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Catholic Schools

WHAT TO EXPECT THIS YEAR:

Important Information about our School Reopening Plan

In late May, the Office of Catholic Schools and Centers of the Diocese of St. Petersburg announced the formation of the Diocesan COVID-19 Task Force on Catholic Education. The Task Force served as a central hub of information and resources for the 46 Catholic schools and centers in the Diocese. Each school, in turn, used these resources to formulate their own implementation plans to fit the unique circumstances of their families and schools. This document gives general principles and attempts to answer common questions. For specific issues or more detailed implementation information, please consult your Catholic school's plan.

Our Catholic schools have a long history of providing top-quality Catholic education. We look forward to continuing that education in the school year to come.

Fundamental Principles of our Reopening Plan



All Students

Our plans allow us to welcome back students for full-day instruction, while creating alternatives for children with unique medical or familial needs.



Strategic Grouping of Students

To the extent possible, students will practice social distancing between individuals and groups. Each child will be assigned to a group cohort, which will usually correspond to their homeroom class. Students within a group cohort should remain physically as far apart as possible. To contain the spread of illness, group cohorts will have limited interactions with others throughout the school day.



School Day Logistics

Schools are evaluating pick-up and drop-off procedures, routes within the school building, lunch times, etc. Signage and tape on the floors will be used to assist clarity in traffic flow.



Stopping the Spread

Symptom screening, temperature checks, social distancing, frequent handwashing, the use of face coverings, contact tracing, and additional cleaning protocols are all ways that our schools will help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other childhood illnesses.



Infection Protocols

Our plans provide for clear guidance on how to address individuals with COVID-19 symptoms, those who have been in contact with someone who has the illness, and/or individuals who test positive. In addition, there is a process to temporarily close or transition all or some grades in a given school to online/distance learning, which includes consultation with public health authorities and the Office of Catholic Schools of the Diocese of St. Petersburg.



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Parents/Guardians Regarding the Reopening of Catholic School Buildings

We know that parents have many questions about the start of the school year. In this document, we have outlined many of the frequently asked questions (FAQ) from parents about our reopening plan. These questions are divided into four sections, each addressing a separate aspect of the reopening process. The categories are:

1. **Health and Safety:** General health and safety questions, such as social distancing, masks, and facility cleaning.
2. **Infection Protocols:** How we will handle instances where students or employees become ill.
3. **Academics and Programming:** Questions related to how classes will be taught. This section also includes information on school events (such as masses or assemblies) and extracurricular activities.
4. **Tuition:** Questions about tuition payments during the upcoming year.

Please note that this document contains general information about Catholic schools. As such, if you have specific questions about how these guidelines apply for your school, we encourage you to contact your school's principal.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Q: What does “reopening our schools” really mean?

A: Gathering as a school community is an integral part of Catholic education. Our plan is to reopen our school buildings to students for in-person learning. This means that all students are welcome to return to classes for face-to-face instruction. Our schools have developed in-depth plans that address numerous aspects of the reopening process, and how schools will function once reopened.

Q: Who helped in the formation of your plan?

A: In constructing our reopening plans, we have closely studied guidance from federal and state authorities, as well as consulted many sources including our Diocesan COVID-19 Task Force on Catholic Education, pastors, educators, physicians, parents and emergency management officials.

Q: Who decides when a school has met the requirements to reopen?

A: Schools have organized their own committees to create school-level plans. Schools then must submit their plans to the diocese for review. The goal of the review process is to help each principal think through the school's specific reopening strategy and the associated challenges.



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Q: Will all students be allowed to return to school at the same time?

A: Yes. Our plans provide for the return of all Catholic school students for full-day instruction. However, students with unique medical or familial needs may choose to continue at home through the school's alternative education plan.

Q: What are we doing about masks in school?

A: The use of face coverings (masks, shields) will be a part of each school's overall plan. Clear rules for when, where, and under which conditions face coverings are required will be provided and updated throughout the school year. We know that students (especially young children) will need training to learn how to properly wear and use masks. We will spend time at the beginning of the year helping children learn how to safely keep masks in place and address issues like storage and cleaning procedures.

Q: Will students be required to physically distance at school?

A: To the extent possible, students will practice social distancing between individuals and groups. Each child will be assigned to a group cohort, which will usually correspond to their homeroom class. Students within a group cohort should remain physically as far apart as possible. To contain the spread of illness, group cohorts will have limited interactions with others throughout the school day.

Q: Should I take my child's temperature every day before school?

A: Yes. A fever is a key symptom of COVID-19. Parents should take their child's temperature every day before their child is taken to school. If your child has a fever of over 100.4° F or any other [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, your child should be kept home from school. Please consult the DOSP COVID-19 Student Decision Tree for more information.

Q: How will drop off and pick up be handled?

