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# A Parent Guide for Reopening Maine Catholic Schools

## WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT THIS YEAR

In late July, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland developed “Reopening Our Schools: A Planning Framework for the 2020-21 School Year”. This plan is designed to help schools and parents successfully and safely reopen our school buildings to students this fall. The plan also reflects important guidance from the Maine Department of Education (MDOE), the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Our Maine Catholic schools have a long history of providing high quality Catholic education. We look forward to continuing this tradition in the school year to come.

## ALL STUDENT IN-PERSON LEARNING

Our plan allows us to welcome back all students for full-day instruction, five days a week, in our school buildings.

## COHORT MODEL

Students in Pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade will be assigned to a “cohort”, a specified group. Students within a cohort should remain physically distant - 6 feet apart. To contain any illness, cohorts will not interact with each other during the day. If children attend before or aftercare, they will be placed in a cohort combining grades (e.g., PK-1, 2-4, 5-8), due to numbers.

## BUILDING LAYOUT

In order to keep cohorts intact, schools are evaluating pick-up and drop-off procedures, routes within the school building, etc. Signage and tape on the floors will be used to assist clarity in traffic flow.

## FACE COVERINGS

All individuals over the age of 2 will be required to wear a cloth face mask when they arrive at school. Face coverings may only be removed during designated times and activities (while seated at their individual desks in the classroom and during lunch), if students remain physically distant, six feet away from each other. Students with specialized needs may have the option for alternative appropriate face coverings with prior approval.

## TEMPERATURE CHECKS

Parents will be required to take the temperatures of their children daily, prior to dropping them off at school. Temperature checks may also occur as students enter the school building and as needed throughout the day.

## INFECTION PROTOCOLS

Our plan provides for clear guidance on how to address individuals with COVID-19 symptoms and/or positive COVID-19 tests.

## REMOTE LEARNING OPTION

Families who choose not to have their children return to school in person will have a remote learning option through their child’s school.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

We know that parents have many questions about school. In this document, we have outlined many of the frequently asked questions (FAQ) received from parents about our reopening plan. These questions are divided into four sections, each addressing an important aspect of our reopening process, and are subject to change as the situation changes:

1. Health and Safety: These questions include but are not limited to: physical distancing, face coverings, and facility cleaning.
2. Infection Protocols: These questions address how schools will respond when a student or employee becomes ill.
3. Academics and Programming: These questions relate to how classes will be taught, information about school events (such as Masses or assemblies), and extracurricular activities.
4. Tuition: Questions about tuition payments during the upcoming school year.

Please note that the School Reopening Plan contains general guidance for schools. Each school must apply these guidelines to its own unique school setting. As such, if you have specific questions about how these guidelines apply to 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 this fall. This means that all students are welcome to return to classes for in-person instruction five days a week. This plan addresses numerous aspects of the reopening process, and how schools will function once reopened.

Q: Will students be safe when school is reopened?

A: Safety is always our top priority in Catholic education. In constructing this plan, we have closely studied guidance from federal and state authorities and can implement the requirements.

Q: Who decides when a school has met the requirements to reopen? When will this happen?

A: Our plan includes specific requirements that schools must meet in order to reopen. Schools must complete a checklist and submit it to the diocese for review. The diocese will determine when a school is prepared to reopen.

Q: Will all students be allowed to return to school at the beginning of the year?

A: Yes. Our plan provides for the return of all Catholic school students for full five day a week instruction. We have small class sizes and lower overall student numbers.

Q: Will students need to wear face coverings at school?

A: Yes. As per directives of the State of Maine, all individuals above the age of two will be required to wear cloth face masks while at school, with certain exceptions. Face coverings may be removed for periods of time under certain circumstances (such as when a student is seated at their individual assigned desk, six feet apart from others, and lunch). When face coverings are removed, students must remain at least six feet apart.

Q: Do I need to purchase face coverings for my child?

A: Yes. Parents must send their children to school with cloth face coverings. Cloth face coverings must be cleaned after each use and parents should send an extra five-pack of cloth face coverings to school to be held by the teacher in case a student forgets to bring one or needs to change during the day. Due to the variety of quality in the disposable masks, cloth face coverings are recommended.

