

**WELCOME BACK AS ST. MATTHEW PREPARES TO RETURN  
TO SCHOOL FOR IN-PERSON LEARNING**

August 26, 2021

Dear Parents,

A few weeks ago, our entire family was able to spend a week up in Suttons Bay, Michigan. There's just something very special about being up north, and it was truly a gift to be all together since two of my three children live out of state. The house that we stayed in was located right on the water, and we were blessed that the owner's provided us with access to numerous kayaks. One day, my oldest son took our granddaughter out in a kayak for a little ride. Emilia had never ridden in a kayak before, but I was so impressed at her lack of fear when her daddy asked her if she wanted to join him. Surrounded by the protection of her life jacket that he placed around her, she immediately climbed into the kayak and set off for an adventure with her daddy. She had no idea where the journey was going take her, she just knew that she was safe with her father paddling and steering the kayak.

In a similar fashion, we are confident that this school year is going to be an amazing journey! And, like Emilia and her life jacket, we are surrounded by God's love and protection. In addition, we are confident that our Heavenly Father will guide us through this adventure. We know there may be some twists and turns along the way, but when Jesus is the one in control, we will cling to the promise presented in Romans 8:28 that "all things will work for good"!

This week, we faced a little curve in the path, and, as a result of the new mandate established by the Oakland County Health Department, we needed to update our COVID protocols. Listed below you will find previous COVID protocols printed in black and new COVID protocols highlighted in blue ink:

1. On August 24th, the Oakland County Health Department (OCHD) issued a new order to all schools mandating that masks are to be worn indoors by all persons four years old and older, including students, teachers, administrative staff, attendees, and other employees of educational institutions.
2. As of this date, masks will be strongly recommended but not required for our Preschool 3 students.
3. As of this date, OCHD will be contacted if any student or staff member should test positive for COVID, and St. Matthew will follow all directives instructed by OCHD.
4. COVID vaccines are recommended by the CDC, MDHSS and OCHD for those eligible but not required.
5. As of this date, student athletes will not be subject to COVID testing. Additional COVID protocols regarding athletics will be shared by the Athletic Director and coaches as necessary.

6. Parents will continue the daily responsibility to screen their children before arriving at school to ensure their child has no signs of a cough, fever, sore throat, or shortness of breath. Early each morning, parents will receive a link to a Google Form to submit this information online. Parents are asked to submit this information before their child arrives at school. Students will not be allowed to enter the building until the screening form has been completed. A "Test Run" will occur this Friday morning, and we would appreciate all parents to participate so that we can test this procedure.
7. To minimize congestion upon arrival on school days, we will continue to stagger arrival times for students. If possible, please arrive at the following times. (We understand if work schedules will not allow for designated times to happen): Last names A - I 8:00 - 8:08; Last names J - Q 8:09 - 8:16; Last names R - Z 8:16 - 8:24
8. To minimize congestion, we will also stagger entrance points. Grades Preschool through Grade 3 will enter through the 100 wing doors under the blue canopy. Grades 4 - 8 will enter through the gym doors. A staff member located at each door will greet students daily and affirm their online screening form has been submitted.
9. To minimize exposure, parents will not be allowed into the school during the school day with the exception of one parent for Preschool and Kindergarten students during morning arrival.
10. Parents picking up children early from school will be asked to wait in the lobby. A staff member will retrieve and escort the child to the lobby after the parent signs out the child.
11. Student hygiene and hand washing will continue to be strongly promoted.
12. Weather permitting, outdoor dining during lunch periods will continue for the months of August through October. Indoor dining procedures will be reevaluated at the end of October. Hot lunch options will return for two days a week (Wednesdays and Fridays).
13. Birthdays are special days, and students may bring in a special treat for this celebration. However, all treats must be individually wrapped.
14. St. Matthew will continue to have additional custodial services throughout the school day for cleaning of high frequency use areas.
15. Air purifiers will continue to be utilized in every classroom and throughout the building.
16. We will continue to limit restroom capacity to three students at one time.
17. Public drinking fountains will remain closed. Each day, please send a refillable water bottles with your child. A water bottle filling station is available.
18. Social distancing is no longer required but desks will be spaced out as much as possible.
19. The use of plexi-glass barriers is no longer recommended per the CDC.
20. Four large tents have been rented for outdoor lunch sessions as well outdoor classroom usage. Masks can be removed when outdoors and these tents will provide a wonderful opportunity for breaks from wearing masks.
21. Chapel services will continue to be streamed into the classrooms for at least the first quarter of school.
22. Students will be able to move throughout the hallways to various classrooms.

23. Whole-school events such as our “Back to School Family Event” and “Progressive Dinner” will be held outside when possible.
24. St. Matthew Preschool and Kids Care will continue to follow all mandates instituted by the Oakland County Health Department and Michigan Licensing and Regulatory Affairs.
25. To minimize exposure, daytime congregational Bible studies will utilize the church sanctuary, and those guests will access restrooms located inside the sanctuary. All those in attendance will also be required to wear a mask.
26. To minimize exposure, International Ministry classes will enter and exit through the back HUB entry. All those in attendance will also be required to wear a mask.

With our Heavenly Father’s strength and power, we are “ON OUR WAY” to navigating this pandemic and into a wonderful school year of equipping young disciples throughout the process!

Looking forward to seeing all of you on Monday, August 30th!

In Jesus’ Love,

Mrs. Palka