



Department of Catholic Schools

Archdiocese of San Antonio
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Dear Catholic School families,

The conversations centered around the re-openings of schools have taken many unexpected twists and turns since the Texas Education Agency (TEA) first communicated just last week their initial expectations for full on-campus instruction from public schools. With the number of COVID-19 cases continuing to increase in large areas of the state, there have been many questions and concerns expressed by parents regarding the safety of their children returning to campus soon.

The one thing we know for certain during this pandemic is that there is no clear, easy path forward. Taking part recently in the TEA Superintendent conference call, in which the expectations and plans regarding public schools were communicated, there was the implicit message that, "This is not going away anytime soon, and we will have to learn to function in a new way so as to not allow this public health crisis to become a crisis in education as well."

Our Catholic schools have been preparing since the Spring for this Fall's safe return of students, faculty, and staff to all our campuses, closely following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines and best practices outlined for schools. There has been tremendous progress, and the challenges have been many. Having the flexibility afforded to us through our Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops Education Department (TCCB ED) accreditation standards, each school has worked hard to customize their own plans to meet the needs of their specific community. It is a continuous work in progress and changes constantly as the public health situation dictates.

We are in consultation almost daily with state and local authorities and commit to taking whatever steps are necessary at the time in order to ensure safe re-entry to our campuses. We believe that Catholic schools, due to our smaller size, are able to adhere to safety protocols and social distancing measures recommended by the CDC to create a very safe environment for students, faculty and staff. Understanding that this health crisis will definitely impact schools for the 2020-2021 school year, we have already planned for operating in both on- and off-campus learning environments with flexibility and options.

At a time when we all want answers, there are no easy responses. This is a situation of Health versus Health; the health of our loved ones as it relates to COVID-19 exposure, and the health of our children in their social, emotional, and intellectual development. As this situation continues to unfold, we remain committed to being able to pivot in our response as appropriate.

I am extremely proud of the work our school personnel have done this Summer to prepare for the difficult challenges of the upcoming school year. Although our remote learning efforts last Spring went exceptionally well, we have taken new lessons learned from that time to strengthen our plans moving forward.

The Archdiocesan Catholic School Council met just last night to discuss the current challenges and decisions surrounding school re-openings. The members of this group will be immediately reaching out to our local Catholic School Councils and Parent Teacher Councils (PTCs) to offer their support in to solicit the assistance of local councils in re-gaining the commitment of our current families, as well as pursuing those interested. We have heard some comments such as, "If schools open remotely, we will go to public schools because of the tuition." It is a challenging reality we face that if families choose the "free" option of remote learning during this time, we may not have the same number of Catholic schools in operation to return to when this crisis is over. This is the time to commit to what we value in our faith-based education. Although academic programming remains a high priority, coming together as a community of faith remains at the heart of what we do.

We are educators and will continue our mission. We build from a foundation of faith. We love and miss your children. We greatly value our partnership with parents. And we HAVE a plan to safely serve your child and family. Please let us know how we can help to ease your worries as we transition back into the new school year.

Many blessings to you and your families,

Marti West,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marti West".

Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Archdiocese of San Antonio