Q: Will teachers teach children how to use face coverings?

A: Yes. We know that students (especially young children) will need training to learn how to properly wear face coverings. We will spend time at the beginning of the year helping children learn how to safely keep face coverings in place. We encourage parents and families to spend time prior to the start of school, working with your children on wearing a face covering for longer periods of time.

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

A: Our plan calls for each student to be part of a larger group of students called a “cohort.” When students are with their cohort, they will strive to remain 6 feet apart. Homeroom teachers are also part of cohorts and can walk around their classroom to monitor student classwork. When students are around other cohorts, they should remain at least six feet apart from those other cohort students and will be required to wear face coverings. We believe the cohort model provides for better containment should there be a positive case of COVID-19 (see the Infection Protocol section).

Q: Will parents/families be required to take their child’s temperature every day before coming to school?

A: Yes. A high fever is a key symptom of COVID-19. Parents will be required to take their child’s temperature every day before taking their child to school. If your child has had a fever of over 100.4°F within the last 24 hours, your child should be kept home from school. You should contact your child’s doctor and the school’s main office. Similarly, you should ask your child if he/she has any of the other symptoms of COVID-19, such as a sore throat, coughing, or nausea. If your child complains of these symptoms, you should keep him/her home and contact your doctor and the school office. For more information about how to handle the potential illness of your child, please see the Infection Protocol section. Schools will require parents to use an online application or paper form to record their child’s temperature and the other required COVID-19 health related screening questions each day before coming to school.

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

A: Each school is carefully evaluating 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 or in parking lots. Your principal will communicate specific drop-off and pick-up procedures to you ahead of the start of school.

Q: What does the plan require regarding safety and cleaning of school buildings?

A: The plan includes specific requirements for the ongoing cleaning and sanitizing of all school buildings. Buildings will be cleaned frequently, focusing on high traffic areas and common surfaces. Windows and/or vents will be opened to maximize air flow. Barriers will be installed in main office areas. Our plan includes instructions for schools on managing shared areas such as hallways, gymnasiums, cafeterias and bathrooms.

Q: How will lunch take place when school reopens?

A: Schools must think differently about lunchtime. Cafeterias may only seat 50 or fewer students, and students must be physically distant. Each school is developing a customized plan that fits their unique building. Some schools may require students to eat lunch in their classrooms and/or have students use the cafeteria in staggered shifts.

Q: What about recess?

A: Schools may conduct recess and will follow defined safety requirements. For example, cohorts must be physically distant from one another. If recess is outdoors, depending on the activity, face coverings may be removed if students stay at least six feet apart.

Q: Can parents/family members come into the schools to drop off and/or pick up their child?

A: Parents will not be able to enter the building for drop-off or pick-up. Staff will meet parents and their children outside the building.

Q: Can parents/family members still volunteer at school?

A: We have asked schools to minimize the number of volunteers this year to mitigate risk. Unless a parent/family member is an essential volunteer, as determined by the principal, schools will likely not allow volunteering.

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

A: Yes. Schools may continue to offer extended care. Our plan includes specific requirements for such care (including staff and students wearing face coverings).

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: The 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 at-risk, we encourage you to speak to your doctor. Ultimately, you must decide whether you believe it is safe for your child to attend school. A remote learning option will be available for families who decide that their children will not return to school in person (see next question).

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

A: We are carefully preparing for our students' safe return to school this fall. However, we understand that some families still may not wish to return. Some families may include individuals in at-risk groups for COVID-19, while others may feel more general concern. As such, the schools are developing a remote learning option that will be available to any family that does not wish to return. The family will remain enrolled at their current school and will be required to continue paying tuition. The Portland Diocese will work with you and your school to provide a high-quality remote learning alternative. If you feel you do not wish to return for in-person instruction this year (or at least at the start of the year), please contact your school's principal about the remote learning option.

Q: Is it okay for my family to travel out of town during the COVID-19 pandemic?

