



March 13, 2020

Dear School and PREP Families and Staff,

We are writing to provide an update on our communication you received last evening. COVID-19 is an ever-evolving health and safety concern affecting the entire country. At this time, we have no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our schools, but we must remain informed, vigilant, and proactive to prevent the spread of illness.

In every decision concerning our schools and parish religious education program, our guiding principle is to care for the safety and welfare of our students, their families, our employees, and those who visit our school and parish communities. In order to meet our responsibilities to those entrusted to our care and those who collaborate with us each day to provide the gift of Catholic education, we are announcing that **ALL high schools, parish and regional elementary schools, schools of special education, PREP programs, and early learning centers in the five-county Archdiocese will close through Friday, March 27, 2020. The previous decision to suspend all extra-curricular and co-curricular activities including retreats, athletic events both on and off school grounds, field trips, and social events planned by elementary, secondary, and special education schools throughout the entire five-county Archdiocese stands. That suspension of activities will last through Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup> and be re-evaluated pending future developments.** The current pandemic presents a rapidly evolving landscape. We will re-examine this timetable on an ongoing basis.

A Special Task Force has been convened to gauge the impact of COVID-19 on Catholic education and develop our ongoing response. Matters are being evaluated on a daily, if not hourly basis. This decision to adopt this course of action was not made lightly. It came only after careful, thought, planning, consideration, and prayer. We will continue to monitor the CDC recommendations as well as directives from governmental agencies and adjust policies accordingly. Please use the link below for additional information.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

In order to provide for the continued education of students, we are shifting from in-person instruction to Flexible Instruction Days. Teachers will provide ongoing assignments, educational support and availability for student questions and interaction through an online learning management system. Students will be completing learning assignments from home. As you know from yesterday's communication, we have been preparing for an occurrence of this nature and have been working with administrators and faculty members to assist them in developing flexible instruction plans for use. As those plans are unique to each school, additional information will be forthcoming from local school administration. We will provide ongoing support to each school as they enact flexible instruction.

For our elementary schools working with Nutritional Development Services of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (NDS) to provide meals and snacks to students in need at school, please know that NDS is preparing an emergency feeding plan. If your school is open to receiving and serving meals to students while school is closed, please contact their office for more information at 215-895-3470, option 1. The Community Food Program is also increasing deliveries to food cupboards to help support families during this time. Information about these locations will be posted on their [Facebook](#) page and other social media outlets.

This moment of national crisis presents a moment for us, as a community of faith, to come together in prayerful solidarity to support one another and lend assistance to the most vulnerable in our midst while doing our best to maintain our daily routines. We know this is difficult time for our school families.

Please know that we walk with you to help navigate the challenges we face in the days and weeks ahead. We are also sharing information from the CDC on [Talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019: Messages for parents, school staff, and others working with children](#).

We are sharing with you the text of the prayer written by the Holy Father, Pope Francis to the blessed Mother during COVID-19 pandemic.

O Mary,  
you always shine on our path  
as a sign of salvation and of hope.  
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,  
who at the cross took part in Jesus' pain, keeping your faith firm.  
You, Salvation of the Roman People,  
know what we need,  
and we are sure you will provide  
so that, as in Cana of Galilee,  
we may return to joy and to feasting  
after this time of trial.  
Help us, Mother of Divine Love,  
to conform to the will of the Father  
and to do as we are told by Jesus,  
who has taken upon himself our sufferings  
and carried our sorrows  
to lead us, through the cross,  
to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.

Under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God. Do not disdain the entreaties of we who are in trial, but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Our primary goal will remain to provide for the health and safety of all those entrusted to our care. The Office of Catholic Education has set up a dedicated point of contact where parents can share their questions and concerns. Messages may be sent to [covid19@archphila-oce.org](mailto:covid19@archphila-oce.org). Be assured of our continued prayers for all those affected by this virus.

Sincerely in Christ,

Sister Maureen L. McDermott, IHM, Ph.D.  
Superintendent for Secondary Schools

Andrew McLaughlin, Ed.D.  
Superintendent for Elementary Schools

Ann Menna  
Deputy Secretary for Catechetical Formation