

Dear MACS Family,

The purposes of this email are to inform you of a few timely updates regarding MACS' COVID-19 response. Due to the length of this email, I have bolded the most important takeaways below and list them here for those short on time (all details below):

1. **Cases/Dashboard.** You can find our positive cases and quarantines, updated weekly, on our MACS dashboard, located on the top right hand side of our [MACS COVID-19 Resource page](#).
2. **Limited Masking.** In the event that 20% or more of a student cohort is absent due to COVID-19 isolation or quarantine, the remaining students and teacher(s) in the cohort will need to wear masks while indoors for a two week period, or until the absentee rate drops below 20%.
3. **Vaccines.** We will not be hosting a vaccine clinic at our schools at this time nor will we mandate vaccines for students or staff. Please consult your child's pediatrician. [Vaccines.gov](#) is a resource from the Centers for Disease Control.
4. **Revision of Quarantine Rules at MACS.** As you may know, persons who are vaccinated or have had a positive COVID test within the prior 90 days are not asked to quarantine but instead to monitor for symptoms. MACS has chosen to expand the 90 day window to six months, according to science and in an attempt to keep more kids in school.

First, a bit of a personal note. **I want to acknowledge with gratitude those that have reached out in various ways these past days and throughout this pandemic.** I hear you. I may not at this time have individual personalized responses. In fact, I am out sick as I write this. While I am out of commission, please continue to exercise patience and kindness with one another. This community has been so great throughout this ordeal, and I don't know if I'll really be able to fully express that gratitude - to parents and staff alike - until the weight and anxiety eventually lift. In any event, our help is in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we cherish your children in His name. We're not perfect, but we are trying our level best to continue to serve our students and mission.

Outside our walls, it's getting ugly. I see with sadness my beloved home, our Chippewa Falls community, splitting at the seams: so tired of this disease, its perils real and imagined, and the trouble and loss it has caused. Yet it is absurd to be angry with a virus, so we are tempted to turn on each other. As for you, my friends, please continue to bear with one another in love. It's rarely been more challenging, but it's what we are called to do.

With that being said, on to the practical stuff. Please note these matters were discussed with the pandemic committee last week and, in particular, the limited masking policy change was unanimously approved. In attempting to land on the prudent course of action, often the middle ground between extremes, I can't promise to make you all happy with my decisions. All I can ask is for your trust, cooperation, and perseverance. It's a tall order, but I am asking anyway.

1. Case Numbers/Dashboard

You can find our positive cases and quarantines, updated weekly, on our MACS dashboard, located on the top right hand side of our [MACS COVID-19 Resource page](#), as we did last year (thanks to those of you who made this helpful suggestion). What we are seeing in our buildings and hearing from other schools is that, once the virus hits a cohort, it seems to spread pretty easily.

As many of you are painfully aware, we are in the thick of it and we expect it to get worse before it gets better. Some families have mentioned to me that they are taking this opportunity to review their choices about things like vaccines, out of school activities, etc. I trust that you will make the best decisions you can according to your judgment, values, and the information available.

2. Updates to Masking Policy

Our number one goal is to keep our students learning in person, yet with safety in mind. Therefore, we are adopting a responsive approach to masking which is tailored specifically to cohorts experiencing high case volumes, in an attempt to check the spread of virus in that cohort.

In the event that 20% or more of a student cohort is absent due to COVID-19 isolation or quarantine, the remaining students and teacher(s) in the cohort will need to wear masks while indoors for a two week period, or until the absentee rate drops below 20%. A student cohort is defined as follows:

1. At grades K-5, the cohort is the homeroom.
2. At grades 6-8, there are two cohorts for each grade level.
3. At the high school, it is not possible to cohort due to mixed grade scheduling. Therefore, the high school student body will be considered one “cohort” for purposes of this policy.

While we are aware that masks are a divisive topic, we feel confident that the majority of our families would rather have a child learn at school in a mask for two weeks versus go home due to isolation or quarantine. Please be assured that this step is not opening the door to a more wide-ranging mask requirement, which I feel could have long-term negative effects later on. If your student's cohort exceeds the 20% threshold, you will receive an email from your building principal notifying you of this fact, including the dates the mask requirement will be necessary.

3. Vaccine Survey Follow-up

Thank you for taking our recent vaccine clinic interest survey. Based on the results, **we will not be hosting a vaccine clinic at our schools at this time nor will we mandate vaccines for students or staff.** Most of our families fall into one of three areas: already vaccinated, too young to vaccinate, or choose not to vaccinate at this time. However, if you are interested in a vaccine for your student(s), we highly encourage you to contact your child's health care provider or a local clinic site such as Walgreens for more information and/or to make an appointment. Additionally, several of you indicated that you would like more information about the vaccine.

[Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) has some great information in general. Additionally, we will be hosting a virtual Q&A with a local health care provider in the very near future. We also encourage our families to focus on hygiene and overall health, including mental wellness, proper sleep, water intake, nutrition, Vitamin D, etc. Take good care of yourselves!

4. Quarantine Update and Explanation

First, a word on quarantine requirements. **As you may know, persons who are vaccinated or have had a positive COVID test within the prior 90 days are not asked to quarantine, but instead to monitor for symptoms. MACS has chosen to expand the 90 day window to six months, according to science.** If your student receives a quarantine notice from public health, but he or she has tested positive for COVID in the six months prior to the notice, we will not enforce that quarantine in our schools. We simply require that you notify us of that as soon as possible after receiving the quarantine notice.

Second, many have had questions and concerns about our quarantine processes, which are different from last year, as I attempted to explain in our most recent FAQ. I apologize for any confusion I may have caused. When we receive notice of a positive student case, we look at our seating charts to determine who the student's close contacts have been in the relevant time window. We provide that list to public health, as advised by our legal counsel. Public health then makes a quarantine decision and notifies the parent(s) in writing via email. (Public health has records of who is vaccinated and who has had a positive COVID case reported in the past.)

Let me be clear that we will not refuse to cooperate with our local public health by ignoring quarantine recommendations, in respectful disagreement with some parents who believe otherwise. We are directed by our Diocese to cooperate with public health, and our faith counsels us to honor civic authorities unless it would become a serious matter of conscience (for example, we would not mandate vaccines due to the Vatican statement holding vaccines to be a personal choice). It would be imprudent to have outbreak notices issued against our schools and simply allow the virus to spread unchecked. We have to balance our desire for in-person learning with our obligations to legitimate authorities and the realities in our buildings.

That being said, we are not the quarantine police, we are educators, and our proper role in this regard is limited. We might miss some close contacts in our reporting. Again, we use seating charts, but do not open full investigations of a child's every move. If you are the parent/guardian of a positive student, you may notify public health of the names and contact information of additional persons with whom your child was within close contact in the 48 hours preceding symptoms or test draw. They should absolutely be contacting every positive with those questions. It is the job of public health to make quarantine determinations and inform us of those determinations. We definitely expect parents or guardians who receive these notices to keep their students home from school and school activities.

We promise to ensure the students' continuity of learning during isolation or quarantine, starting no later than 48 hours after notice to the teachers. Keep in mind teachers will not instantaneously be aware of who is in quarantine.

In conclusion, I realize this email is long. We've had a lot of developments and I owe you new information and a lot of explanation. Thanks for hanging in there with us and may God protect our students and families from harm.

In Christ our hope,

Molly Bushman