



## PITTSBURGH CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Catholic School Community,

I wish you many blessings as we journey through this season of Advent. The season is one of joy, faith, and hope as we await the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Patience is one word that comes to mind in any time of waiting – patience and faith. It is in that spirit that I convey the content of this message.

Catholic schools serve a critical role in the faith formation, education, and emotional development of each student they serve. For over two hundred years Catholic educators have engaged in this ministry, they have faced and met numerous challenges. For almost two years, Catholic schools have faced and overcome challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We did not let our students down.

As Catholic communities, we are called to protect and enhance the life and dignity of each person while also living our Gospel call to love one another, be mindful of the common good, and to protect the vulnerable among us. Therefore, we will continue our requirement that adults and children wear masks inside all Catholic school buildings in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

The current mask requirement, coupled with the close contact distance of 3 feet, has reduced the number of close contacts required to quarantine compared to last year despite comparatively high case counts. While cases are rising in our schools, our contact tracing shows that COVID is not spreading within the schools but coming into the schools from external events.

It is and has been our goal to keep as many children as possible in school for in-person instruction. We continue to have concerns for the health and well-being of our students, faculty and staff members. Current staffing shortages in western Pennsylvania warrant extreme care in implementing mitigation strategies that keep our teachers safe and healthy in school.

With the holiday season upon us, we want to use every mitigation possible to enable our students and staff to enjoy the events of the season and the start of winter sports. We will review our current mitigation strategies in mid-January. This will provide a two-week buffer following the Christmas holiday break and an opportunity to review the community spread within each county and

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recommendations from the CDC to determine next steps. Our current health and safety plan states that the mask may become optional when community spread is in the low or moderate category.

We have heard from many parents on both sides of the masking debate. We recognize that COVID-19 will be with us for the foreseeable future, and we are examining the proper process and metrics for transitioning from mask required to mask optional.

Please know that our intent is keep our schools fully open and our students fully engaged in their faith, academics, physical and social development. I ask for your continued prayers for our schools as we walk together to the stable in Bethlehem to welcome our Lord, Jesus.

God bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle A. Peduto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michelle A. Peduto