



August 22, 2020

Dear Parents,

Yesterday at 5:30 p.m., Public Health Madison-Dane County released [Emergency Order #9](#), requiring students in grades 3-12 in all schools to begin the year virtually. For many of you and our schools, this only allowed 60 hours to make dramatic changes before the first day of school. As you know, Catholic schools were preparing to open in-person, with many starting this coming week. We know that you believe that being in school, in-person, is the most effective and nurturing environment for your children. This was affirmed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the CDC, and even the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, all of which recommend opening schools for in-person instruction.

During the last three months, our principals and superintendent participated twice each week in conference calls with Public Health, the DPI, and DHS. We asked questions, adjusted plans as guidance changed, and made sure we had the latest information. Our principals and teachers worked tirelessly to draft, revise, and perfect re-opening plans, ensuring that all CDC, DHS, and county guidelines were followed, and that no detail was overlooked in order to make our schools safe for students and teachers. Tens of thousands of dollars have already been spent to meet these guidelines.

On numerous occasions since early July, county officials were asked to provide the metrics that would be used regarding closing and opening schools, with regard to COVID-19. These were not provided until Friday, leaving many of you, who have already gone back to work, with the added hardship of finding child care. Many of you have few, if any options, given this order. Further, given no indication to the contrary, teachers were preparing to meet and welcome your children in person, while also having made preparations to adjust to virtual learning, if cases drastically increased.

Wednesday, August 20<sup>th</sup>, Dane County announced that the daily number of coronavirus cases had [dropped by nearly 50%](#) since July 13, 2020, while the [7 day average of new cases](#) continued to decline. Yet now, despite declining numbers and all the work and diligence given to following all the guidelines for re-opening, Dane County has said that only grades K-2 may return, while all other grades must start online.

In an attempt to explore all of our options with regard the County's order, knowing that every school is different and will need to make adjustments as we begin this academic year, we are allowing our Dane County schools to delay the first day of school until after Labor Day, should they deem necessary.

We are extraordinarily disappointed at this order and its timing. You have told us of your sadness, your anger, and your children's grief as they burst into tears when you told them of the County's decision. We urge you to contact your elected officials, Joe Parisi, County Executive, and Janel Heinrich, Director of Public Health to voice your opinion.

As we navigate these tumultuous waters, we remain committed to working with you as the primary educators of your children, to do what is best for your children and family. Thank you for your faith in the mission of Catholic Schools.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Donald J. Hying  
Bishop of Madison

Michael J. Lancaster  
Superintendent of Catholic Schools

**O F F I C E O F T H E B I S H O P**

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