

May 13, 2021

Hello parents,

This message comes to you via St. Joseph Administration in conjunction with the Office for the Mission of Catholic Education. Your support for Catholic Education is a great gift to the children and families of our school. Thank you for your continued partnership with us.

Recognizing that the challenge of this Pandemic often gives way to concerns and questions that evade simple explanations, I am hoping to address the concerns that have been raised about the requirement of face-coverings in our school. In lieu of making these decisions in a vacuum, we at St. Joseph School, have leaned into the Office for the Mission of Catholic Education (Archdiocese School Leadership team) to help provide this summary of the essential points relating to our implementation of masking policies and also explain the rationale for how we will continue to engage this question in the days and months to come. We note, too, that Executive Order 21-21 issued on May 6, 2021 significantly changes in a very positive way the impact that face coverings will have on schools in the months ahead. We look with hope to the day when the issues we are facing are not so rooted in crisis, and trust that you do, too.

At the outset, and in a desire to engage your concerns about face coverings in our school, it is important for us to make several key and interrelated distinctions:

- Through Executive Order 20-81, Governor Walz on July 22, 2020 mandated that with limited exceptions in certain circumstance, all students in all K-12 schools must wear face coverings.
- The State of Minnesota confirmed that Executive Order 20-81 applies to all schools, including all nonpublic schools (see July 22, 2020 clarification from MDE).
- As institutions committed to education and the common good, it is our responsibility to obey proper authority when it has been legitimately exercised.
- Executive Order 20-81 represents a prudential decision made by the Governor following the advice of public health officials. For those who have concerns with the Governor's decision, we encourage you to contact the Governor and your elected representatives.
- It is an exercise of faithful citizenship to hold elected officials accountable for their decisions and to make known their impact on the lives of constituents (particularly for the youngest and most vulnerable among us). In fact, this is what makes our democracy great, involved citizenship. We urge that civil discourse with elected representatives is marked by respect and charity. It is entirely reasonable to ask elected officials, and those in public health, for the specific peer-reviewed scientific studies that confirm the efficacy of face coverings as a means of mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in school and classroom environments.

At the same time, given the scope of the Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese, over 91 Catholic schools and 186 parish catechetical programs, we want to reiterate a few essential considerations that underscore how we will continue to engage this question:

- As Institutions responsible for the safety of our students and the common good, Catholic schools are obligated to promote legitimate social order, acknowledge rightful authority, and

exercise responsible citizenship even when we disagree about prudential decisions.

- Concerning the need for face coverings in Catholic schools, at this time, we affirm the importance of following the mandates and guidance of the civil authorities responsible for the promotion of public health. We will continue to rely upon the recommendations from those who have competence and responsibility for public health in Minnesota.
- In the midst of a Pandemic, the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese reopened to in-person learning for the 2020-2021 school year and have implemented COVID-19 mitigation protocols that have allowed us to offer students the essential service of in-person instruction. These efforts and strategies have been very successful, however the goal of in-person instruction would not have been possible without the prudential measures taken throughout this year.
- With increased access to testing and vaccination, we are hopeful that the weight of the pandemic will loosen its grip on our school communities, especially the day-to-day experience of our students and teachers.
- Executive Order 21-21 signals that an eventual end to the requirement of face coverings in schools. At this time, however, following the announcement on May 6 from Governor Walz, face coverings under the conditions captured previously in Executive Order 20-81 remain obligatory *when indoors* through the end of the 2020-2021 school year unless modified sooner by Governor Walz. *Face coverings will no longer be enforced when outside.*
- The Office for the Mission of Catholic Education will be providing our Catholic schools with updated guidance this summer for the 2021-22 school year. ***Given the gains we have seen in the fight against COVID-19 through the spring of 2021, it is difficult to imagine that students will be wearing masks in schools at the start of the 2021-22 school year, however this pandemic has taught us that the virus has its own timeline.***

We urge you to continue to pray for the complete eradication of COVID-19 from every corner of the earth and to remain in solidarity with those places where access to the sacraments and medical treatments are a burden for those suffering the devastating effects of this disease. During the month of May, which is dedicated to Blessed Virgin Mary, we invite you to join us, and our Holy Father Pope Francis, in commending our struggle and hope to the help of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary.

Finally, I am happy to announce that we are planning to open our final Mass of the school year to all families. The social distancing order will expire on Friday, May 28<sup>th</sup> and we invite all of you to join us for Mass on Wednesday, June 2<sup>nd</sup> at 10:30 a.m. for this special event. Please keep in mind that the executive order will still require all to wear face coverings while inside the church. See today's newsletter for more information.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Richards'.

Bruce Richards Ed.S  
Principal  
St. Joseph Catholic STEM School