



DIOCESE OF
FORT WAYNE-SOUTH BEND
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

Date: August 3, 2020

Re: Update on School Year 2020-2021

Dear Parents and Families,

The coronavirus has had a dramatic impact on families, Catholic schools, parishes, and the diocese. Besides the obvious challenges to life, health, and financial sustainability, it has also impacted our ability to be in community with one another, our reception of the sacraments, and the way that we teach and serve.

So many of our teachers embody what St. Mother Theodore Guerin told her religious sisters, "love the children first, then teach them." For months, our Catholic schools have been eagerly preparing for the 2020-21 school year, and we know that our teachers and staff long for the opportunity to be with the children again.

It is important to note, however, that our diocese covers fourteen counties. In forty-three schools, we serve over 13,000 children. The number of Covid-19 cases varies in each county and, no doubt, the faculty, staff, and parents. Across the diocese have been watching the news regarding school reopening plans.

On the subject of reopening schools, there is no shortage of opinion, and rightly so, because we all care so deeply for the health and safety, growth in holiness, and, ultimately, the salvation of the children entrusted to our care and for the faculty and staff that have answered God's call for a vocation in Catholic education.

Our pastors and principals know best the needs of their specific community, can work according to their county's health department recommendations, understand the nuances of their buildings, and have the details of the reopening plans they have developed over the last several months. For these reasons, **pastors, in collaboration with their principals, will decide how best to begin the school year, whether that is in-person classes, a hybrid model, or virtual learning.**

Our faith is relational, incarnational, and sacramental. We learn best about accompaniment, abiding with Our Lord, and the importance of personal witness when we are in-person. While some Catholic schools may be able to open with in-person classes due to the space in their building that allows for social distancing, other Catholic schools may need to begin with a hybrid or virtual model, and then move to in-person learning later.

For the reopening of our Catholic schools, it is important to know the factors that have gone into the decision-making process. We have taken each of the following into full consideration:

- First, the family is the domestic Church. It is in the context of the family that we first learn who God is and to seek His will for us prayerfully.¹
- Second, parents are the primary educators² in the faith, and the Church works with parents to catechize children through the ministries of the parish and Catholic schools.³

¹ Lumen Gentium, 11.

² Gravissimum Educationis, 3.

³ Evangelii Nuntiandi, 44; cf. Canon 793-794, CCC #2223.



- Third, the Church's mission is to evangelize⁴ and, at the heart of that mission, are our Catholic schools⁵.
"These Catholic schools afford the fullest and best opportunity to realize the fourfold purpose of Christian education, namely to provide an atmosphere in which the Gospel message is proclaimed, community in Christ is experienced, service to our brothers and sisters is the norm, and thanksgiving and worship of God is cultivated⁶."
- Fourth, bishops, as successors of the apostles, are the chief pastors of the Church who receive at ordination the offices of teaching, sanctifying, and governing. Entrusted with the diocesan bishop is the pastoral care of the people of his diocese.
- Fifth, the bishop appoints pastors who exercise pastoral care for the parish community entrusted to their care⁷, and these pastors must take special care for the Catholic education of the children and young people in their parish⁸. The bishop has the right to issue directives regarding our Catholic schools⁹. He works closely with pastors who know the needs of their individual parishes.
- Lastly, we seek the advice of state and local health experts as well as the advice of our peers in public and non-public schools.

Jesus calls us to be disciples and bring hope to our community and our world, which is so desperately in need of healing, unity, and joy. We know that Our Lord has placed each of us at this moment to serve, to respond with faith, and to trust in His presence, and to know that whatever we face in this current moment we should place in the broader context of being called to union with God in heaven for eternity.

We believe "Behold; children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward." (Psalm 127:3). We must do what is best for all children when it comes to safety when they come to school. For these reasons, even though every school individualized their reopening plan, the following approved policies from the Catholic Schools Office are in every school's plan.

- If deemed safe, the goal is to reopen for in-person instruction, with a virtual-only option for parents who do not feel it is safe to send their children to the building. Schools need to plan to transition, if needed, to a hybrid (combines face-to-face classroom instruction with online activities) schedule or virtual-only learning.
- Parents will be responsible for making sure their child(ren) conducts daily health screens and stays home if they have a fever or other symptoms of COVID-19.
- The administration, faculty, staff, and visitors will conduct or undergo daily health screens before they enter the building to ensure they do not have symptoms of COVID-19.
- Cleaning touch point surfaces will occur throughout the day and enhanced cleaning at night to disinfect for COVID-19 and other contagions.
- Hand washing and sanitizing will occur when entering and exiting the school and scheduled throughout the day.
- Our schools will social-distance six feet in the building and at extra/co-curricular events when practical.
- Every member of the school will wear a cloth face covering when entering and exiting the school, during transitions to areas within the building, and in the classroom when they cannot maintain six-foot social distancing, at least for the

⁴ Canon 781. Matthew 28:19-20.

⁵ Catholic Schools on the Threshold, 11; cf. 761.

⁶ Renewing Our Commitment

⁷ Canon 519.

⁸ Canon 528§1

⁹ Canon 806§1



first month of school. After that, at the discretion of the principal, students may be able to take their masks off when sitting in their seats, facing forward, and socially distance three to six feet. Students who want to keep their masks on at all times may.

- Each school will have a designated area for anyone who comes down with the symptoms of COVID-19. The school will request that the parent pick them up as soon as possible. Everyone will have to follow local health department guidelines for at-home quarantining when coming in prolonged contact with someone who has COVID-19 or isolation for anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 as identified by the local health department or school.
- The school will readmit anyone quarantined or isolated who have followed the guidelines from the school and their local health departments.

We conclude by humbly asking for two things. First, in true Christian charity, let us support each other and assume the goodwill of each other as we continue to work together in these extraordinary times. Second, let us continue to lift each other in prayer, prayers for wisdom, and prayers for safety.

May the Lord who has called us to the vocations of the parent, teacher, or religious continue to guide us and may His Blessed Mother and all the patron saints of our schools and parishes intercede for us and all of the children of our diocese.

Sincerely,

Carl Loesch
Secretary for Catholic Education

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Superintendent