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June 10, 2021

Dear Catholic School Parents and Guardians,

As this year comes to an end, there is no question that it has been a year like no other for all of us. Your decision to entrust your children to our Catholic schools forged a partnership between your home and our schools that has resulted in a remarkable relationship that has kept our students safe, while receiving an excellent education and growing closer to Jesus every day. Thanks to your trust in our schools and the extraordinary commitment of the pastors, principals, teachers and staff, your children have been able to attend school all year, in a beautiful Christ-centered atmosphere.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Metuchen have offered in-person learning on a full-day schedule since the beginning of the school year, with only a few temporary exceptions. Our remote learning has included students, as seamlessly as possible, in classroom activities and faith development experiences. Catholic schools are communities of faith, committed to common values and principles that drive our actions. The successes achieved this year are a tangible example of our Catholic communities in action and a testament to what we can accomplish together under the loving protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Much of the success in the classroom must be attributed to the extraordinary efforts of our teachers, who have taught in the classroom and online for nearly 180 days. Concurrent teaching of this kind requires tremendous preparation and elevated focus, all day, every day. While it has been exhausting for the teachers, they have maintained their efforts because they deeply believe in their mission to teach as Jesus did—serving all students and meeting their needs.

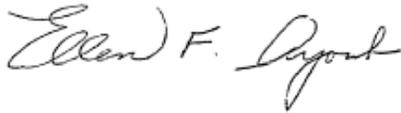
When the Catholic schools in the State of New Jersey made the decision that we would be open for the 2020-2021 school year, this concurrent method of teaching in-class and remote students was developed in answer to an emergency situation. We are grateful this method of teaching allowed us to get through the emergency situation and it will result in some long-term changes in practice, such as a greater use in technology; but it is not sustainable for the future in its current form. Fortunately, there are many signs that indicate full-time remote learning will not be necessary next year. That will be a blessing for our students. There is no question that students learn best in a classroom setting. The interaction among the teacher and the students is a critical part of the development of the child. Additionally, one of the hallmarks of a Catholic school is its ability to build community, and our school communities have missed having all of our students with us!

With all of the positive signs that we are seeing regarding the pandemic and the value of in-person learning, all students enrolled for the 2021-2022 school year are expected to attend school in person next year. Although we do not know yet the specific expectations that schools will face in the 2021-2022 school year, we do know that we will continue to implement the measures we have taken to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and we will follow the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the State of New Jersey.

During the summer, each of our schools will be hard at work planning to welcome everyone back, taking into consideration whatever the guidelines will be regarding COVID-19 precautions. Along with all of that work, I pray that all of our pastors, principals, staffs and school families will take the time to relax and renew themselves spiritually and physically. It will be good to spend time with family and friends and to thank God for the blessings we have all received.

I pray that you and your families have a wonderful summer. The partnerships that you have formed with our schools is a visible sign of your strong commitment to Catholic school education and a gift to your child.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ellen F. Ayoub". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Ellen F. Ayoub
Secretary of Education
Diocese of Metuchen