



OFFICE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS MEMORANDUM

October 18, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As we begin the second quarter of school, I want to thank all of you for your commitment to Catholic education and for entrusting your children to us to educate. This is an immense responsibility and privilege in normal times and even more so in the extraordinary days in which we live. The coronavirus and variants have disrupted our lives for nearly two years and challenged us in ways we never could have predicted.

Putting first the health and welfare of students and school employees has been our priority as we have taken a cautious approach to mitigation strategies, supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). We have adopted a multi-layered approach to mitigation that has helped to minimize the number of positive cases and quarantined students in our schools (encouraging vaccinations, improved ventilation, handwashing, social distancing, cleaning protocols, masking and sick individuals staying home). Also, our communities have benefitted from increased vaccination rates and other strategies implemented in the four counties in which our diocesan schools are located. Overall, there has been significant progress in bringing COVID-19 infection and transmission rate data points down to more acceptable levels.

In my Memorandum dated August 9, 2021, I stated the following:

Factors such as the county case rate consistently below 100/100,000, the new case positivity rate below 10%, and the transmission level at moderate or low, will allow us to reconsider having facial coverings/masks as optional rather than required. Decisions will be made on a county-by-county basis based on a monthly review of data. Parents will be notified by your school administrator or pastor when a change in the masking requirements will occur for Catholic schools in your county.

The diocese will continue to highly recommend that masks be used by everyone on our campuses. **However, schools located in counties where the weekly number of cases per 100,000 is less than 100 AND the positivity rate is below 10% will be given the opportunity to have parents opt out of their student wearing a mask. Parents/guardians are asked to communicate clearly with their child regarding their expectations related to masks.** In making your decision, please be aware that the transmission risk level has not yet reached the moderate or low level. It has moved rapidly in that direction but has not met this criteria yet.

There may still be times when masks are required despite your decision to opt out from your student wearing a mask. Principals and Pastors/Presidents, in consultation with the diocese, may impose temporary requirements for students and staff if conditions within a classroom, grade level or school warrant a return to masks, quarantines or additional mitigation strategies. All unvaccinated adults on our campuses are highly recommended to wear a mask.

The current data on positivity rate and weekly cases per 100,000 is listed below as of October 14, 2021. The temporary mask requirement expires on October 20, 2021. **All four counties where our Catholic schools are located met the guidelines and masks will be optional in all diocesan Catholic schools effective Thursday, October 21, 2021.**

Current Florida Department of Health data for our four counties as of October 14 indicates:

County	Weekly Positive Cases/100,000	Positivity Rate
Indian River	51.6	3.2
Martin	67.6	4.2
Palm Beach	96.2	4.1
St. Lucie	87.8	5.8

In addition, we are implementing a mask requirement for all students, faculty, staff, and visitors for the two weeks following extended holidays (Thanksgiving and Christmas). There are typically spikes in transmission after holidays and this mask requirement will help limit any potential spread of the virus. Masks will be required after the Thanksgiving Break (November 29 through December 10) and following Christmas Break (through January 14.) Students who already have an approved medical accommodation regarding masks may utilize the accommodations during this time. As a reminder, please adhere to travel guidelines from the CDC for domestic and international travel: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

This protocol adopted by the Diocese of Palm Beach for its schools related to COVID-19 is the product of considered judgement and a function of religious autonomy in the administration of its private religious schools. All parents are expected to cooperate with the school administration on this and all school policies.

Allow me to close with a quote from Gloria Purvis from *America Magazine*, October 2021:

More than anything, this pandemic should push American Catholics to recall what we believe about the human person and the defense of human life. Let us recall Christ's example of sacrifice. Let us recall the suffering of the holy martyrs. We may not suffer as the martyrs did, but we can witness to our faith by embracing the restrictions of the pandemic for the love of God and neighbor.

Thank you to the many families who have, through their witness and faith, embraced the love of God and neighbor throughout the last several months. It is our love for another and our faith that will conquer COVID-19 and help to restore our communities and schools.

Yours in Christ,

Gary Gelo

Gary Gelo
Superintendent of Schools