



DIOCESE OF DALLAS

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

August 9, 2021

Dear Parents:

When you last heard from me in May, I sent out a letter informing you that we would be returning the decision-making regarding COVID protocols to the local sites. This decision was made with the best information we had regarding our own case counts, vaccination status of our parents and teachers, and the lower case counts that we had all been seeing in the Dallas area. We have continually reinforced this idea through the summer. We were hopeful that we could maintain subsidiarity even with the increasing case counts in the Dallas area over the past several weeks. Unfortunately, we can no longer allow that as the delta variant has created a clear and present danger for unvaccinated children in our community, which is currently the majority of our approximately 15,000 students.

As of today, Bishop Burns has asked us to provide updated protocol guidance in order to ensure that all of our schools are taking a uniform approach to safety. While these protocols will be in place until further notice, it is our intention to return control to the local sites as soon as it is safe to do so. This will largely be determined by the same factors that we used to make that decision last year: local case counts, vaccination rates, hospital capacity, and our own internal data regarding school cases.

In short, masks will be required for all people inside school buildings regardless of vaccination status. Local guidance will still apply for sports, outdoor activities and volunteer activities. The majority of our schools have already adopted these protocols.

There are some critical things that you can do to ensure that we can return local control as quickly as possible. If you are eligible to get vaccinated, please do so as soon as you can. I ask this for two reasons. First, I am in frequent communication with Parkland hospital, and the local data for vaccination effectiveness shows a 98.5% rate of avoiding hospitalization or serious consequences. Put another way, that is 1.5 cases per 100,000 people. For the non-vaccinated, that rate jumps to 100 cases per 100,000 people. Second, last year, the number one vector across the 608 student cases we had in the diocese were family and close friends. For our youngest students, the most likely people to infect them were their parents. Our data shows that you have the best tool directly at your disposal to protect your families.

In addition to this, we recommend that you upgrade from cloth masks to a KN-95 or N95 mask that is able to form a seal around the mouth and nose. Not only are these masks easier to breathe in, they provide better protection than loose-fitting cloth masks.

We will be updating you as conditions change, and will meet weekly with the principals and presidents until further notice to share local data and changes. As much as this is difficult to send, please know that I remain hopeful. We now have tools that we did not have last year, and as such we are not powerless to overcome this. Please pray that the Lord will continue to offer us His wisdom and guidance, and will lead us safely to our return to normalcy.

Respectfully,

Matthew Vereecke,
Superintendent