



OFFICE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION
CATHOLIC DIOCESE of JACKSON

August 13, 2021

Dear Catholic School Community Members,

Since our last communication on July 25, a great deal has occurred concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. Our state has seen the highest number of cases in a single day since the start of the pandemic, and many of our hospitals and medical facilities have been pushed to capacity. When our guidance was issued at the end of July, we knew we were facing a spike in cases but had hoped it would pass quickly. Unfortunately, we see that is not our reality, and we have been forced to re-evaluate what we are doing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to ensure our teachers, students, and families are safe. After consultation with healthcare professionals, principals, canonical administrators, and Bishop Kopacz and following the [Mississippi Department of Health](#) and [CDC recommendations for schools](#), beginning Monday, August 16, all teachers and students in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Jackson will be required to wear masks.

This decision is not one our office takes lightly. Our number one priority is the health and safety of everyone entrusted to our care. In addition, we recognize that in-person learning is the best environment for our students. It is our responsibility to do everything we can to ensure these two things can happen simultaneously.

The decision to require masks has been made based on the data and [research](#) demonstrating that masks work to mitigate the spread of this virus. Throughout the pandemic, as mask mandates were implemented across the state, case numbers fell. Unfortunately, we now face higher case numbers than at any point during the last school year. In addition to higher case numbers, we are seeing an increase in infections in young children. As of August 11, there were six children in the pediatric intensive care unit at UMMC in Jackson with others across the state.

We feel it is counterintuitive to relax our mitigation strategies in the face of a stronger enemy in the delta variant. This mask mandate will be re-evaluated weekly until it is determined it is safe to relax our protocols.

We recognize and appreciate that families make sacrifices and pay tuition to send their children to our schools. While not everyone will agree with this decision, we hope you have enough trust in our office and your local school to understand we are working to serve our entire community.

We appreciate your continued support and prayers, and we will provide updates as needed moving forward.

Sincerely,

Karla Luke, Executive Director of School Operations

Stephanie Brown, Director of Curriculum & Development

CC: Joseph R. Kopacz, Bishop of Jackson