A: We are asking each school to carefully evaluate drop off and pick up procedures. Schools will use various entrances and exits to minimize contact between student cohorts. Parents will be asked not to congregate near school doors. Your principal will communicate specific drop off and pick up procedures to you prior to the start of school. In addition, when students enter school every day, they will be asked to participate in a screening process. This may include the following:

1. A temperature check, administered by a school employee (please note that parents should also take temperatures every day, as noted above).
2. Washing their hands with soap or using hand sanitizer.
3. Asking if students are feeling well.

If a student has a temperature above 100.4° F or complains of other COVID-19 symptoms, he/she will be immediately sent to the office. Parents will be contacted and asked to pick up their child.

Q: What does the plan say about safety and cleanliness requirements for school buildings?

A: Each school has specific plans for the ongoing cleaning and sanitizing of our school buildings. Buildings will be cleaned very frequently, with a particular focus on high-traffic areas and common surfaces. Barriers will be installed in certain areas. There are also instructions for managing shared areas such as hallways, gymnasiums, cafeterias and bathrooms.



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Q: How will lunch take place when school reopens?

A: Each school is developing its plans for lunch based on the needs of the students and the physical spaces available. Some schools may ask students to eat lunch in their classrooms and/or have students use the eating spaced in staggered shifts.

Q: What about recess?

A: Schools will still conduct recess. Attempts will be made to ensure that students are outside on a regular basis.

Q: Can I still volunteer at school?

A: We have asked schools to minimize the number of volunteers this year in an effort to mitigate risk. Thus, your school may not allow you to volunteer. Please consult your school for more information.

Q: Will extended care (before and after care) be available this year?

A: Yes. Schools may continue to offer extended care. Please consult your school for more information.

Q: My child and/or another member of my household is in an at-risk group for COVID-19. Should I send my child to school?

A: Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has defined [conditions in which certain people may be more at risk for severe illness through COVID-19](#). If your child or another member of your household is in an at-risk group, we encourage you to speak to your doctor. Ultimately you should decide whether it is safe for your child to attend school. Each school has an alternative educational plan option available for families that do not wish to return to in-person instruction. Please consult with your school about this option.

Q: What should I do if I do not feel safe sending my child back to school?

A: If your child has a unique medical or familial need and you wish to keep him/her at home this year (or at least at the start of the year), please contact your school's principal for more information. The school will provide you with more information about the alternative educational plan option.

Q: What happens if the state or local governments impose more restrictions on schools?

A: We will work closely with officials to determine whether we can continue in-person instruction (even on an alternate schedule). If necessary, we will return to at-home distance instruction.

INFECTION PROTOCOLS

Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

A: The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has identified several [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, including high fever (above 100.4° F), sore throat, coughing, nausea, headache, muscle aches, loss of taste or smell, runny nose, fatigue, diarrhea and difficulty breathing. However, some people experience no visible symptoms.

Q: What should I do if my child has symptoms of COVID-19?

A: If your child shows [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, you should contact your doctor and the school's main office. You should not send your child to school. If the symptoms occur during the schools day, your



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child will be immediately sent to the office and you will be contacted to pick your child up from school. Please consult the DOSP COVID-19 Student Decision Tree for more information.

Q: What happens if someone has symptoms, tests positive, or has contact with someone who has COVID-19?

A: The Office of Catholic Schools and Centers has developed a COVID-19 Decision Tree to address all of these situations. You will receive a copy from your school.

Q: Could my child's school building be closed down due to COVID-19 this year?

A: We will do our best to ensure a safe and healthy environment in the coming year. However, if circumstances warrant, we may need to close the school building and transition all students to distance learning for a time. These decisions will be made by the school leadership, in consultation with the local health department, the Pastor (if applicable), and Office of Catholic Schools and Centers. Parents will be updated regularly should that need arise.

ACADEMICS AND PROGRAMMING

Q: Will my child's curriculum be changed this year?

A: Schools will still deliver high-quality instruction in core subjects (religion, language arts, math, science and social studies). Special requirements may be in place for certain classes and special area subjects (see sections below). The implementation of safety and health requirements (outlined earlier in this FAQ) will create new complexities in instruction, but our commitment remains to provide your child the best possible Catholic education.

Q: Will my child's classroom look different?

A: Schools are spreading out desks and tables in classrooms as much as possible. In order to maximize floorspace, teachers may remove non-essential furniture and other items. Desks and tables will be arranged so that they face the front of the room when possible. Each school is evaluating its learning spaces to keep children as safe as possible.

Q: Will students share school supplies?

A: No. We are asking schools to ensure that students not share school supplies (e.g., books, crayons, technology, etc.), including for such subjects as art and music. Exceptions may be made for outdoor activities (such as sports or PE classes). Items like computers in a computer lab will be cleaned regularly.

