



FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

## COVID19 Guidance for Schools in 2021-2022

### Prevention Strategies

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended these layered prevention strategies as critical in the protection of students, teachers, staff, and administrators in our schools. These strategies include:

- Promoting vaccination.
- Consistent and correct mask use.
- Social & physical distancing.
- Screening testing to promptly identify cases, clusters, and outbreaks.
- Ventilation.
- Handwashing and respiratory etiquette.
- Staying home when sick and getting tested.
- Contact tracing, in combination with isolation and quarantine.
- Cleaning and disinfection.

### Wearing of Masks

The CDC has released guidance in K-12 schools and recommends that, "Masks should be worn indoors by all individuals (age 2 and older) who are not fully vaccinated." The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) has fully adopted the CDC guidance. The Catholic Diocese of Peoria advises parents and guardians to carefully review and consider the CDC and IDPH guidance when making decisions about the health and safety of their children.

As recently as July 13<sup>th</sup>, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) published a clarification of wearing masks that allows school administrators to implement layered prevention strategies based on local conditions and monitoring of COVID19.

Per this guidance, the Office of Catholic Schools has consulted the Office of the Bishop and Coadjutor Bishop and has received approval to publish the following guidance for all diocesan elementary and secondary schools in 2021-2022: **The choice to wear a mask will be the decision of the individual school employee. In regard to masking of students in grades PK-12, the decision will be made by the parents or guardians of their school-aged children. However, school employees and students are required to wear masks on busses.**

There are many strong opinions on mask mitigation. As our schools are institutions of the Catholic Church, we would ask that our employees, students, and families please be *respectful* of those who have differing opinions and who make different decisions than our own.

### Safety Protocols and Recommendations

The Office of Catholic Schools will continue to dialog with our Catholic school administrators regarding any increases in COVID19 positivity rates within our school's community. In consultation with local public health department officials and OCS, changes in key prevention strategies for any of our Catholic schools must be **approved** by the diocesan Superintendent of Schools *before* being shared with the school's community.

In cases of positive COVID19 tests or exposure to such individuals, employees and students will quarantine following IDPH guidelines and their local public health department's directives. Each school's administration will provide information on how students will receive academic instruction at home if a student is COVID19 positive or has been exposed and not vaccinated against COVID19.

### Vaccinations

COVID19 vaccinations are distinct from other vaccines required at specified grade levels for school enrollment. Therefore, **it will be a family decision on whether or not their children will be vaccinated.** The Catholic school may gather information from employees and students as to their vaccination status; however, medical information is private and is protected by law. Public identification of those who are or are not vaccinated against COVID19 will not be permitted.

Furthermore, vaccination status against COVID19 may not be a basis for unequal treatment. No action will be taken against, or required of, an individual employee or child if that action could potentially identify vaccination status.

An exception would be if there is an outbreak within the school in which quarantining and safety decisions must be implemented to protect those who are unvaccinated. In such cases, every precaution will be made to not publicly identify those who are unvaccinated, nor will there be any stigma or discrimination allowed against any unvaccinated person. Vaccination status may not be a requirement for to attend any school event or to be a member of any school organization.

### Remote Learning

**Remote learning will not be offered as an alternative to in-class instruction in our diocesan schools for the 2021-2022 school year.** Exceptions would be: 1) if positivity rates are at such a level that an individual classroom or an entire school must close as a mitigation strategy; or, 2) if a student is deemed "medically fragile." In regard to the latter, a parent or guardian

may petition the school with professional documentation from a licensed physician that supports a child's "medically fragile" status. At that point, it will then become a site-based decision of the pastor/chaplain and principal to provide a remote-learning option based upon the school's resources to reasonably accommodate such a request.

It is also important to note that remote learning could possibly not be in the same format as in the 2020-2021 school year. It will, most likely, be a combination of live streaming, recorded lessons, and assigned tasks.

### New School Year

In gratitude, the Office of Catholic Schools joins our 42 elementary and secondary Catholic school communities in looking forward to the return of regularly-scheduled instructional days for 2021-2022. Catholic education is vital to the evangelizing mission of the Church. Let us *continue to pray and to seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit* as we teach the children entrusted to our care.

To God be the glory.