



LETTER FROM BISHOP PATES RE: COVID MITIGATION IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

September 3, 2021

My good friends,

The first priority of our diocesan schools is the best interest of children and their safety and health.

In recent days, the controversial issue regarding masks in our schools surfaced. Many are deeply divided on this issue. There are supposed facts and studies which support all sides of the question. We at the diocese have become acquainted with many perspectives on the matter. The other factor of note is that the issue tends to be highly emotional which complicates reasonable resolution.

At this time, the diocese and our dedicated school principals and pastors have worked together to create a “tiered” system for the requirement of masks in our schools. Other dioceses in the state are adopting a very similar leveled approach to COVID-19 mitigation.

The system has goals to:

- Make decisions locally by monitoring and using data to implement measured responses accordingly.
- Be aware that the local reality is fluid and that requires agility and flexibility in our plans.
- Evaluate all decisions with emphasis on providing the best possible environment for our students, faculty, and staff to learn and work.
- Keep our students and teachers in their classroom for in-person learning throughout the year.
- Actively collaborate with our diocese, local agencies, and other schools.
- Make the mission of your school embedded in all your words and actions.

The system has three levels with descriptive criteria, mitigation response strategies that align to each level, and areas for schools to implement operational practice pertinent to their location.

The diocesan-wide mask mandate in schools will remain in place for the first two weeks of each school’s academic year. At that point, each school will identify with a level based on the approved descriptive criteria and will adopt appropriate mitigation responses, such as continuing the requirement for masking or pivoting to optional masking. Each school will then be responsible for frequent identification and communication regarding their leveled COVID-19 response.

The time calls for prayer, wisdom, and confidence that God will be with us at this important time in the life of our beloved children.

*Bishop Richard E. Pates
Apostolic Administrator
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