



# The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

The health and safety of the young people entrusted to our care, as well as that of our staff, are of the highest priority in the schools of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington (ADW). This has been no less true amid the COVID pandemic, during which the ADW has sought to carefully balance the interests of both student health and effective learning. Many area schools went virtual during the 2020-21 school year, and some jurisdictions sought to require us to remain solely virtual as well. We made every effort to keep our Catholic schools open for in-person learning, beginning in September 2020 and carrying through this school year.

The ADW has continued to monitor the guidance of public health authorities and the data as we assess the right time to transition to optional masking in our schools. We also consider local government regulations, which have limited what we can and cannot do. A growing consensus of experts and stakeholders, both locally and across the country, have determined that it is now safe to eliminate mask mandates for schools. This includes some public health experts who previously advocated for mandated masking. The remaining localities with indoor mask mandates have also begun to announce plans to lift those requirements in most indoor settings. Over the past several months, substantial numbers of people have been vaccinated, including younger children, and our schools in Maryland and the District of Columbia are in one of the most highly vaccinated areas of the country. Case numbers have also been steadily dropping locally over the past month in the wake of the delta and omicron variants.

While masking has been one of the health and safety protocols that allowed our schools to stay open, experts have begun to acknowledge that masking children has its drawbacks. We recognize that many parents and students have asked to ease measures such as mask requirements more quickly. Others say they would feel more comfortable maintaining precautions a while longer.

In consideration of all of this, ADW Catholic schools will, beginning Monday, February 21, make face coverings voluntary and optional in jurisdictions where this is possible. This will enable our parents and staff to decide what they feel is right based upon their own situations. This approach balances the desires of those parents, students, and staff who wish to continue to wear masks with those who do not, while still keeping our schools safe.

## **Archdiocesan Schools in Maryland**

Beginning on February 21, 2022, face coverings will no longer be required indoors in our Maryland school facilities for students, staff, or visitors. We have been meeting with school leaders to organize and prepare their communities. Depending on the needs of each school's leaders to prepare, schools will transition between February 21 and February 28. We appreciate and will fully support whatever decisions that parents make for their own children regarding whether to wear a face covering in school or not. Enforcement of this decision is between parent and child, not school personnel. However, CDC and local regulations still require that everyone using public transportation, including students who use public school buses, continue to wear face coverings.

### **Archdiocesan Schools in the District of Columbia**

In the District of Columbia, Mayor Muriel Bowser's February 14 executive order continues to require masking in all schools in the District, both public and non-public. The Archdiocese is reviewing these requirements and advocating with city officials to make face coverings optional for our school families in the District. We invite parents to do the same. In the meantime, ADW Catholic schools located in the District of Columbia remain subject to the District's masking order. As we receive additional updates regarding any change in status in the District, we will continue to share this information with our school communities.

### **Looking Ahead**

ADW Catholic schools will continue to monitor local conditions and implement prudent safeguards and mitigation strategies as we strive to provide safe, in-person instruction. If a major spike in cases or a serious variant emerges, government authorities may reinstitute a face covering requirement. As we have done previously, we will consult with medical experts and public health officials for guidance. All Archdiocesan schools will continue to adhere to applicable public health guidance for individuals who test positive for COVID-19 and those who have been exposed.

Let us remain persistent in our prayers that the virus will continue to recede and our schools will return to pre-pandemic normalcy. I cannot thank you enough for your support to our school leaders and teachers throughout the pandemic. Our family-school partnership is a hallmark of our Catholic school community, which I am proud to lead.

May God bless you and your families.

Peace of Christ,



Kelly Branaman  
Secretary for Catholic Schools  
Superintendent of Schools