A: We recommend that you do not travel out of town during the current pandemic. However, if you or a member of your household travels to another country or to a state identified by the State of Maine guidelines as having a surge in COVID-19 cases, your school may ask you to wait for 14 days until returning your child to school or provide a negative COVID-19 test result taken within 72 hours.

Q: What happens if there is a COVID-19 surge in Maine and the state imposes more restrictions on schools?

A: If a COVID-19 surge occurs, we will work closely with state officials to determine whether we can continue in-person instruction. Catholic schools are prepared to switch from in-person to remote learning immediately should the governor of Maine issue a Stay at Home order.

## **INFECTION PROTOCOLS**

Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

A: The MCDC 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.

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. Your doctor may ask that your child participate in a COVID-19 test. You should alert your school's main office and do not bring your child to school. If COVID-19 symptoms occur during the school day, your child will be immediately sent to the office and you will be contacted to pick your child up from school in the required, designated isolation room. You will be required to provide a note from your doctor on return to school.

Q: My child had COVID-19-like symptoms but tested negative for COVID-19. When can he/she return to school?

A: If your child does not have COVID-19 but has another illness, you must keep your child home until the following three requirements are met: 1. Your child is symptom free (no fever, sore throat, diarrhea, runny nose, difficulty breathing, nausea) for 24 hours; 2. A doctor's note clearing your child to return to school; 3. Provide a negative COVID-19 test result.

Q: What should I do if my child tests positive for COVID-19?

A: You should immediately contact your doctor for additional instructions. You should also contact your school's main office so they can contact CDC and parents of students in that classroom. You should not send your child to school. Privacy laws prevent the school staff from sharing the student's or staff's name if they have a positive test result. It is likely the entire class of students will be put in quarantine. CDC may require testing of all students/staff in contact and possibly the school.

Q: When can a student return to school after receiving a positive COVID-19 test?

A: If a student tests positive for COVID-19, or does not seek medical attention, students must not return to school until at least 14 days have passed since symptoms first appeared. In addition, parents must provide a negative COVID-19 test result to the school, and a doctor's note clearing the student to return to school.

Q: What should I do if a member of my household (who is not my child) tests positive for COVID-19?

A: You should immediately contact your school's main office. Your school will require you to keep your child home from school for at least 14 days. If your family member recovers from COVID-19 (through meeting the criteria in the previous question) AND your child is symptom free, your child will be allowed to return to school.

Q: Can my student participate in remote learning while in quarantine?

A: Students will be able to participate in remote learning while in quarantine, with approval from the principal.

Q: What happens if my child's teacher tests positive for COVID-19?

A: Should any employee have COVID-19 symptoms or test positive for COVID-19, schools will follow the same protocols used for students (see above). If a teacher becomes sick and is unable to work, your school will provide a substitute teacher. Parents will be notified. The school will contact local health authorities for recommendations on testing and cleaning.

Q: What happens if another student in my child's class tests positive for COVID-19?

A: Your school will make all parents aware that a student has tested positive for COVID-19. The school may be closed for approximately two to five days for cleaning and sanitizing. All students in the cohort will be monitored closely for COVID-19 symptoms. If more than one student tests positive for COVID-19, it is likely that the entire cohort will be isolated (sent home) for at least 14 days. Local health authorities will be contacted and guide the school in the quarantine and cleaning process. Students will be able to participate through remote learning while the cohort is at home.

Q: Could my child's school building be closed 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 a state-wide Stay at Home order is issued, we may need to close the school building and transition all students to remote learning for a time. Parents will be updated regularly should a school closure be required.

## **ACADEMICS AND PROGRAMMING**

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

A: Schools will continue to deliver high-quality instruction in core subjects (religion, language arts, math, science and social studies). Special requirements will be in place for departmentalized 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 an academically rigorous, faith-based education.

Q: Will my child's classroom look different?

A: We have instructed schools to spread out desks and tables in classrooms as much as possible. Plexiglass dividers may also be in place if six-foot spacing between students is not possible. In order to maximize floor space, teachers will be removing non-essential furniture and other items. We have also asked that desks and tables be arranged so that they all face the front of the room. These strategies will minimize risk of any infection in the classroom.

