



August 20, 2021

---

## Catholic Diocese of Columbus

---

Office of the Bishop  
614 • 224 • 2251

Dear Families,

Last week, the Office of Catholic Schools issued the Covid school protocols for the 2021-22 school year. Again, we thank you for your help that allowed us not only to keep our schools open last year, but to do so without any significant community spread of Covid through the schools. Since the pandemic began, we have all shared as our highest priority keeping children in school and learning 5-days a week in the safest possible conditions. To that end, we continue to monitor the conditions in the various parts of the Diocese and remain flexible to respond to the needs as they arise.

The opening of the school year coincides with a steep rise in the number of cases here in Central Ohio, as in most of the country. Those who are not vaccinated are particularly vulnerable to this variant of the virus. Since children under the age of 12 are not eligible for the vaccine, we need to take the conditions for their health and safety particularly seriously. Also, the health departments across the state are setting quarantine rules such that if a child tests positive for Covid, those who do not use masks will need to quarantine for a period of time while those who are vaccinated or wearing masks will be able to continue in school. For these reasons, parents of all children in our elementary schools and of unvaccinated children in our high schools are urged in the strongest possible terms to please have your children wear masks while indoors during this surge in the numbers of Covid cases.

Various conditions, including the rapidly increasing number of cases in Franklin County and the quarantine guidance from the local public health agencies that strongly incentivizes masks, lead us to require all schools in Franklin County to use masks indoors for students and staff. This temporary requirement will be re-evaluated weekly based a number of factors, including data published by the Ohio Department of Health. One of the primary markers for lifting this requirement at schools will be when the county transmission rate falls below 100 per 100,000. We will also look at other factors such as hospitalizations and the overall trend of illness and quarantine in the schools. Mask exemptions for medical reasons will be permitted by forms available through each school.

High schools are not impacted by this requirement, as students are eligible for vaccination, and we continue to encourage all students and staff to receive the vaccination.

We know the strength of opinion on masking on both sides of what has become an intense debate. We have heard from many of you and respect and understand your feelings. We ask you please to understand that this decision is temporary and rooted in a concern for the safety of our children and a sincere desire to keep our students present in the classroom every day. Ultimately, we want to leave this decision to parents, but we have an obligation to respond to the current spike in case

numbers. If requiring a mask for a short period of time means that we will prevent a serious illness, it is the right action to take. We believe that taking these proactive steps now will avoid the need to take reactive measures later.

As Catholic communities, our schools must strive to protect the needs and the dignity of all individuals as well as to live our call to love one another, to protect the vulnerable, and be supportive of the common good of those in our communities.

Thank you for understanding.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert Brennan". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Most Reverend Robert J. Brennan  
Bishop of Columbus

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Adam J. Dufault". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Adam J. Dufault  
Superintendent of Catholic Schools