



United in Christ to ignite the joy of faith, community, and learning.

February 16, 2022

Dear families,

Our plan, and our hope, was to move to a mask-optional, in-person learning model when the city mask mandate ended. Today the mask mandate has been lifted so we will move to a mask-optional school policy. The new mask-optional policy will allow families to choose whether they would still like their child to continue masking throughout the day. Our staff will do its best to monitor these children. To give families the opportunity to discuss their family's mask-optional decision with their student(s), **our mask-optional policy will go into effect beginning today at our final dismissal time 3:25.** We will continue to carefully monitor our own school community cases and the community at large. At any time, if it is determined that our numbers are too high, we are directed by the Douglas County Health Department and/or we are mandated by the county or city, we will return to mandatory or situational masking.

When we began the school year, we considered several factors and spoke with other leaders, the Douglas County Health Department, and the Nebraska Department of Education before writing our COVID-19 policies. At that time, vaccines were not available for children under 12. This was a primary consideration when we determined our masking policies. Since then, the vaccine has become available for students in grades K-8 and families have had time to vaccinate their children if they choose to do so. Recently, the Douglas County Health Department determined that cases and hospitalizations surged with the Omicron Variant after Christmas. According to the Douglas County Health Department, the numbers of positive cases are dropping, the number of COVID-19 related hospitalizations are fewer, and vaccinations amongst K-8 students are up. We have tracked data from our cases since the beginning of the school year, and unlike many other nearby schools, we have not had to close classrooms because of school transmission. We feel our decision to mask situationally (when students could not maintain distance) proved to be a successful plan.

With the mask-optional policy, we will continue to follow the Douglas County Health Department recommendations and requirements for Covid-19 positive individuals and direct exposure. ***To be very clear this means even without a mask mandate, some classrooms, grades, or students might need to mask again if they have a positive exposure or a cluster has been identified. Mask Exemptions are not***

recognized under circumstances when students and/or staff test positive and/or when direct exposure is determined. Mask Exemptions must be signed by a healthcare professional, provide a medical and/or emotional diagnosis and should include the length of time that student has been treated by that health care professional for the diagnosis stated on the letter.

Please continue to pray that we can all remain healthy and in school. Thank you for your continued support and prayers for our school community.

Hopeful and prayerful,

Father Dave Belt, Pastor

Julie Perrault, Principal

Greg Verraneault, Assistant Principal

ST. STEPHEN THE MARTYR CATHOLIC SCHOOL

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