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Dear Parents and Guardians in our Catholic Schools:

I hope the Christmas season brought peace and joy to your families! I am writing to update you on our Covid protocols for our Catholic Schools and some adjustments we are making, effective January 17.

On December 27, the CDC published new guidelines that are informing our approach, as we strive to mitigate Covid and maximize in-person learning:

1. Isolation time for those who are positive for Covid 19 will now be five days, if asymptomatic, followed by five days of strict mask usage, without exception. If this is not possible, then the full ten-day period applies.
2. Quarantine time for those who are unvaccinated and exposed to Covid 19 will be five days, followed by five days of strict mask usage, without exception. If this is not possible, then the full ten-day period applies. If symptoms occur, individuals must immediately quarantine until the quarantine period is completed, or a negative test indicates the symptoms do not stem from Covid 19.
3. We will also begin to implement the CDC-approved “test-to-stay” program, when it is logistically possible for a school to do so. As of the week of January 17, schools will apply this program only for faculty and staff members. We hope to apply this program for students in the future. In this program, those unvaccinated individuals who were potentially exposed to Covid 19 may remain in school, as long as they remain symptom free, and follow the CDC-recommended regimen for testing.

We are also making the following changes:

Our Catholic schools are beginning the transition to mask-optional protocols. Schools will implement mask-optional protocols as early as January 17, but no later than January 31. **All Catholic schools will follow mask-optional protocols as of January 31.** The actual date on which the implementation begins is left to the school’s discretion.

Holy Name of Jesus School in conjunction with the schools in the Dauphin Deanery: Harrisburg Catholic, St. Margaret Mary, St. Catherine Laboure, St. Joan of Arc, Seven Sorrows, and Bishop McDevitt High School will begin the mask-optional protocol on **Monday, January 31, 2022.**

However, face masks will be required in certain situations, including:

*The requirements for masks in the new protocols, above;

*When, at the discretion of the Principal in consultation with the Secretary for Education, there are multiple Covid cases in a particular classroom or grade level, and masking could help maintain in-person learning;

*When 4% of the building is positive for Covid 19 (based on new cases in the previous week). In that case, the building will mask for one week, and we will re-evaluate in one-week increments. For smaller schools (less than 200 students), eight new cases will be needed to require masking for the whole school.

Based on the data and circumstances of the situation, the school Principal, in consultation with the Secretary for Education, may elect to switch an individual classroom or the entire school to virtual learning, when we believe that is in the best interests of the health and safety of all involved. **We are committed to keeping virtual learning to a minimum, and to prioritizing in-person instruction.**

While consistency is difficult to achieve in Covid times, we have been striving for consistency with masking protocols: As the Church teaches us that parents are the primary educators of their children, we started this school year with a mask-optional approach. When the state's mask mandate was issued, we complied, as we have with previous mandates. As the mandate was overturned, we provided a period of time for transition and preparation for mask-optional protocols. Now, it is time to return to our original intent to allow parents to make the decision on masking for their children.

My office will provide support and information to schools as we adopt these protocols, and our schools will be in touch with more information.

We will continue to review and revise our protocols, as needed, based on the data we collect, as Covid situations change rapidly.

I thank you for your support for our Catholic schools. God bless you and your family.

Blessings,

Daniel Breen
Secretary for Education
Superintendent of Catholic Schools