



September 2, 2021

Dear members of the JACS community,

As we turn the calendar into September and anticipate the Labor Day holiday, I want to provide an update on our mask requirement at school. First, I would like to thank our school families who have, for the most, part been supportive of our efforts to keep our school community safe as we address the reality of Covid in our area. Our goal remains to safeguard the health of our school community while also providing the opportunity for students to learn and grow in knowledge and faith. Keeping students and staff safely in school is a part of what will help us achieve this goal.

I noted in my earlier communication to all of you that our school advisory board would revisit our decision to require masks throughout our schools at our August meeting. At our meeting last week, we reviewed the guidance that has been presented to us by the Joplin Health Department, a letter from over 100 area doctors urging the usage of masks in schools, as well as the realities within our community. In doing so we determined that we would make some adjustments to our masking guidance.

When we return to school after Labor Day, **we will require masks indoors in those places where 3 feet of distance cannot be maintained between individuals, i.e., when moving in the hallways, going through lunch line, or classroom activities that require students/teachers to be closer than 3 feet from others.** This generally means that when your child is seated at their desk in the classroom, they will not need to wear a mask, when they're up and moving around or working closely with others, masks will be expected.

This is a change from our current expectation that students and staff remain masked throughout the day. We are making this change because the Joplin Health Department has determined, based on guidance from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services and the CDC, that 3 feet of distance between individuals will be used to determine close contacts that might necessitate quarantining individuals for exposure to a person who is Covid positive. If you would prefer that your child remain masked at all times, please let the school know and we will help ensure that this happens.

I have attached to this letter the guidance protocols we will be using across our school system for determining when to quarantine or isolate individuals due to diagnosis of Covid or close contact exposure to someone who has Covid. This guidance is based on information provided by the Joplin Health Department. Regardless of where your family resides, we will follow this protocol for all our schools. Please note that there is a significant difference in the

protocols for being quarantined based on whether individuals are fully vaccinated, if both parties are properly masked, and where (in or out of school) the exposure occurred. This guidance has already been helpful to us as we've addressed the Covid cases we have had among our extended school community. Because we have been masking in school as well as practicing social distancing, we have not needed to quarantine anyone due to possible exposure to Covid at school.

While we do recognize some improvement in the numbers of diagnosed cases of Covid in our area, we are still considered to be an area of high transmission. The other concerning factor is that the Delta variant is proving to be much more transmissible among young people; many who are not yet eligible to receive the vaccine. We will continue to assess our guidelines monthly and update and change as warranted.

We ask you, as parents, to be vigilant for Covid symptoms that persist more than a day or two. If in doubt, please consult a health care provider for possible testing. Please do not send a child to school if they are showing signs and symptoms of Covid for more than a day or two.

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,

Sr. Julie Brandt, SSND
Director of Schools