



**DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER**  
*Superintendent of Schools*

February 18, 2022

Dear Parents,

In June 2021, we announced our decision to implement a “parent choice” mask policy for the start of the current academic year. It was our desire to provide parents with the flexibility and freedom to make their own decisions on whether or not they want their child to wear a mask at school, and the same was true for our teachers and staff.

At that time, the COVID statistics in our state were trending in a positive direction and we wanted to be responsive to that change. Our school leaders and I were committed to operating safely and responsibly, ensuring a high level of flexibility should unforeseen circumstances arise. This flexibility was put into operation shortly after the school year began. During the fall and early winter, the delta and omicron variants emerged, the number of COVID infections rose significantly, and the widespread language regarding vaccine efficacy changed. I engaged Catholic school leaders in continued dialogue to ensure the health of faculty, staff, students, their families, and the community at large. In addition to our COVID mitigation efforts, many schools implemented the use of masks as a temporary layer of protection and mitigation with the goal of always returning to parent and employee choice.

Thankfully, the number of COVID cases has declined precipitously over the last few weeks and it appears this trend will continue. This welcomed news! There has also been increased research regarding the persistent use of masks and the potential for learning delays among our youngest students. As a result of this information, and in the spirit of partnership, **all schools will adhere to “parent choice” as a system-wide policy as of Monday, February 28, 2022. This policy will stay in place for the remainder of the school year.** \*\*Please note that according to current federal guidelines, students must still wear masks when utilizing local public school bussing, and all schools will follow the NH DHHS guidelines on masking after isolation due to a positive COVID test.\*\* If schools experience a significant COVID outbreak, we will work with them in assessing their mitigation efforts, however our priority is always maintaining parental choice.

It is worth mentioning that our Catholic Schools Office has worked to provide schools with resource such as:

- Free in-school COVID diagnostic testing kits
- Resources for continued virus mitigation efforts
- Partnership with the Department of Education for state EANS/ EANS+1 funding for COVID-related expenses

We believe that our Catholic schools are partners with parents in the education and formation of their children. Please have a conversation with your child about what your expectations are regarding their mask use, as schools will not be policing their adherence to parental decisions. The direction of Bishop Libasci in his June 6<sup>th</sup> Letter to the Faithful is most appropriate when he stated, *“In making a decision whether to wear a mask...let us not shame or admonish other people whatever course of action they decide to take.”*

I appreciate the patience, grace, and charity with which parents, staff, and most importantly- students- have navigated this changing environment. Families have done an incredible job in mitigating the spread of COVID in their school communities by keeping children home when sick. Our principals have succeeded in the herculean task of making life at school as normal as possible for students and staff. None of this has been easy, nor expected, but we rejoice in the hope that is Christ, and in our communion with one another.

Know of my steadfast prayers for you and all our Catholic school families. We know that sending your child(ren) to Catholic schools is a choice, and an investment. Thank you for choosing a Catholic education for your family. May the Lord bless you abundantly.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David A. Thibault".

David A. Thibault

Superintendent of Catholic Schools  
Diocese of Manchester