

8.20.21

Dear Erie Catholic School Families,

I write to let you know of my gratitude to you and your children. The challenges that we have encountered over the last 18 months have been significant, and I do understand that dealing with protocols, mitigation efforts, recommendations and mandates can be overwhelming.

One difference this year is that we have a year-long record of successfully navigating the COVID-19 pandemic behind us. For the most part, we have been able to meet our goals of maintaining in-person instruction while keeping our students, their families and our staff safe. Our students experienced far less academic disruption than most. This was achieved because we followed recommended mitigation strategies, and all pulled in the same direction with patience, flexibility and respect. Again, I am grateful.

Working in close collaboration with the Catholic Schools Office (CSO), we are implementing protocols similar to last year as we begin the 2021-22 academic year. As you may have seen in a release from the Diocese of Erie, available at www.eriecd.org/news-releases.html, the CSO and our Return to School Planning Committee remain confident in the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control, paired with available transmission rate data.

We do have some degree of autonomy regarding our decisions this year and we are working closely with our system board and principals in our plans.

When we shared our 'Return to School Plan 21-22' we were aware and acknowledged that our plan was fluid and could change. During the first three weeks of schools, Erie Catholic School System schools will require all students and employees to wear a mask regardless of their vaccination status. An update on mask requirements will be shared by September 17th.

This mitigation strategy was enhanced due to several reasons: community transmission in Erie County and additional CDC guidance on quarantine measures.

A new page has been added to the 'Return to School Plan' which outlines quarantining and isolation. Our two primary goals are the safety of the students/employees and in person education. An overwhelming majority of our students cannot receive the vaccine and therefore if they are a close contact of someone with COVID-19 they will need to stay at home for 10-14 days. If they choose to test and it is negative, they may leave after day 8 but will need to mask through day 14.



This summer we had over 200 students in our summer program, all children were temperature checked and masked before entering our buildings. We did not report any COVID-19 cases or outbreaks.

We are aware that an outbreak at our schools could happen that requires us to strategically close classrooms or schools. We also know the hardship quarantining and isolation has on the student and family. Therefore, by masking, we are doing what we can to keep the two goals in check: safety and in person learning.

Earlier this week, we met with the Erie County Department of Health and learned that face shields, (permitted last school year) do not count as a mask. We wish to clarify that our schools will require masks.

We will continue a thoughtful and deliberate approach to any changes in strategy as new developments regarding COVID-19 emerge.

I encourage you to look at the outlined changes made to the 'Return to School Plan', updated in red. I anticipate questions or concerns and you are welcome to email questions@eriecatholic.org. I will do my best to respond as soon as possible.

I want to encourage you to not lose sight of the hope and excitement that comes with a new school year. Your children are strong and resilient, and our faculty and staff are getting their classrooms ready, focused on providing an excellent education to your students in a safe, nurturing and faith-filled environment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bridget Philip".

Bridget Philip
Erie Catholic School System
Interim President