



DIOCESE OF WORCESTER CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

49 ELM STREET
WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01609

July 24, 2020

Dear parents and guardians,

As we approach the closing days of July, I write to you with an update regarding the preparation of Catholic schools in the Diocese for the upcoming 2020-2021 academic year.

Throughout the last several months, my team at the Catholic Schools Office (CSO) has remained in close contact with state officials from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Aided by consultation with organizations with expertise in infectious disease, pediatrics and public health such as the Massachusetts General Brigham Health System and the Massachusetts chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, as well as, information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO), DESE has issued guidance to school officials pertaining to the safe reopening of schools. To protect the health and wellness of all of our students, teachers and staff, Catholic schools in the Diocese are following this guidance in making the very best informed decisions possible.

Based on a review of current COVID-19 trends and pertinent data, the medical community in the Commonwealth is supporting the return of students to in-person learning with enhanced health and safety requirements in place. With both the desire to return to in-person learning, and the support and guidance of the medical community for the same, our Catholic schools are planning for a safe return to campus this academic year.

With this goal in mind, I have asked school-based leaders to develop flexible reopening plans in the event that COVID-19 trends may require adjusting learning modalities. Leaders of Catholic schools are planning for 1) in-person school with new safety requirements; 2) a hybrid-learning model where students learn both in person and remotely; and 3) remote learning. If at any point during the course of the school year circumstances necessitate a shift in the learning model, our schools need to be adaptive to the possibilities that may emerge. These possibilities are many and varied, and I am most thankful for the energy and expertise our Catholic school leaders have exerted in addressing them. There has been an arduous summer of contingency planning in ensuring a high quality Catholic education for your children.

Following DESE planning guidance, I have instructed school leaders to submit a draft of their initial school-based plans to the CSO by August 1. After review by the CSO, these school-based plans will be submitted to DESE for additional input by August 10. At this time, we will also share school plans with families. It is my expectation that the school planning documents will provide a clear sense of what school will look like under each of the three scenarios. School plans will include comprehensive details about before and after school activities, student supports, and health and safety requirements. Plans will also provide school communities with an initial overview of training sessions for students, families, and staff on new protocols and procedures on social distancing, personal hygiene, and other COVID-19 prevention measures. It is my hope that the comprehensive nature of these plans, the necessary training and education in implementing health measures, and the systematic approach to reopening school will make for a sure and certain confidence for all our Catholic school community members in beginning the new academic year.

To assist with reopening planning and scheduling, some Catholic schools have already begun a process of gathering information from families. Others will be doing so in the coming weeks. I kindly ask that you participate in this data collection so that plans are responsive to your preferences and those of the larger school community.

To reiterate, we welcome an in-person return to school as informed by state medical officials and the particular needs that present themselves at the local school level. Our work proceeds in abiding by the standards set by state health officials in safeguarding the wellness of students and school staff alike. Our school leaders also appreciate that individual family circumstances may necessitate that reasonable accommodations be applied on a case-by-case basis. I invite you to contact your school principal should you anticipate such a family need.

We seek to keep families fully informed as plans solidify. If changes are warranted at any point, we will let you know as soon as possible. In the meantime, please feel free to contact your school principal if you have questions or concerns. I can also be reached via email 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