



PITTSBURGH CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Catholic School Community,

I hope this summer break brought peace and joy to you all. Our school community has worked so collaboratively to meet and overcome the challenges of the past 18 months! Parents, teachers, staff, and students demonstrated extraordinary resilience, faith, and courage as we met our goals for keeping students, faculty and staff safe and for keeping students physically present in school. Our intent is to navigate the COVID situation this year as well as we did last year.

As we approach the start of a new school year, we continue to face challenges related to COVID 19, specifically with the emerging variants. Our goals continue to be to keep staff and students safe while providing 5-day-a-week in-person instruction.

Although we had hoped to be in a position to allow optional masking, that is **not** possible at this point in time. The protocols for quarantining in an optional-mask environment would significantly compromise our ability to provide in-person instruction. We must evaluate how the first month of classroom instruction impacts COVID numbers for students of all ages.

Relying on the guidelines of all major health agencies and the counsel of **local** pediatric and infectious disease physicians, we will implement the following as we begin the new school year:

- Masks are required **inside** all school buildings (pre-k to 12) for all staff and students who are 2 years or older, unless medical or developmental conditions prohibit their use. This includes all vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. **Frequent** mask breaks should be provided, which is best done outside.
- Masks are required on buses and public transportation. All bus regulations must be followed in order for students to utilize those services.
- Configurations of classrooms and lunchrooms will employ physical distancing strategies in the least restrictive manner possible, , while maintaining a safe environment.
- School employees and students will continue to focus on hand hygiene.
- Schools will continue to adhere to cleaning and disinfecting procedures.

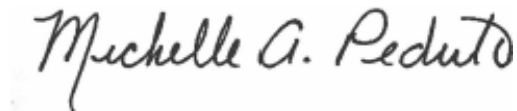
- Schools will continue to keep classrooms properly ventilated and will conduct as many activities as possible outside.
- Positive COVID cases will continue to be reported to the appropriate health departments. We will continue to follow their guidance on quarantines, in accordance with CDC guidelines.

We will re-evaluate our masking policy **in late September**, which provides time to see what the data is after a few weeks of having students back together in classroom settings. **Please note that the components of this policy will change based upon the most updated federal, state and county guidance.** This was the case last year, which allowed us to maintain the highest level of in-person instruction. It is our added goal this year to have the least restrictive environment possible that still enables all children to be protected in our classrooms.

The mission of our Catholic schools is to provide an environment where your children, God's children, can encounter Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior each day. We live that mission by loving God above all things and loving our neighbor above ourselves. It is our belief that this policy statement best demonstrates both. We had our students in our classrooms last year! Please trust and have faith that we will do it again this year.

Please join me in continuously praying for our students, faculty, and staff as we begin the 2021-22 school year.

God bless,



Michelle A. Peduto

Resources:

CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

American Academy of Pediatrics

<https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

Allegheny County Health Department/Pennsylvania Department of Health are aligned with CDC