



Dear Diocesan School Families,

By now I am sure you are aware of Governor Pritzker's announcement on Wednesday afternoon that **ALL** PK-12 schools in the state are now mandated to require masks for all students, employees, and visitors while inside the building. While it is true that our schools are exempt from some state and federal regulations, this mandate does not fall into that category. Therefore, masks must be worn by everyone inside of our schools at least at the start of the 2021/2022 school year.

We understand that this adjustment will be met with mixed emotions and respect the individual's right to their opinions. However, as I have shared with you several times since March 13, 2020, our main goal continues to be to have students in school and continuing with their education. Next week at our annual principals' meeting, we will be discussing creative ways to implement "masks breaks" to provide some respite to the students throughout the day.

Other items to share:

- According to the new CDC close contact definition, classroom students who were within 3 to 6 feet of the infected student are not treated as close contacts if both the infected student and exposed student were engaged in consistent and correct use of a well-fitting mask.
- The CDC Test-to-Stay Strategy says if schools test close contacts on days one, three, five, and seven from the date of exposure then close contacts are permitted to remain in the classroom if the results are negative. (Saliva and swab tests qualify).
- The CDC has also provided guidance on levels of transmission which should influence issues like the mask mandate as we move forward meaning that the mask mandate should only be as long as levels are high.

We understand that the past few weeks may feel like we are moving backwards and, in some ways, maybe we have; however, I have listed a few positive items below to remember:

- At this time masks are not required outdoors, and extra-curricular activities are on schedule
- A cohort approach is not necessary, and schedules can be adjusted to allow more socialization between students across all grade levels (reading buddies, faith families, etc)
- Continuity of education because of less quarantine situations (as described above)
- Lunch can return to the cafeteria at all schools
- Students can attend Mass in person and as a school
- Field trips, pep rallies, assemblies, field day, etc. can all be considered again

Respectfully and Prayerfully,

Jonathan Birdsong

Superintendent of Schools
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