



August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Re: Smarter Safer Schools

Dear Parents and Community Leaders in East Baton Rouge, Livingston, and Ascension Parishes,

The Delta variant is causing skyrocketing cases of COVID-19 among children in Louisiana. As a healthcare coalition united with physicians who treat children and families from neighborhoods and communities across our region, we unite in a common voice to gain greater control over COVID-19 and the Delta variant so we can send our children and teachers back to safe school environments. We support the current back-to-school guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the recommendation that all children from kindergarten to grade 12 wear masks and social distance when indoors regardless of vaccination status.

The purpose of this guidance is to continue to support local leaders in education and public health, as they create policies for safe schools to foster the overall health of children, adolescents, educators, staff, and communities.

Schools and school-supported programs are fundamental to child and adolescent development and well-being and provide our children and adolescents with academic instruction, social and emotional skills, safety, reliable nutrition, physical/occupational/speech therapy, mental health services, health services, and opportunities for physical activity, among other benefits.

Our schools must continue to take a multi-pronged, layered approach to protect students, teachers, and staff (i.e., vaccinations, universal mask use, hand washing, ventilation, high-quality COVID-19 testing resources that are routinely available and accessible, quarantining, cleaning, and disinfecting). Combining these layers of protection will make in-person learning as safe as possible.

Students, teachers, and staff should stay home when they have signs of any infectious illness and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care. If a parent or student does not wish to comply with their school’s guidelines, they should consider online learning options. We hope that medical exceptions will be minimal so that all of our students and staff can return to school safely.

Everything possible must be done to keep students in schools for in-person learning. Many families do not have adequate support to care for their children if they return home and employers in our region are counting on their employees to return to work to keep our businesses open and successful.

Sincerely,

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Our Lady of the Lake  
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