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 activities outdoors (such as outdoor physical education classes). If it is impossible to avoid sharing supplies, such as computers in a computer lab, such supplies will be cleaned after every use.

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

A: Yes. We are working closely with our early education teachers to continue the best possible instruction in preschool and kindergarten. While health and safety requirements are in place, our teachers will continue to work hard to support your children's intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth.

Q: Will students still change classes or classrooms?

A: Prior to the pandemic, many of our schools offered departmentalization, in which students changed classes for core subjects (religion, language arts, math, science and social studies). This model was particularly common at the junior high level. In order to protect classes in cohorts, most students will not move to different classrooms in departmentalized settings. Instead, teachers will go to the students' homerooms and teach there. At the High School level, students will change classrooms. The non-homeroom teacher will remain six feet apart from students.

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

A: Yes. As with departmentalization (see last question), special subject area teachers will travel to each homeroom for instruction whenever possible. If students visit spaces such as the gymnasium, computer/STEM lab or library, the room and supplies/materials will be cleaned after every cohort.

Q: Will tests be given this year?

A: Yes. It is important that we continue to gauge student academic growth throughout the school year. As such, students and families should anticipate tests to be administered in your child's class. These tests will include the NWEA tests.

Q: Will students participate in field trips?

A: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools will not arrange in-person field trips during the 2020-21 school year, or until such time field trips are deemed safe.

Q: My child has an Individualized Service Plan (ISP) because of an identified learning, behavioral or physical need. Will the needs of my child still be met this year?

A: As each Individualized Service Plan (ISP) is different, your school will be evaluating each plan to determine whether additional accommodations or modifications are needed for COVID-19-related health and safety protocols. Your school will contact you if it is determined that changes need to occur. If you have urgent questions, contact your school directly.

Q: If a parent wants to meet with the teacher or principal, how can these meetings occur?

A: These meetings can take place virtually, via phone or video chat.

Q: Can we still have stakeholder group meetings, such as the School Board, Home-Family Association and Booster Club?

A: Such meetings should take place virtually.

Q: What about fundraising and community events, such as an annual gala?

A: Fundraising and community events will be reimagined to comply with physical distancing guidelines.

Q: Will school Masses still take place?

A: The diocese has created a plan for parishes that allows for the celebration of Mass under specific conditions. Schools must follow this plan, through close coordination with the local pastor and parish, in determining whether/how Masses will be celebrated. In some cases, the Masses will be livestreamed.

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

A: Your child's school and parish will continue to provide preparation for the Sacraments of First Communion, Reconciliation, and Confirmation. For the celebration of the Sacraments, schools and parishes must follow a specific plan defined by the diocese. Your pastor and parish will determine the timing and schedule of these sacraments.

Q: How will extracurricular activities be impacted this year?

A: Our plan provides guidance on extracurricular activities. Highlights include:

- Athletics: Our sports programs will adhere to the Maine Principals Association guidelines. We are awaiting further information from the State of Maine regarding athletics. More information will be provided to parents as it is known.
- Band: Rehearsals for small groups (15 or fewer) may take place for non-wind instruments (e.g., percussion, strings, etc.). Students must be physically distant. Rehearsals must occur virtually for wind instruments (woodwinds and brass).
- Choir, Drama/School Play, Christmas Program: Schools must conduct such programs virtually or cancel them for the coming school year.
- Other Activities: For other activities (e.g., chess, debate, etc.), schools must meet specific health and safety requirements. If such requirements cannot be met, these activities must 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.

Q: Will I still have to pay full tuition should the school need to move back into remote learning?

A: Yes, our schools need to continue to pay teachers and school staff to support your children during remote learning.

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 changed this year?

A: Each school develops their own fees based upon 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 field trip, that the fee will not be collected this year, as in-person field trips will not occur.

If you have any other questions about the coming school year, please contact your school principal directly. They welcome your inquiries.