

August 23, 2021

Dear Diocesan Educational Community,

As you know from my previous letters to you this summer, our main goals for the upcoming school year are to keep students and teachers safe, to keep schools open for in-person learning, and to keep our students in school.

In those letters, I also said that we remain in a global pandemic, and we may need to revise our mitigation strategies if the situation changes. Here is a summary of our current situation:

- COVID-19 cases are surging as a result of the highly-contagious Delta Variant.
- The five counties of the Diocese are at High Levels of Community Transmission.
- The spread of disease in our schools puts everyone there at risk.
- If masking were optional and there would be even one COVID-19 case in a classroom, it would require certain students, masked or unmasked, to quarantine, preventing them from attending class in person.*
- If everyone in school is masked and has maintained social distancing, then only the affected student would have to quarantine.
- Without masks, even one case of COVID-19 in a classroom may impact multiple families, whether or not their children are wearing masks.
- School quarantines also increase the disruption for all parents who rely on the school schedule when making their own plans for work and other activities.

Given these circumstances, we are left with this question: “Should we require masks now or risk not being able to keep schools open for safe, in-person learning?” That is why we have made the decision to require masks for all students, teachers, staff and visitors regardless of vaccination status in our school buildings.

I recognize that not all parents will agree with this decision. Personal choice is an important tenet of our Catholic faith, and it is always our goal to allow parents, who are the primary educators of their children, to have a choice wherever possible. However, keeping our schools open for in-person learning is important for every student and family.

We will continue to monitor the Levels of Community Transmission, review the number of positive cases, and work with local and state health officials to help determine when this masking requirement can be changed.

We regret the need to begin the school year with this mask requirement inside our buildings and we look forward to the time when virus conditions improve and classroom restrictions can be eased.

I ask each of you for your support. I firmly believe that we owe it to our students to come together and do our part for a successful start to the school year. We remain committed to providing our students with a safe, faith-filled, and academically sound experience, and we pray for a successful 2021-22 school year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Philip J. Fromuth".

Philip J. Fromuth, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Catholic Education

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention protocols for quarantining in a mask-optional situation would significantly compromise our ability to provide in-person instruction. At 3-6 feet in a mask-optional environment, if one student is positive, all other students who are within 3-6 feet of the positive student for more than 15 minutes would need to quarantine, even if they were wearing masks. If all were wearing masks at 3-6 feet, only the positive student would need to quarantine.*