

August 5, 2021

With malice toward none, with charity for all...

Good Parents and Students:

With malice toward none, with charity toward all is a mantra that I have continually repeated throughout my time as a principal, and this idea has become particularly important during the past year and a half. President Lincoln spoke these timeless and profound words during his Second Inaugural Address to a divided nation in need of immense healing. Although we have not experienced the great tragedy of a civil war, the nation is as divided as I have ever seen it.

As I have written to high school families, we are united as sons and daughters of God. We are mystically bonded in Christ. The devil hates this unity and will try to divide us whenever possible. The lines of division are particularly acute today on various social and medical issues. There are strong arguments on both sides of many of these topics. As Catholics we are to understand the issues through reading, discussing, and praying. With a well-formed conscience, many decisions are for the family alone. Often, it is not the school's business to supersede the primacy of the parents as educators.

One of these divisive issues is masking for students. I have been reading about masking and speaking to Catholic and government-school leaders throughout the State. Aware that unanimous agreement is unlikely, no matter the decision, there can be charity and goodwill. (It is certain that private and government schools throughout the state will make different decisions just as they did with in-person learning last year.)

Although many of our mitigation strategies against the coronavirus will still be in practice, as of now masking will be a parent's choice. Our primary goal has always been to care for the well-being of our students, teachers, and staff. We define well-being as the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and social well-being. Because of this holistic approach, we set our goals to conduct in-person learning as much as possible, with as few restrictions as possible.

This is a decision made for today, and as situations change so could school protocols. For example, if there is a mandate by our Governor for masks, we would follow the mandate to maintain our foremost goal of in-person learning.

It weighs heavily to decide against CDC and Health Department guidelines, which recommend universal masking for teachers and students. However, it is important to remember that these are recommendations and not mandates. We will always follow mandates; however, recommendations allow our own experience and local expertise to bear weight on final decisions. Even with the new variant, the high level of vaccinations coupled with the number who have immunity through previously contracting the virus put us in an entirely different place than when making decisions last year. Further, our local school data is the most important data that we have. For example, last year, we only had two confirmed school-associated cases among students in Immaculate Conception, and six at Saint Elizabeth. (School-associated cases applies to students who had a confirmed case of the virus and were on-campus). In the high school, there were twelve school-associated cases last year. Also in the high school, there were hundreds of students tested weekly due to sports, and we did not see an increase of cases when many of our students and teachers were unmasked for the last two months of school. Additionally, of our students who were

quarantined due to contact tracing in our three schools, none of them contracted the virus. Again, a change in school data as this year progresses could necessitate a change in policy.

Each school will outline their specific COVID-19 protocols, but here are some main points:

- **Schools will foster an environment of Christian charity and respect for others' decisions regarding vaccination status and use of masks.**
- Schools will continue to utilize the CDC guidance for cleaning, disinfection, and hand hygiene.
- Schools will continue to use many of the distancing strategies for indoor activities that were used last year.
- Parents/guardians should monitor their children for symptoms of infectious illness every day before arrival at school. You will not need to complete a daily health survey.
- Students who are sick or displaying symptoms of infectious illness should not attend school and seek medical care when necessary.
- Schools will continue to report positive cases to the Health Department and report positive cases to school families.
- Positive cases will be required to isolate at home for the requisite period based on Health Department guidelines.
- At this time, there are no COVID-related restrictions for athletics; schools will follow MHSAA requirements.
- Schools will follow the Mass protocols as established by the Diocese.
- While the school is not requiring masks at school events, the use of facial coverings is required by federal order on school buses and other forms of public transportation in the United States.

As I was speaking with another Diocesan Superintendent this morning he said, "Remind your parents how successful your schools were last year. Your students grew academically and spiritually, while thousands of schools across the country experienced academic regression." Indeed, our schools showed good growth again last year because of our partnership and commitment to in-person, Christ-centered education. Even when we had to make changes, which we may have to this year, we remembered our mission.

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right let us strive to finish the work...(Lincoln). In Catholic education, "the work" means to form the next generation of Catholics who will know, love, and serve Christ making this world all the better for their presence, while confidently seeking the great prize that comes to those who put Christ above all things!

Peace and all good,

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cc: Pastors, Advisory Councils