



DIOCESE OF WORCESTER CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

49 ELM STREET
WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01609

June 25, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Over the last several weeks, Catholic school administrators in the Diocese of Worcester have been developing plans to prepare for the 2020-21 school year with the hope for a full in-person return to school in the fall.

With that purpose in mind, we will need to ensure that all Catholic schools are compliant with requirements from state agencies such as the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Department of Public Health (DPH) that pertain to minimizing risk from COVID-19. As we have seen in the news each day over the past few months, our understanding of COVID-19 continues to evolve and there are significant uncertainties as we look to the months ahead. All of this creates challenges in developing plans for the next school year. For this reason, our approach has been to develop contingencies and alternatives that we can readily utilize as circumstances necessitate between now and the start of the school year, as well as, during the 2020-21 school year.

This morning, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) issued initial guidance to schools in the Commonwealth about the reopening of schools in the fall. I write to keep you informed as you will likely hear about the guidance and reactions to it in the news. In large part, it is consistent with the approach we have taken so far – that is, we are planning for a full return to school with safety precautions while preparing for alternatives should they become necessary such as a possible return to remote learning or a hybrid approach which might have students learning both in-person and remotely. The DESE guidance is available here (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/return-to-school/guidance.docx>) and contains additional details that we will be folding into our planning. Our plans will need to remain flexible as it is likely that guidance will be fine-tuned and that additional information will be shared with school systems over the summer.

While we are preparing for a safe return to the classroom, we also want to be prepared for effective, continuous education for your child should there be interruptions to onsite learning. It is important to look back and underscore how much our Catholic school students were able to accomplish between March and the end of the school year with remote learning. While many of you

were reading news stories or hearing neighbors talk about how their school systems could not seem to implement or provide meaningful remote learning, I heard from many Catholic school parents that their children were receiving consistent and enriching instruction each day. Should we need to rely on remote learning at any time next year, know that we are committed to making that experience even more effective than during this past year. Every day of instruction is important in the preparation of our students for the challenges they will face in life.

Please know that our Catholic school leaders are working diligently to develop school-based plans for safely re-opening. Our principals will be examining factors such as class size and group size limits, classroom layouts, cleaning protocols, face coverings, school schedules, transportation, and procedures for responding to staff or students who are sick. Student wellness is of the utmost importance, and I want you to know that all Catholic schools in the Diocese will be sharing best practices and resources in complying with state-issued health requirements.

With DESE guidance now in-hand, our work can move forward more clearly. Our first steps as Catholic school leaders will be to conference with one another in better understanding the fullness of today's announcement. We will also actively engage in thoughtful dialogue with local and state authorities. Please know of our collective commitment to keep you, our students, families, and school staff informed throughout the summer. Your input and support are most appreciated. Please feel free to contact your school principal if you have general questions or concerns. I am also happy to speak with you. I can be reached via e-mail at dperda@worcesterdiocese.org or by phone at 774-764-1019.

All God's Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Perda". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Perda".

David Perda, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools