



March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Dear Waterloo Catholic Community –

We sincerely hope that this letter finds you well. It has been exactly 2 years since we sat on the cusp of the 2020 March Break and we began to receive the news that the arrival of COVID-19 was going to be changing our lives rather significantly. We did not know then what we know now – just how dramatically our lives would change and what a seemingly long journey it would be. During that time our staff have been nothing short of heroic in their efforts to respond to the ever-evolving demands of the pandemic. Similarly – our students and families have also been truly remarkable in their partnership and willingness to journey with us, through each new challenge that came our way. In an announcement yesterday, the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health, (along with many other leaders in various parts of the country and world), has signalled that it is time to start transitioning to a more normalized life.

While this is welcome news, and an update we have desired for some time, it is going to evoke mixed reactions amongst our staff and families. Above all else, we would encourage cultivating an environment of respect and tolerance for views that may differ from our own. Throughout the pandemic we have relied on the Guiding Principle of following the guidance of the Chief Medical Officer of Health for the province, and that of Waterloo Region Public Health.

**This letter brings some critical updates about the return to school on Monday March 21st:**

#### **Screening:**

It is still extremely important that **anyone feeling ill should not attend school**. All children, students, staff, and visitors must be screened for symptoms of illness every day before attending school or childcare. St. Louis students who have enrolled their child in our school's onsite childcare/childminding programs should contact the childcare directly for health and safety updates and screening guidelines. Any student or staff member with **any symptom** should **not** report to school. To help meet this requirement, you should use the provincial screening tool found here: [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#). Using the screening tool will lead you to the right process for family/household contacts as well. **Please use the screener and review your full outcome carefully**. While screening is mandatory, confirmation of screening is no longer required.

#### **Masks:**

In alignment with community masking requirements, masks will no longer be required by staff or students. With that said, we would encourage a gradual release of their use. We are still not quite through winter, and staff and students might do well to continue mask wearing until we get firmly into the spring months. Staff who desire a mask will still be provided with them, per current practice. Again – we will have to be mindful not to engage with or judge others if their views do not align with our own. We do well to remind our students of the same.



**Testing:**

When an individual feels symptomatic, please follow the direction of the [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#) and seek a rapid test kit that is widely available in community.

**Cohorting and Distancing:**

We will start to see a loosening of distanced seating and cohorting and classrooms will start to return to less restricted practices for teaching, collaborating and communicating.

**Case and Contact Management:**

We will be continuing to report upon and monitor school absenteeism rates and will work with Public Health if concerning thresholds are reached. The Ministry of Health has revised the [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#), with updated guidance for close contacts in the community and in households.

**Graduations:**

The Chief Medical Officer of Health and Ministry of Education has indicated that we can begin planning for the normal celebratory events connected with graduation. We will now begin the process of planning and seeing what is possible for St. Louis' 2021-2022 Graduation held this Fall.

**Travel:**

March Break does sometimes signal travel. A reminder that under [current federal travel requirements](#), upon return from international travel, individuals must, wear a mask at all times when in public spaces (including schools and child care), maintain a list of all close contacts for your first 14 days in Canada, and monitor yourself for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

**Vaccination:**

Vaccination for children 5-11 is currently underway. Booster shots will be available over the March Break for our youth who are 12 to 17 years of age. Booster shots for anyone over 18 years of age continues. Waterloo Region Public Health will help us continue to support school-based clinics for vaccination.

**Extra-Curriculars:**

St. Louis does not offer extra-curricular activities or athletics, yet continues to support Homework Clubs in-person at Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools.

We are very grateful for your support and partnership as we do our best to keep our students learning, healthy and engaged. The March Break signals that the season of spring will soon be upon us. As we journey toward Lent, let us remember that we are an Easter people and we are now journeying toward the season of rebirth and new life.

Sincerely,

Loretta Notten, Director of Education

