



Tuesday, April 20, 2021

Dear Colleagues & Families,

Thank you for your patience with us since yesterday, when the Governor announced he is rescinding the mask requirements for K-12 schools.

Since last August, it seems we have had before us numerous decisions that inevitably frustrate and divide, no matter the direction we choose. Our original decision to open the schools was one such decision. It was made successful only because of the tremendous goodwill brought by faculty, parents, staff and students in carrying out that decision, no matter the challenges.

As it was then, we still today have differences of opinion regarding the best way forward. Of course, I wish we were all of one mind but, alas.... Our family circumstances and our differing experiences with the impacts of the virus have given us different perspectives and expectations.

For Great Hearts AZ, what has been consistent from the beginning is that we remained committed to following state guidelines, implementing robust cleaning regimens, and using campus level data to provide the clearest direction on how to ensure our school communities were, and are, safe. We have learned a lot over the past many months.

Case counts at our schools, even as they rose in line with the state, have always remained significantly lower than the state averages. We have not, as a matter of fact, seen significant spread across our nearly 12,000 in-person students and 1,500 faculty and staff this semester. We celebrate this. Over the past two months, positivity rates have dropped significantly across the schools, with many seeing no cases in over a month.

The debate around the efficacy of masks in all of this is, of course, a central and dividing issue. People's minds are made up one way or the other. For our part, as public schools, we believe we were right to submit to the state authorities on the matter. And our parents, on the whole, were happy to comply. With the requirement now lifted by the state authorities, we believe *parents should have the right to determine if their child wears a mask at school. Therefore, starting tomorrow, we will no longer be requiring that masks be worn by students. The same is true for faculty and staff on our campuses.*

However, any member of our community who wishes to wear a mask may continue to do so. We will not be discouraging mask wearing, and we will expect goodwill between those who choose to wear a mask and those who choose not to.

Please keep in mind that, in the Archways, the desk shields will remain in place for the rest of the school year. We will also continue, on all campuses, the cleaning protocols, ventilation regimens, and other health and safety measures for the rest of this quarter. For High School athletic competition, we will continue to abide by AIA mask requirements.

Please also note, should a campus see any concerning rise in cases, the Covid Response Team can decide to reinstate mask requirements as they deem necessary. We believe this is unlikely, based upon all available data and experience, but of course we will be watching closely.

Next Monday, I will be sharing our updated safety guidelines for the new school year.



I realize this decision will please some and frustrate others. I hope we can move forward with one another and make these last final weeks as positive and joyful for our students as possible.

Most Sincerely,
Erik