



2021-2022 Academic Year Announcement from Carol Killebrew, Interim Head of School

TO: Parents and the SMS Community
DATE: May 27, 2021
RE: Re-Opening of School

Saint Mary's School has spent several months preparing for the re-opening of campus for our students, faculty, and staff for the 2021-2022 academic year. After a successful graduation weekend, we are confident in our team and in all of you in helping us have another successful year. We will continue to rely on experts in the public health, infectious diseases, epidemiology, and environmental health fields, as well as the latest best practices and our experience in managing and planning for continuous operations. We will also prepare contingency plans and commit to staying on top of the ever-evolving global pandemic situation.

Anticipating that the spread of COVID-19 infections will continue to significantly diminish, that vaccination efforts will prove effective in preventing serious or deadly illness, and that restrictions for public gatherings and prevailing public health guidelines for physical distancing will be eased, **Saint Mary's is preparing for a fully in-person fall 2021 semester.**

Starting on May 28, 2021, Saint Mary's will suspend the Ascend app for the summer months and re-evaluate its use for the fall semester. Should an alternate plan be needed, Saint Mary's will continue to have contingency plans for robust checks and safety procedures to be in place immediately.

In preparation for the new 2021-2022 academic year, Saint Mary's in-person learning environment goal assumes that all faculty and staff who intend to receive the COVID-19 vaccine will have been vaccinated, and that most students will have been able to receive the vaccine before the fall semester begins. While the vaccine is not mandatory, **we strongly encourage all Saints to consider getting the vaccination.**

As the fall semester approaches, Saint Mary's will continue to communicate with families; however, please note that the decision to require masks in all public spaces such as classrooms or campus/school events must be determined later in the summer. That decision will depend on the state of the pandemic, state requirements, and prevailing public health guidelines.

Saint Mary's is also planning to operate its housing and dining operations at normal capacity and intends to continue to reserve isolation and quarantine space in residence halls for students that are directed to isolate or quarantine by a medical professional if needed.

We have developed and followed sound strategies for mitigating the health risks for more than a calendar year, and we remain committed to providing the best Saint Mary's experience we can for our students and families. Our collective commitment to following these guidelines has helped to flatten the curve of cases while allowing us to continue fulfilling our institutional mission.

As we prepare for the fall, it is imperative that we continue to prioritize the well-being of our community by complying with all health and safety protocols. We are certain that our collective commitment this past year has created this opportunity to restore the in-person instructional experiences that are so meaningful to faculty and students.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WILL THE FALL SEMESTER BE FULLY IN PERSON?

We are preparing for the preferred mode of operation as a fully in-person learning environment for the fall semester. This will depend on the state of the pandemic, the governor's orders, and prevailing public health guidelines, which will be confirmed or updated as the semester approaches. As the semester approaches, or during the semester, we may have to adjust plans; however, our goal is to be fully open in grand Saints-style!

WILL VACCINATIONS BE REQUIRED FOR STUDENTS RETURNING IN THE FALL SEMESTER?

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective. Vaccination is not required, but it is **strongly** encouraged.

IF THE FALL SEMESTER IS IN-PERSON, WILL SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL REQUIRE MASKS, PHYSICAL DISTANCING, AND ADHERENCE TO OTHER PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDELINES?

These factors depend on the governor's orders, prevailing public health guidelines, and the state of the pandemic as the semester approaches.

IS IT SAFE TO RETURN TO A MORE NORMAL CAMPUS EXPERIENCE?

We have developed and followed sound strategies for mitigating the health risks for more than a calendar year. Our collective commitment to following these guidelines have helped to flatten the curve of the case numbers while allowing us to continue fulfilling our institutional mission. While we anticipate wider access to vaccinations and improving conditions as the fall semester approaches, we will adjust accordingly to lower the health risks if necessary.

WILL THERE BE ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE SPACES ON CAMPUS, IF NEEDED, IN THE FALL?

Yes.

For additional questions, please contact the Binder Health Center at

Phone: 919-424-4043 | Email: nurses@sms.edu

You may also review updates on our COVID-19 Updates & Resources website page at

<https://www.sms.edu/about-us/covid-19-updates>.