



Diocese of Knoxville: Preparing Scholars, Leaders, & Saints

August 17, 2021

Dear Families and Friends of our Catholic Schools,

Over the last month parents, grandparents, faculty members, and concerned community members have contacted me pleading for universal mask requirements in our schools and others advocating for parental choice in mask policies. Please know I have read every communication thoughtfully and shared these communications with other diocesan leadership. I know that these communications originate out of love for our children and the genuine hope for their health and welfare. I hope that you receive this response with the same grace and charity to understand. Bishop Stika made the determination that parents have the right and obligation to make the decision to wear masks or not in the Diocese of Knoxville Catholic Schools. Click [here](#) to access Bishop's full statement. Yesterday Governor Bill Lee signed Executive Order 84, granting parents the choice of opting out of face covering requirements established by school systems, on a school bus, or at school functions. The diocese concurs with the position that balances parental responsibility and public health concerns. Parents will not need to submit any "opt out" form as suggested by Governor Lee's Order; your decision will be known by whether your child comes to school in a mask or through direct communication with your child's teacher.

The Diocese of Knoxville remains committed to in-person instruction and the overall well-being of our children and our school employees. To that end, we will continue to track our schools' COVID- case numbers, attendance rates, and number of individuals quarantined with our parish pastors and school leaders. School officials will continue to alert close contacts of potential exposures. Each school will notify the community of positive cases within the school. The diocese continues to encourage vaccinations for all those able to receive one and the use of masks to protect against COVID-19 for those unvaccinated or immune-compromised.

As stated previously, our goal is to remain in school and can only be accomplished with your continued support. Therefore, as previously requested, we seek your cooperation and assistance with the following protocols:

- Stay home or keep children at home if you are ill or have [COVID-like symptoms](#); consider testing to rule out COVID even if vaccinated
- Immediately report positive known cases to the school so we can contact-trace as necessary
- Quarantine and/or isolate as indicated by our diocesan protocols

Many of us have experienced the divisiveness created by the various views of wearing masks. Division within our communities does not promote the love and supportive environments that we embrace as the faithful in the body of Christ. It is our greatest hope that we can come together, in support of positive, cohesive school communities, to respect one another and the decision each parent makes for the protection of their children. Be assured, our school leaders and teachers will continue to work earnestly to administer the best instructional program for our students. Let us continue praying for each other and an end to this pandemic. May God our heavenly Father hear our collective prayer for the safety of every one of His children entrusted to our care.

In Christ,

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