



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK

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MR. MICHAEL J. DEEGAN, SUPERINTENDENT

November 12, 2020
Eve of the Feast of St. Francis Cabrini

Dear Staten Island Catholic Schools Community,

I know the past 24 hours has been filled with frustration, angst and uncertainty for your family and most especially your children. While we had wanted to share additional information with you yesterday, given the rapidly evolving situation and the ever changing city and state requirements, we wanted to provide you as much notice as possible given the requirement that we close as a result of the designation of the greater part of Staten Island as a COVID-19 yellow zone.

Please know our singular focus remains our ability to restore 5 days of full in person learning for as many students as our buildings will safely hold. I am grateful to the principals, teachers, and you the parents who allowed us to open our schools on day one and keep them open until today.

In order for our school buildings to *remain open* in a yellow zone, 20 percent of staff and students must be tested weekly for COVID-19, according to the New York State health department. New York City is legally required to provide these health services for Catholic schools but have thus far failed to do so, despite repeated requests for parity. We were forced to temporarily pause in-person instruction as we continue to advocate to receive the testing services to which we are entitled under the law. The same services provided to public schools!

While these days of remote home-based learning may have been imposed on us, the archdiocese, in collaboration with local elected officials, are pursuing all remedies to ensure our schools receive what they are legally entitled. We stand ready, if needed, to defend the rights of our students legally. We are also actively engaging the Governor's Office, community health partners and stakeholders to ensure families, teachers and administrators can follow the testing protocols once they have been established, allowing a safe return to in-person instruction. We will continue to keep you updated as things progress.

While this forced transition to full remote instruction is not our preference, our dedicated principals and teachers *have planned for and are prepared* for this brief pause. It was a prudent step to take, made necessary by the spike in cases and city officials' lack of action on our behalf, to protect the health and safety of the Staten Island Catholic school communities, the community of Staten Island as a whole, and the viability of Catholic education in New York.

As we just celebrated Veterans Day, I ask that you join me in prayer to Blessed Fr. Vincent Capodanno, who will be Staten Island's first Saint. I am reminded of his words to us "Belief in Christ brings with it a deeply rooted sense in the primacy and urgency of now. Not last year or next year, but now".

"Now" is the time that we will remain united for our children!

Sincerely,

Mr. Michael J. Deegan
Superintendent of Schools

CC: Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York