

November 19, 2021



## CHRIST ABOVE ALL THINGS

Good Parents and Students,

Peace be with you!

As I walk into my home after work every day, just before I get buried in hugs from the little Chittles, I read a quote that my wife, Kim, writes on our weekly calendar. This week it is by Blessed Solanus Casey: "**Gratitude** is the first sign of a thinking, rational creature."

This allows me to be grateful for the kids I just came from serving and for the kids who need me to serve them now. On the best days, my heart overflows; on the worst day, well... ☺

I write this afternoon knowing based on several emails that there is a valid concern over increased COVID cases in our school, our region, and in our hospital. There are two main questions that are being asked:

1. Will we take the two days off before Thanksgiving due to the increased spread of COVID?
2. Will we reconsider masking our children in school?

I will respond briefly to each of the two questions:

### **Will we take the two days off before Thanksgiving due to the increased spread of COVID?**

We have had hours of meetings over this very issue. We have poured over the data, and it is my decision that the schools' illness numbers, although higher this week, do not necessitate a closing. Absences due to COVID and other illnesses are within an acceptable range. Today is a good example: 6% of students are out due to illness at Immaculate Conception, 8% at Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, and 4% at Saint Francis. (There are other students out by parent choice for varied reasons). We see similar rates to this every fall and winter. Additionally, I was in a meeting with all area superintendents this morning, and the majority are, as of now, going to have school next week. Some of the schools that are staying in session cited that transmission is primarily occurring within the families and not in the school. There are certain schools that, for their own reasons including sickness and staffing, may decide to take next week off. (It is important to note that every school has different data and circumstances that drive their decisions. The superintendents were all deliberating what is best for their communities.)

The one reason that I did want the extra two days was for the teachers who work tirelessly for our students. I know that many have spent themselves for the Lord and His children. Still, the decision to stay in is due to the fact that we value our teachers' work at the highest level. Each moment of each day with our students is a grace for them and the teachers. Our students' time with what I believe is the best faculty in the country is irreplaceable, and we must treat it as precious. As Interim Superintendent, I am at Immaculate Conception more than in past years. The joy of that building is infectious and the witness to Christ by the teachers is a great blessing. As a parent, I want my children with those witnesses as much as possible.

There may be a time that we must close school for illness, but it is not now.

Continued on next page

## Will we reconsider masking our children in school?

For this decision, I have been watching the movement of COVID within our school closely. As aforementioned, at the superintendent's meeting this morning some of the schools cited that transmission is primarily occurring within the families and not in the school. This is our experience as well. For example, yesterday of the 11 total cases (new and existing) of COVID at Immaculate, they were from 8 different classrooms. When I consider the overall illness rate within our schools, the indicators that cases are being transferred outside of the school, and the benefits of non-masked classrooms for education, I remain with the decision of allowing our parents to choose whether to mask their children.

I end with a grateful heart for all the families that partner with our schools as we together nurture these students to grow spiritually and academically. Below is one of my favorite Thanksgiving poems.

Thou that has given so much to me,  
Give one thing more, a grateful heart.  
Not thankful when it pleases me,  
As if thy blessing had spare days;  
But such a heart whose very pulse  
May be thy praise.

*George Herbert (1593 – 1633)*

Peace and Happy Thanksgiving,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erick Chittle'.

Erick Chittle, Ph.D.  
Interim Superintendent

cc: Pastors, Councils