



Our Lady Star of the Sea School
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February 17, 2022

Dear OLSS Families,

This letter is to inform you that the Archdiocese of Washington has assessed current COVID trends and due to decreasing cases and increasing number of those vaccinated, the decision has been made to make masks OPTIONAL in ADW school systems starting February 21st, 2022. Please read this letter in its entirety to be sure you gain all needed information prior to making a decision on masking AND to understand there will still be certain conditions in which masks will still be **REQUIRED** to be worn (early return after exposure and positive cases).

Per Calvert County Health Department, Omicron remains responsible for >95% of cases genotyped in Maryland. Overall, cases in Calvert dropped another 37% from last week and a total of 75% from 4 weeks ago. With that being said, our case count remains well into the **High Transmission range** (217/100,000). With schools in some parts of the country beginning to lift mask mandates, it's important to note that the current case rate for 5-14 year-olds in Calvert is 360/100,000. This is after a 60% drop in cases among this age group in the past 2 weeks. Vaccination rate remains at 37% in the 5-11 age group (72% in 12-13 and 69% in 14-17 year-olds), **which is likely a key factor in the higher rates of infections in children compared to teens and adults.** The Maryland State Board of Education released a statement today that they are keeping their mask requirements in place at least until their next meeting on 2/22.

While masks will be optional in school, the current guidelines for “close contacts” in schools has **NOT** changed. The current definition by CDC states “In the K–12 indoor classroom setting or a structured outdoor setting **where mask use can be observed**, the close contact definition excludes students who were between 3 to 6 feet of an infected student **IF both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time**. Please note that with optional mask wearing, we are looking at the potential for more close contacts to be observed and thus increased quarantines and virtual learning for 5 days or more to monitor for symptoms in those that are not vaccinated. It is to be expected that transmission of other illnesses like cold and flu to also spread more easily especially in our younger students which will require students to quarantine and test. In order to prevent outbreaks in classrooms and disruption to in school learning for students, it is of utmost importance that students are NOT sent to school when experiencing new onset symptoms. IF your student develops new symptoms please remain home, monitor symptoms and report to schoolnurse@olsss.org for further guidance.

For those that are exposed, regardless of vaccination status, will be REQUIRED to wear a mask for 10 days post exposure OR quarantine for 10 days. If a student/staff tests positive for COVID and is able to test negative on a rapid test after day 5 of symptoms to return to school, they too will be REQUIRED to wear a mask for 5 additional days once they have returned to school. IF a parent wishes for their child not to wear a mask after exposure or testing positive, they will have the option to complete a FULL 10-day quarantine/isolation and return on Day 11 after symptom onset or exposure. Students who cannot comply with mask wearing in the above situations will be dismissed from school immediately and sent home to complete their full quarantine/isolation.

OLSS has had an extremely great track record the past two years related to exposures and COVID cases. We have kept students in the classrooms, had extremely low exposures rates the past two years within the school walls, and had only 1 outbreak (2 or more students who could be contact traced to one another) in the last two years. We attribute this great success due to the well thought out plans and guidelines that have been

implemented here at the school which include multiple layers of protection including: distancing, air quality, cleaning techniques, and MASKING. Please consider continuing the use of masks for multi-layered protection at least until the end of March when cold/flu season ends and numbers are expected to plummet further, warmer weather emerges, and where windows can be opened, and students can spend more time outdoors.

The optional mask wearing will also apply to before and after care. There are currently **NO** changes in masking requirements for basketball. **Students will still be expected to wear a mask in situations they were previously required, and ALL precautionary measures still remain in place.** Students and staff will NOT be ridiculed for either wearing or NOT wearing a mask and such behavior will be subject to disciplinary action. Families that wish for their student to continue to wear a mask during school can fill out the below request, however teachers will NOT be responsible for policing students on consistent use. Students will be reminded that it is a parental request for the student to continue to wear a mask, but teachers will not be responsible or **LIABLE** for repeated reminders for students to wear masks per parental requests.

Please sit down and have intentional conversations with your children about the upcoming changes. Explain to them your families' decision and the importance of following that decision, not following the crowd. It is extremely important to reiterate to students that there will still be some situations in which they must return to wearing a mask due to an exposure or if they are returning early after having COVID. It is important to have these discussions now before the change is implemented, so students can understand and process the upcoming changes. Young students especially may have a difficult time understanding and adjusting to these changes and may be emotionally impacted. Please reach out if you have questions or concern.

Sincerely,

Brandi Hutchins, School Nurse

Jennifer Thompson, Principal

Family Name: _____

PLEASE RETURN TO SCHOOL BY FEBRUARY 23, 2022

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____

____ I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE CHANGES REGARDING OPTIONAL MASK WEARING. I UNDERSTAND THAT THERE WILL BE SOME SITUATION IN WHICH MASKS WILL BE **REQUIRED** AND IF MY STUDENT(S) CANNOT COMPLY DURING THOSE SITUATIONS THEY WILL BE DISMISSED FROM SCHOOL AND WILL NOT RETURN UNTIL A COMPLETE (10 DAY) ISOLATION/QUARANTINE HAS BEEN ACHEIVED.

Parent Signature: _____

____ I request that my student(s) continues to wear a mask in school. I understand that by signing this document that staff will not be held responsible or liable for consistent mask use on behalf of my student.

Parent Signature: _____