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Office of Catholic Schools
MEMORANDUM
COVID-19 Protocols and Guidelines for the 2021-22 School Year
August 9, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

The arrival of a new school year invites us to look to the future with a lot of hope, and perhaps some uneasiness. We are blessed because each day brings with it a new possibility. With each incoming class comes a new hope for the future. This upcoming school year is no different.

As you know the situation with COVID-19 and its' variants has been very fluid over the last year and a half and the path of the virus has pushed our medical and governmental authorities to respond in different ways at different times. The Catholic Schools Office of the Diocese of Palm Beach continues to follow the data and make our decisions as to what we think will be the safest protocols for our children, faculty and staff. Parents have voiced strong opinions on all sides of many of these issues such as whether to vaccinate or not, and whether children should wear masks or not. We have taken your comments and the supporting evidence under consideration. Keep in mind that one's personal choices may also impact others. In this regard we want to protect all of the children entrusted to our care. None of us would want to be responsible for the transmission of this virus to another person.

While the diocese was hopeful to re-open our schools this August with the Protocols and Guidelines that were circulated to parents on July 15, 2021, the significant increase in positive cases and the high level of community transmission indicated below, call for **a temporary return to the requirement of facial coverings or masks indoors, on busses and in large gatherings for all individuals (teachers, staff, parents, visitors, students K-12) on our school campuses.** Outdoor breaks without masks will be encouraged, especially for our younger students. This is effective immediately. **Families who do not want their child to wear a mask may do so with an opt-out letter to the principal signed by the parent. However, masks may be required at certain times for all students, regardless of the opt out, at the discretion of the principal/pastor for short periods of times such as Mass attendance, small group work or other reasons.** If your child receives one of the state scholarships your child must attend a brick-and-mortar school in order to receive the scholarship. **Effectively immediately, all teachers and staff will be required to wear a facial covering indoors and on school transportation. Visitors are also required to wear a facial covering while indoors on school property.** Other protocols and guidelines in the July 15, 2021 memorandum will continue to be in place.

Data from the Florida Department of Health and the CDC indicate that our four-county area is currently in high levels of transmission with the number of cases per 100,000 having increased significantly since mid-July. After a considerable decline through the end of June, current levels match the levels from

January/February 2021. Positivity rates, new hospital admissions, percent of hospital beds used for COVID and percent of ICU beds used for COVID all dramatically increased since July 15 and continues to increase. Some current data:

Florida Department of Health, August 5, 2021

County	New Case Positivity Rate	Cases per 100,000 population
Indian River	19.8%	594.2
Martin	18.0%	383.9
Palm Beach	17.1%	524.0
St. Lucie	23.9%	580.5

CDC, August 8, 2021

County	Level of Community Transmission	Case rate/100,000 last 7 days
Indian River	High	597.16
Martin	High	390.06
Palm Beach	High	521.06
St. Lucie	High	571.74

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 Office of Catholic Schools continues to review guidance from the CDC, state and local health departments and other sources to revise and update our guidelines for Catholic schools in the Diocese of Palm Beach. This decision was made in consultation with diocesan leaders, school pastors and administrators, the Catholic superintendents of the Province of Miami, and others. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend masking in schools.

Thank you for your consideration of the needs of others as we act with Christian charity through this pandemic and ensure the safety of all members of our school communities. Let us enter this new school year with the firm hope in the promises of our Creator and in the goodness of we who are created in God's image.