



Heritage Christian School

"United in One Faith, One Hope, One Heritage"

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Dear Heritage Christian School supporters,

The apostle Paul wrote, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Corinthians 4:17). The life of a Christian has been tested and tried - and recently we have felt affliction in different forms. One who walked an afflicted life - persecuted and despised for teaching about Our God, refers to "light affliction". The worldwide pandemic that we are experiencing has caused us affliction - sickness, anxiety, frustration, fear of overreach on the part of the government, and threatens to cause philosophical divisions among us. What it also *must* do is cause us to see that God is testing us, and He is preparing us for His kingdom through our earthly walk. "When we walk with the Lord in the light of His word, What a glory He sheds on our way...Trust and Obey"

The announcement from the Ottawa County Department of Public Health (OCDPH) on August 20, 2021 took away a bit of the excitement as we look to begin a new year. The COVID committee received communications from the OCDPH on August 6, 9, and 11 regarding the start of the school year. All of these communications referred to layers of protection for staff and students, and *recommendations* for masks. Based on this, the COVID Committee formed our Plan which was published on August 17, 2021.

Our Plan implemented these layers of protection by increasing spacing in the classroom, increasing emphasis on handwashing, and *allowing* masks based on parental choice. We also published health guidelines, and a reminder to keep sick students home. In so doing, we acted in good faith based on the input of the OCDPH and in what we thought was a reasonable manner.

The August 20, 2021 Order of Kent and Ottawa Counties takes that choice out of your hands and ours. If you haven't read the Order, here it is:

- "1. The Educational Institutions shall ensure that people in pre-kindergarten through grade six consistently and properly wear a facial covering while inside any enclosed building or structure of the institution.
2. The Educational Institutions shall ensure that all persons, regardless of vaccination status, providing service to any persons in pre-kindergarten through grade six properly and consistently wear a facial covering while inside any enclosed building or structure of the institution."

This Order is set to expire 60 days after the vaccine has been approved for use by 5-11 year old students. It is important for you to know that prior to the Order being released, we communicated with the OCDPH and expressed our concerns about timing and overreach. After publication, we communicated again as they had not yet answered our first communication. This time we included the attorney for the OCDPH in our communications. We also have contacted our attorney, who has

prepared a legal brief for us. That brief will be posted on the school website, but in summary, he is of the mind that this Order will hold up to legal challenges.

Must we obey the law? As it is not in opposition to the law of God, we must obey.

Can a private school be exempted? No, the Order refers to *all* educational institutions.

What if we disobey? We will be subject to the penalties imposed by OCDPH including at minimum fines, potential impact on educational licensing, and potential school closure.

What will happen to my child if they do not obey? The first time we will issue them a mask. The next time we will ask you to pick them up. We desire to be gracious, and we will. However, our teachers and staff need to focus on education, not mask compliance.

Will masks be required outside? Not at this time. For this reason, we will conduct PE and some classes outside as well for as long as the weather permits.

Can my child be exempted? Exemptions to the Order are possible. If your child has a mask exemption on file from last year, there is no need to submit another one. New exemptions will require a signed waiver from an MD or DO. These waivers are available from the HCS office. Additional exemptions can be applied for students as follows: "Masks are not required for students with developmental conditions at any age for whom it has been demonstrated that wearing a mask inhibits their education. This is limited to students with an IEP, 504 plan, or equivalent plan on file at school." In most cases, students to whom this language refers already have a waiver on file.

Must masks be worn in chapel and devotions? The Order does not allow for mask exemptions for K-6 grade students or staff in chapel or devotions.

Who can I direct my questions to? Questions about practice and how this impacts your child are outlined in the HCS Plan. If you have other questions of this type, please call the school. Questions addressing the Order specifically can be sent to the Ottawa County Department of Public Health, the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners, or your State Senator or State Representative. Their numbers and addresses are all online.

Our experience last year was that children are resilient and obedient. How we speak with them and model behavior for them is very important. As we work together for the good of their education, let us not allow this Order to hinder what we are here to do. Let's educate His children to the best of our ability teaching them to honor and love a Creator and Savior. And may this education be used for the service of the King who makes us "sincerely willing and ready to live unto Him". (HC Q&A 1).

Heritage Christian School Board