



# DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

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## OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

August 4, 2021

Dear Parents,

I hope this letter finds each of you enjoying some relaxation during these warm and humid summer days. My letter today is a follow-up on my earlier message that indicated our desire to return to a near normal school year which included being mask optional.

While I am not ready to retract any of my earlier statements, I cannot remain oblivious to the latest trends and the uptick in positive Covid-19 cases. **We most likely will be riding a roller coaster as new variants of the Covid-19 virus come and go.** We must carefully monitor these trends and respond appropriately to the resulting ebb and flow created by these variant cycles.

My office has been inundated with e-mails and calls from concerned parents voicing their opinion on the masking issue. In these communications, **there is a clear sense that a return to normalcy for their children is the goal for the school year.**

This is certainly an issue that can be viewed from several sides. We are a system of 25 schools and about 7,000 students across Fairfield County and the facts around vaccination rates or virus infectivity rates are different in various parts of the Diocese. This makes supporting a “one size fits all” decision a difficult one.

Some facts are very positive:

- Nearly 90% of our Diocesan teachers and staff are fully vaccinated.
- There is an over 70% vaccination rate in Fairfield County among those eligible to receive it and more 12-15 year olds are receiving the vaccine daily.
- There is limited transmission among young people and those infected have mild symptoms.

We are awaiting more concrete information from the State as to what might be “mandated” for all schools in September and beyond. In the meantime, **I am offering the following recommended guidelines to schools as they prepare for their opening:**

- School-wide Masses and assemblies should resume
- All extracurricular activities, including athletics should resume
- Computer labs, libraries, and Innovation zones should reopen
- Quarantines should be limited to the unvaccinated who were in close proximity to the Covid-19 positive person
- Water fountains can be used for bottle filling
- Minimum 3 feet of physical distancing is required indoors for all classrooms and activities

- Daily wellness checks, which can include temperature checks should continue
- Frequent handwashing reminders for students should continue
- Disinfection and cleaning of high-touch/high traffic areas should continue
- Those eligible for vaccination should be encouraged to receive it
- Required mask use when distancing is not possible,
  - Specifically, masks must be worn:
    - To and from school on the bus
    - In the hallways
    - In large group settings where distancing is not possible, i.e. Mass, Auditorium
    - By all visitors to the school building
    - In close contact in the classroom, i.e. Science lab partners, small group learning
  - Masks may be optional:
    - Outside
    - In the classroom once students are seated and spaced appropriately

It is important to note that Principals may need to tailor these recommendations to fit the realities of their school and township (i.e., a classmate has a compromising health issue, the town has low vaccination rates or the town has high rates of infectivity, etc.) **There may be a need to revisit these recommendations based on trends or State public health mandates.**

In the coming weeks, I will continue to monitor the data and communication from the CDC, and the State Public Health Agency. I will communicate any updates when necessary.

Let us hope that these weeks are filled with good health and safety. Let us all be vigilant so that our young people, particularly those under 12 who at present are not protected by vaccines, can return to school with all the joy and enthusiasm that a new year brings.

May God bless each of you and may Our Lady shower her blessings on our Catholic school community.

Sincerely,



Dr. Steven F. Cheeseman  
Superintendent of Schools  
Diocese of Bridgeport