

MEMORANDUM

Date: July 31, 2020

To: Catholic School Leaders

From: The Office for the Mission of Catholic Education

Re: Face Coverings

Last week, Governor Walz issued Executive Order 20-81 requiring Minnesotans to wear a face covering in all indoor spaces, including K-12 schools, beginning July 25.

Following the announcement, Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker clarified that this Executive Order included all school buildings, both public and nonpublic, writing that “face coverings are generally required for all students, staff, and other person present in any kindergarten through grade 12 school buildings or district offices or riding on school transportation vehicles.”

Based on that guidance, Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis should include their processes and procedures for following the governor’s order in the school’s Pandemic Preparedness and Response Plan. The Office for the Mission of Catholic Education is available to assist you in understanding the requirements of the Order and providing practical guidance in its implementation.

Face coverings in K-12 schools pose unique challenges to the learning environment and child development. We are grateful to the many school leaders who assisted us in compiling a detailed list of concerns related to the impact of this Order on Catholic school students. We are working with the Walz administration to establish a more reasonable approach to mask wearing in schools, especially for our youngest students.

Finally, the governor has committed significant resources to schools to increase compliance with this Order and other health and safety requirements, including the distribution of cloth and disposable face masks for students and face shields for teachers. Consistent with the long tradition of equitable sharing of education funding

and services made available to all students, it is our expectation that Catholic school students and teachers will be eligible to receive these same services, which are directed towards our shared goal of mitigating the spread of COVID-19. We are working with the Governor's administration on this issue and hope to come to a swift resolution.

Thank you for your commitment to Catholic schools and your willingness to collaborate with the Governor's administration on this Executive Order. We know it is not an easy one for many members of your communities. To help you communicate this difficult message, we have provided a few talking points that you may find helpful to incorporate into your school communications.

Suggested Talking Points for Parent Communications

- On July 22, 2020, the Walz Administration, through Executive Order 20-81, has now required that all K-12 students, including Catholic school students, wear face coverings inside the school building. In our desire to work collaboratively with public officials in the spirit of public health and the common good, we are developing new policies that meet the requirements of the Executive Order. In our preparations for the start of a safe and healthy school year, our Building Reopening Committee developed a reasonable and thoughtful approach to wearing face coverings in school.
- The Archdiocese is working with the Walz Administration to give schools greater flexibility to ensure educational quality and the health and wellbeing of their students and community. It is also our expectation that our Catholic school students will be able to share equitably in the services and funding the Governor has made available to all Minnesota students, which includes access to both cloth and re-usable face coverings.
- This is a difficult issue and not the way many of us had planned to start the school year. We are grateful for your continued patience and flexibility as we work to keep our students, teachers and community healthy and safe as we prepare for in-person learning.

What this Order means for your child (based on what we know today):

- All K-12 students are required to wear a face covering that covers the nose and mouth.
- A face shield (clear plastic shield worn in front of the face) may be used for students who cannot wear a face mask.
- Teachers will be instructed in proper techniques for wearing facemasks and will use positive behavioral strategies to encourage the safe wearing of facemasks in school. No student will be punished or singled-out for his or her inability to wear a face covering.
- Students will not be wearing coverings during recess, physical education class or lunch.
- We will be scheduling additional “mask breaks” for students.
- Masks must be free of writing or any distracting design.

We ask you to work with your children and make a good-faith effort to help your child wear a facemask. Parents may opt to send their child to school with a face shield if wearing a face mask is not possible. We will work to make reasonable accommodations for those students who may not be able to wear a face covering due to a medical condition, mental health condition or disability that makes it unreasonable to wear a face covering.

In the upcoming weeks we will be in close communication with our families with more information.