

July 29, 2021

Dear Catholic School Community Members,

I pray this correspondence finds you well. With new school year approaching, we'd like to update you on our return to school as it relates to recent changes to federal and state guidance and local public health orders.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ADLA) has been closely monitoring public health conditions in all five public health agencies that serve our communities. We are grateful that all levels of government – federal, state and local authorities have made in-person instruction a priority this coming school year given how long most students were forced to learn at a distance last year. With the recent increase in COVID-19 cases, public health authorities have been considering what measures schools will be required to implement to maintain a stable and healthy in-person learning environment. Guidance and health orders have been evolving over the past several weeks and now we have a clearer picture as to how the start of the school year will look.

All TK-12 schools in California are permitted to reopen in-person for full-time, daily instruction. This represents significant progress from last year when we all reopened with distance learning. To maintain a safe in-person learning environment, the [California Department of Public Health](#) (CDPH) released updated guidance for TK-12 schools reflecting recent revisions from the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC). The update removes several requirements that were included in last year's guidance such as physical distancing, cohort scheduling, temperature checks and the wearing of masks outdoors – these are no longer mandated. The new guidance offers greater flexibility to our schools providing for a full-time, in-person instructional program this coming year.

With the elimination of these restrictions, CDPH is relying on a multi-layered transmission prevention strategy in schools. This strategy includes the wearing of masks indoors for all individuals (regardless of vaccination status), testing provided at no cost through federal and state funding, frequent hand washing and indoor ventilation. We understand that some consider any restrictions, like the wearing of masks indoors for school-aged children and the vaccinated, unnecessary. Others believe the state's guidance does not go far enough to mitigate transmission of COVID-19 in schools. Some news reports have implied schools (particularly non-public schools) have the discretion to make mask wearing optional. This is not accurate. We are required to enforce this mandate, as we would with any applicable civil law, regulation, or policy. Schools may enact stricter standards, but not less.

All five of the public health departments in the ADLA have aligned their health orders with the CDPH guidance for TK-12 schools and have affirmed that all schools, public and private, must

comply with the guidance for schools included in the State Public Health Officer Order of June 11, 2021, which derives its authority from California Health and Safety Codes 120125, 120140, 120175, 120195 and 131080 and other applicable laws. From a pediatric health perspective, indoor masking for school-aged children is supported by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#). In addition, children under 12 are not currently eligible for vaccine and individuals who are unvaccinated and/or have compromised immune systems and health conditions are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and suffering illness.

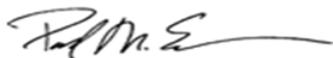
**As we have from the beginning of the pandemic, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles will maintain its alignment with public health orders and for this reason, students, faculty and staff in our schools are required to wear masks while indoors until the order has been lifted.**

Our prime objective is to protect the health and safety of our school community members while maintaining stable, uninterrupted in-person instruction for all students. Though we cannot eliminate the risk of transmission, if we remain vigilant and follow the guidance, our schools will avoid quarantines and outbreaks and remain open. It's important to note that our adherence to public health orders, including indoor masking, permitted a successful return to in-person instruction last year and minimized transmission of COVID-19. Moreover, as a Catholic community, we have a duty of care for one another, for the common good and to protect life.

The past 18 months have been challenging in different ways for everyone. Whether you're excited for the future, feeling overwhelmed by changes, frustrated from the circumstances, trying to process loss, or a combination of all these things, we want to acknowledge your role in making it through an historic school year. Our Catholic school communities and staff members supported each other, went far above and beyond to learn new ways of doing things and did everything possible to take care of our students and families. We did it together – we will do it again.

Thank you for your continued patience and understanding. May our faithful God shine warmly on you and your families this summer.

Yours in Christ,



Paul M. Escala  
Superintendent of Schools