Q: I have a child in preschool or kindergarten. Is high-quality learning possible?

A: Yes. We are working very closely with our early education teachers to continue the best possible quality of instruction in preschool and kindergarten. While health and safety requirements are in place, our teachers will continue to work hard in the coming year to ensure your child grows intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

Q: Will students still change classes?

A: Many schools offer departmentalization, in which students change classes for core subjects (religion, language arts, math, science and social studies). To the extent possible, students will not move to



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different classrooms in departmentalized settings. Instead the teacher will go to the students' rooms and teach them there.

Q: Will schools still offer classes in special subject areas (e.g. art, music, PE, etc.)?

A: Yes. As with departmentalization (see last question), we will ask special subject area teachers to travel to each class's homeroom for instruction whenever possible. This will be particularly likely for such subjects as art, music, health and foreign language. When students must visit spaces such as the gymnasium, computer/STEM lab or library, the rooms will undergo rigorous cleaning protocols.

Q: Will tests still be given this year?

A: Yes. It is important that we continue to gauge student academic growth throughout the school year. As such, you should anticipate tests to be administered in your child's classes.

Q: Will students participate in field trips?

A: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we do not believe that we will be able to participate in in-person field trips during the 2020-2021 school year. However, we will continue to evaluate these possibilities as the year progresses.

Q: My child has a Student Support Plan (SSP) because of an identified learning, behavioral or physical need. Can the needs of my child still be met this year?

A: As each Student Support Plan (SSP) is different, your school will be evaluating each SSP to determine whether additional changes are needed in light of COVID-19-related health and safety protocols. Your school will contact you if it is determined that changes to the SSP need to occur. If you have urgent questions, you should not hesitate to contact your school.

Q: I need to meet with a teacher or my school principal. Can these meetings occur?

A: Yes. These meetings can take place virtually via phone or video chat. If in-person meetings take place, social distancing protocol must be followed and all attendees need to wear a mask.

Q: Can we still have meetings of stakeholder groups, such as the School Advisory Committee, Home-School Association, etc.? What about fundraising events, such as an annual gala?

A: Such meetings should take place virtually if at all possible. In the case that face-to-face meetings occur, schools must follow social distancing protocol and any guidelines for the local community regarding group size.

Fundraising events, such as gala, festivals, etc. will be evaluated as the year progresses. If possible, galas could be done virtually.

Q: Will school masses still take place?

A: Yes. Each school will work closely with the pastor or chaplain in determining how school masses may be celebrated.

Q: Will First Communion, Reconciliation and Confirmation take place this year?

A: Your child's school will continue to provide preparation for the Sacraments of First Communion, Reconciliation, and Confirmation. Your school will work closely with your pastor and parish to determine the timing and schedule of these sacraments.



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Q: How will extracurricular activities be impacted this year?

A: Each extracurricular activity is unique. As such, please consult your local school about how your child's activity is impacted.

- **Athletics:** We are awaiting further information from the state and/or FHSAA regarding athletics. More information will be provided to parents as it is known.
- **Other Activities:** For all other activities (e.g., clubs, dances, etc.), schools will evaluate whether they can be held safely. If that is not possible, these activities will be conducted virtually or canceled.

TUITION AND FEES

Q: Will schools still collect tuition this year?

A: Yes. While this school year may look different, our schools will continue to provide a rigorous academic experience while supporting the moral and spiritual development of each student. Our Catholic schools depend upon tuition revenue to pay our employees who do this work and support other school-related expenses. Tuition will be the same whether a student attends classes in-person or opts for the alternative educational plan. Should in-person learning be suspended due to a COVID-19 local outbreak, tuition will not be discounted or refunded.

Q: I am having difficulty paying tuition, as my own workplace has been impacted by COVID-19. What do I do?

A: We know that some families may have difficulties paying tuition due to the loss of pay during workplace closures. If this is happening to you, please contact your school's principal. We understand your situation and will do our very best to work with you.

Q: Will fees be charged this year?

A: Each school develops their fees based upon their own local needs. Fees may be adjusted if a program or activity has been directly impacted by COVID-19. For example, if a fee is collected for a particular field trip and it is subsequently cancelled, the fee will be returned.

Q: Will my scholarship program be honored if I choose the distance learning for my child?

A: Yes. You will need to follow the attendance policy your school has in place for distance learning. The FLDOE and scholarship organizations like Step-Up for Students will verify student attendance per the compliance guidelines of the scholarship. Families who do not comply with attendance policies are at-risk of losing their scholarship. The allotted days a student can miss in one academic year is ten (10) days.

If you have any other questions about the coming school year, we invite you to contact your school principal or the Office of Catholic Schools and Centers at ocsc@dosp.org