

Joplin Area Catholic Schools

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August 12, 2021

Dear JACS school community members,

As we rapidly approach our first day of school on Thursday, August 19, I am writing to share with you our plan for beginning the school year with regard to the Covid virus. I am sure each of us hoped that our Joplin community and surrounding area would have been able to put Covid concerns behind us but that is not our reality right now. Instead, we face growing rates of infection, high levels of hospitalizations and death in our area at this time. These increases appear to be a result of the impact of the delta variant and low vaccination rates in our area.

To safely open our schools next week, ***we will require all students, staff, parents, and other visitors wear masks inside our buildings during the school day for at least the first two weeks of school (through at least September 3).*** Our pastors, school advisory board and administrative team will evaluate the reality of our local community on a month-by-month basis to determine when we can safely change our protocols. We will also maintain our cleaning protocols and provide as much social distancing as possible within our schools.

It would be our hope that at some point this fall we will be able to change this guidance and allow parents to make a decision about whether their child(ren) wear masks in school. This decision will take into consideration community spread, levels of vaccination within our schools and surrounding areas, and guidance we receive from our Catholic diocese, the CDC and other health officials.

I would encourage all eligible individuals to get vaccinated if you have not already done so. The vaccine is our best defense to the Covid virus as evidenced by the disproportionate number of hospitalizations and deaths among those who are unvaccinated. Pope Francis and our bishop, Bishop Rice, have strongly advocated that all individuals who are able to do so, to be vaccinated. I realize that our students who are under the age of 12 are not yet eligible to get the vaccine. Having other family members as well as other members of our school and parish communities who are fully vaccinated will help protect our children. I realize there are some who may be hesitant to get the vaccine or to have your older children vaccinated. I would encourage anyone who is hesitant to talk with your family doctor to discuss your concerns and to gain their advice as trained medical professionals. While respecting the rights of individuals to make their own decisions, we are also part of a Catholic community that calls us to care for the common good of all.

I am aware that many people, including myself, have grown weary of wearing masks, social distancing, etc. and wonder if we are ever going to end this global pandemic. In spite of such weariness, I do remain hopeful that our community can respond to this crisis with a singular concern for the well-being of all as we strive to reduce the spread of the Covid virus and protect one another from serious illness or death from Covid.

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St. Mary's Elementary School
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St. Peter's Middle School
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McAuley Catholic High School
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I have heard all too many stories of your family members or friends who have died or been seriously impacted by this virus. I am sorry for each of you who has lost loved ones to Covid and continue to pray that we will do all we can to reduce the impact of the virus.

As we began last year, I continue to invite us to entrust our schools, parishes and Joplin community to the provident care of our God as we pray.

Holy Mary, Health of the Sick, pray for us.

Saint Joseph, Hope for the Sick, pray for us.

Saint Marco, protector against epidemics, pray for us.

Respectfully,

S. Julie Brandt, SSND

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