

NOTRE DAME ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



PROTECTING THE PRIDE



September 7, 2021

Dear Parents,

As you know, my number one goal for your children is to keep them safe and healthy while in school while continuing to follow [our health protocols](#). My second goal is to remain open all year with in-person learning.

While many of us may have differing viewpoints about masking or non-masking, we can all agree that in-person learning is optimal for students' growth and development. They not only need to see the teacher in person, but also greatly benefit from the social-emotional aspects of in-person learning. [COVID-19 and subsequent quarantining](#) will take away our ability to instruct our students in-person.

Last year we were able to stay open and offer in-person learning all year because we took safety precautions to keep our students healthy and for the most part, virus-free. One of those precautions was mandating the wearing of masks. While there were several factors keeping our children healthy, wearing masks helped prevent the widespread escalation of the virus at Notre Dame Elementary School.

We began this year with an optional mask policy, campus wide. In the beginning of August, this was the clearest guideline we could give, given that health and government authorities would strongly encourage, but not mandate wearing masks.

Because vaccines are available to persons 12 years and older, we know our older students have this added layer of protection available to them. Our younger students do not. What separates us from NDCL is that most of our elementary students are not vaccinated, and most of them are not even eligible for the vaccine.

Throughout, I have messaged that our school will be responsive and responsible to the emerging conditions. The first few weeks were uneventful, but over the weekend, we experienced our first COVID-19 case and many reported incidents of COVID-19 symptoms in our students. We anticipate this to continue, unless we add another layer of protection for our students, faculty and staff.

For all the above reasons, ***effective tomorrow, September 8th, we are requiring masks for students, faculty, staff and visitors at Notre Dame Elementary School.***

- The mask mandate will be effective until further notice, and NDES will be closely monitoring the data daily. When the time comes to adjust the mandate, we will communicate updates to parents in a prompt manner.
- We will take multiple mask breaks throughout the day and masks will not need to be worn at lunch and at recess. Masks are to be worn by all staff and students with the exception being medical or religious exemptions.
- If you believe your child is eligible for a medical exemption, please call me so I can send you the proper form to be completed by your child's physician. The Catholic faith has no prohibition against face coverings, as shown by the words and actions of the Holy Father and our own bishop. However, if you believe there is a faith-based prohibition that applies to your child, please call me so we can discuss your situation.

I understand this decision is controversial and will not be met with everyone's approval, but please know that I appreciate everyone's viewpoint and understand that reasonable people can have different opinions on this topic. However, I believe it is vitally important to do all we reasonably can to ensure our students and staff can continue in-person schooling. We cannot meet this goal if, due to exposure to COVID-19, students and staff must quarantine themselves for a week or more at a time. The temporary mask requirement ensures, as much as possible, that we will not be faced with the possibility of going to virtual instruction this year.

We managed to get through last year being present in school for all but four days with very few cases of COVID-19. I ask that you place your trust in us again to have another successful in-person year of learning.

Thank you for your continued patience, flexibility and support.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jacqueline Hoynes

