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September 1, 2021

Dear ATS Families,

As stated in our Parent Orientation, we have continued to monitor Medina County's positive COVID-19 transmission rates, as well as our local public schools' positivity and quarantine rates. According to the Ohio Department of Health, the number of positive cases in Medina County has increased dramatically in the past week. There were 283 confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported on August 30<sup>th</sup>, versus 83 cases reported only 4 days earlier.

Due to this concerning trend, we feel it is necessary to increase our layers of protection at Around the Sun by **requiring all students, staff, and parent volunteers to wear an appropriate face covering during operational hours**. Students and staff will be required to wear a face covering while indoors except for snack, lunch (all-day students), and mask breaks.

Around the Sun will promote a culture of wearing face coverings where students feel they have choice and control within the limits of safety. Students will have opportunities to take mask breaks independently, when they feel the need to do so, throughout the day. We will provide designated "mask break" areas in the classroom that will be safely distanced from other students.

We understand that there are many opinions and challenges related to the topic of wearing masks, especially for young children. It was our hope to leave this decision up to each family, as we recognize that there are concerns related to pre-existing health conditions, speech and language development, anxiety, and other reasons that may impact young children. However, all current guidance strongly suggests the wearing of masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status, as one of many tiers of intervention. We respect this guidance and ask that you help us to keep our children and teachers safe by supporting and accepting this recommendation.

We recognize the challenge in expecting children to consistently wear a mask for extended periods of time, so we are asking for your help in getting your child accustomed to wearing a mask as we approach the start of the new school year. We will continue to support this effort by incorporating lessons on how to properly wear a mask, so it safely covers the nose and mouth. We ask that each student bring at least one extra mask to school (in a labeled baggie) so they have access to a fresh mask should they need it throughout the day.

Thank you in advance for your support and understanding. The past few weeks have been quite challenging for the ATS staff as we juggle the demands of classroom setup with constantly changing COVID statistics and guidelines. The safety and well-being of your children are our top priority, and we are hopeful that the strategies we have put in place, including masking, will lead to an amazing year of in-person learning!

Respectfully,

The Staff at Around the Sun Montessori