



July 30, 2021

Dear Saint Brigid Parents,

I am writing to you today to let you know the details of our Back-to-School COVID plan. This was formed in conjunction with the school committee last evening and based upon recommendations from the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Midland County Health Department.

Let me begin by saying that our goals for the school year are to maintain a safe and healthy learning environment and to keep our children in school, where teaching and learning is most effective.

The COVID cases that are steadily on the rise at this time are the new Delta variant cases. While 44, 000 people in Midland County have been vaccinated, vaccines are not yet available for children under 12. While children did not previously make up a large number of COVID cases, they make up an increasingly larger percentage of the Delta Variant cases. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the CDC and the Midland Health Department all have recommended universal masking for schools because of the fact that a significant portion of students are not yet eligible for the vaccine, because of the fact that the variants seem to spread more quickly among adults and children, and because there are still too many unknowns about the Delta variant.

In addition to masking, the Midland County Health Department has also recommended improved ventilation, rapid testing of symptomatic individuals, and cohorting. It is expected that we will continue to use contact tracing measures, cleaning and disinfecting and asking sick individuals to remain home.

While some of the COVID policies require sacrifice, our faith teaches us that we are to make sacrifices for others. We are not just called to be like Christ, we are called to BE Christ to others, caring for others as they need.

Because of the recommendations of the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Midland County Health Department guidance, and because we feel compelled to do our part to keep our children safe, we have adopted the following guidelines:

- All students who have not been vaccinated will be required to wear masks throughout the day, with the exception of meals, snack time and outdoor recess. This guidance is subject to change as conditions change.
- All staff, vaccinated or unvaccinated, will wear masks to model appropriate mask behavior for students.
- All students who have been vaccinated may choose not to wear masks within the classroom but will be required to wear masks within the hallways, in part to reduce transmission of the virus and in part because they, too, are called to be examples for younger students.
- There will be NO TRAVEL Quarantines required this year.

- We will continue to monitor temperatures using our thermal camera in the morning and after recess to identify and isolate cases of illness.
- There will be 3 daily screening questions for students, staff and visitors: Are you feeling well today (no sore throat, cough, etc.)?, Have you been exposed to someone who recently tested positive for COVID, Have you recently tested positive for COVID?
- Volunteers will be permitted in the building providing they have attended VIRTUS. They will be expected to wear masks and complete a daily screening form.
- We have installed UV Air handlers throughout the building to help to provide a healthy environment for all.
- Students will be cohorted but will have interactions with other classes to include: math instruction (for those students who have advanced one grade level), Mass, Circle of Prayer, sports, after school care activities.
- We will have sports after school. These will follow MHSAA guidelines, as soon as they become available, and our school guidelines.
- After school activities may resume but are expected to follow guidelines as set during the school day, including masking of students and adults, good handwashing and sanitizing techniques, etc.

These guidelines are subject to change as caseloads/guidance change. There is some hope that while caseloads seem to rise more quickly with the Delta variant, they may also decline more quickly. If caseloads in the area decrease steadily over a period of time, we may be able to relax the standards we currently have. Additionally, as vaccines become available for all of our students, we will relax the standards and mask mandates.

I do know that masking is a controversial issue. Please understand that this decision was not made without much research and discussion. I might leave you with a few observations of students throughout the previous year. Our kindergarten students wore their masks better than any other grade, many of them even forgetting or deciding not to take them off at recess. We made mask wearing more fun with our mask prizes. As a result, students would often stop to proudly show me their latest mask. Students proudly wrote, "St. Brigid school is the best- even if we have to wear masks" on the pavement in the parking lot. Another group of students made up songs and cheers about Saint Brigid. In everything they said about the school, masks were never mentioned. They were a non-issue for them. While the lack of masks is a sign of a return normal, and one in which we all would like to see, we are not quite there.

I leave you with a verse from Romans, 12:12. "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." My prayers are with all staff, students and parents as we begin this school year.

Prayerfully yours,

Laura E. Wilkowski

Principal

Saint Brigid Catholic School