIOCESE OF DALLAS

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## CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

July 21, 2020

Dear Parents –

I am writing to update you on the safety plans for our diocesan schools as we continue to plan for our fall reopening. Over the course of the summer, the leaders of your diocesan schools have been meeting regularly with our office and with outside medical experts throughout the State of Texas. We have been sharing, revising and testing the various plans and protocols that are necessary to keep kids safe, and we are continuously submitting those plans for validation to our health experts.

We have come to the conclusion that we can absolutely open our schools in person, and that we can keep our teachers, students and staff safe. Over and over again, our medical experts have pointed to examples throughout the country and the world that have reopened safely, and have put those best practices into some simple steps that can slow and stop the transmission of the virus. The simple matter is that public schools are facing different issues: our Catholic Schools have smaller classes, different facilities and more flexibility to adapt to the health concerns that we currently see.

Because we firmly support parishes and schools having local control, we do not take diocesan-wide mandates like this one lightly. To that end, we have limited our guidance to things that we have determined to be medically necessary in order to keep our schools open, to ensure consistency among our protocols in terms of when schools will close when COVID-19 infections are detected and to how students and faculty will be screened for symptoms each day.

I am acutely aware that for some, these protocols may be seen as an ideological or political statement. That is not the case. Our decisions have been made with only three objectives in mind: ensuring the health, safety and faith of our students, faculty and staff. Human life is sacred, and as Catholics we have a responsibility to protect it from conception to natural death, and we firmly believe these protocols will do so.

You will get a detailed reopening plan from your school very shortly if you have not already, but these are the consistent policies that you will see at all diocesan schools:

- All diocesan elementary schools that are not in Dallas County can begin in person instruction as early as August 19<sup>th</sup>.
- All diocesan elementary schools in Dallas County can begin in person instruction as early as September 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- Regardless of start date, there will be a two-week phase in to fulltime instruction where we train all of our students and parents on our protocols.
- All individuals will be required to wear face masks or neck gaiters when inside school buildings. For the safety of the entire school community, exceptions to this policy will not be granted.
- There will be no fall sports for the grade schools.

- All individuals will submit to health screenings every day; mandatory sick leave will be enforced and details will be shared by your local principal when and if someone tests positive.
- All diocesan schools will continue to offer online learning options for students who prefer to learn at home.

Be assured that we will be actively reviewing these procedures alongside our health experts and monitoring schools and organizations that are less restrictive than our own in order to consider relaxing restrictions. As always, we are thankful for your partnership and your trust, and we look forward to seeing you in the fall. In the meantime, our prayers are with all of those who strive to help our students in their quest of becoming Saints and Scholars, and for the health, safety and well-being of all of you.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Matt Vereecke".

Matt Vereecke