Diocese of Steubenville  
Office of Christian Formation and Schools  

Diocesan Directive for Catholic Schools  
2021-2022 Guidelines for the Covid-19 Pandemic

1. Introduction

Purpose of this Diocesan Directive is to provide guidelines for Catholic schools for the start of the 2021-2022 school year, in light of the on-going presence of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the present time, in the State of Ohio it is illegal for schools to require vaccinations that have only been approved for “emergency use” – such as the Covid-19 vaccines; nor are there mandates in place requiring masks or facial coverings. There are however, current CDC and ODH recommendations which Catholic school communities should be aware of. Newly revised guidance with recommendations for Ohio K-12 Schools can be found at:

https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/schools/K-12-Schools-Guidance.pdf

In the event that NEW state of Ohio Department of Health or CDC mandates become effective subsequent to the promulgation of this Diocesan Directive, the Diocesan Office shall provide revised guidance.

This current diocesan guidance abrogates the previous “Diocesan Directive to Reopening Catholic Schools - A response plan to Ohio’s Reset & Restart Planning Guide” issued for the 2020-2021 school year.”

2. Classroom/Remote Instruction

2.1. “Traditional” face-to-face classroom instruction. As a NORM for all Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Steubenville, Catholic schools shall open in the fall, in accordance with each school’s 2021-2022 academic school calendar. Catholic schools shall be open for “traditional” face-to-face classroom instruction, Monday through Friday (except for planned in-service days and holidays).

2.2. School-Wide Long-Term Remote Instruction. Catholic schools shall provide school-wide remote instruction, only in such cases when state or local authorities have mandated (not simply recommended) that school buildings be closed. Catholic schools shall then make use of streaming technology and distance learning tools, in order to continue providing instruction and learning support while students remain at home.

2.3. Long-Term Remote Instruction for Individual families. Because of limited human and material resources, diocesan Catholic schools may only offer individual families a long-term option of remote or distance learning, after first consulting with the Diocesan Office of
Christian Formation and Schools. Should a school choose to offer families a long-term option of remote instruction (outside of the traditional classroom), that school shall:

- Submit a written, detailed proposal describing how long-term remote instruction will take place;
- Outline any stipulations/qualifications for participation in this option, and;
- Include a policy of participation in extra-curricular activities, for remote learners.

2.4. **Temporary Remote-Instruction/Learning.** In the event that a teacher or student (or a group of students) are unable to report to school for on-site instruction/learning because they have tested positive for Covid-19, or are in quarantine (by order of the local health department or a doctor’s recommendation), schools shall make every effort to provide temporary remote learning accommodations via live-streaming. Where such a live streaming arrangement is not possible or practicable, schools shall make every effort to provide student work and learning support to students, on a temporary basis.

3. **Covid-19 Vaccinations and On-site (school campus) Testing.**

The *Ethical and Religious Directives of the USCCB* currently states, “No one should be the subject of medical or genetic experimentation, *even if it is therapeutic*, unless the person or surrogate first has given free and informed consent... no person should be obliged to submit to a health care procedure that the person has judged, with a free and informed conscience, not to provide a reasonable hope of benefit without imposing excessive risks and burdens on the patient.”[^1]

Therefore, diocesan Catholic schools shall not mandate that students, volunteers, or employees receive a Covid-19 vaccination (even if “fully” approved by the FDA), as a condition for enrollment, volunteer work, or employment. The decision to receive such a vaccination is a private matter between an individual and his/her healthcare provider.

Catholic schools shall not ask information from students, volunteers, or staff regarding his/her Covid-19 vaccination status.

Diocesan Catholic schools shall not conduct on-site/school campus Covid-19 testing, nor shall school campuses be utilized as Covid-19 vaccination sites.

4. **Ventilation.**

Diocesan Catholic schools shall do everything they reasonably can to keep school buildings and classrooms well ventilated, as local circumstances, safety, and weather, will allow. According to the CDC guidance for proper ventilation[^2], schools shall:

4.1. Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example, by opening windows when possible. Do not open windows
and doors if doing so compromises the security of the building, or poses a safety or health risk to staff or students (e.g., risk of falling or triggering asthma symptoms).

4.2. If portable ventilation equipment like fans are used, take steps to minimize air from them blowing from one person directly at another person to reduce the potential spread of any airborne or aerosolized viruses.

5. **Assigned Classroom Seating.**

All Diocesan Catholic school students shall be given assigned classroom seating. Teachers shall maintain a written classroom seating chart. This requirement shall be in effect for all grades K-12, and for both a shared-table, and individual-desk classroom arrangement. Adhering to such a policy is essential, so that in the unfortunate event that a student tests positive for COVID-19, the number of additional students to be quarantined will be greatly reduced.

6. **Assessing for Symptoms.**

Since COVID-19 spreads so rapidly, it is essential that all students (and their caregivers), staff, and volunteers conduct daily health screening prior to going to school. This shall include taking their temperature and assessing their symptoms.

6.1. To assist with performing daily and consistent symptom screening, Diocesan schools shall be provided with a *Self-Monitoring COVID-19 Symptom Screening Log* (Form-CV). The *Symptom Screening Log* is based on the CDC’s symptom log for students and has been modified to reflect the State of Ohio’s Public Health Advisory System for COVID-19. Parents and staff shall maintain these logs at home for their own records, schools shall not collect screening logs for either staff or students.

6.2. Students and school staff with any one or more of the Covid-19 symptoms listed on the Diocesan *Self-Monitoring COVID-19 Symptom Screening Log* (Form-CV) should not report to school for that day, and should be referred to their healthcare provider for possible care and/or testing. Students and staff should stay home when sick until symptom free, and as advised by their healthcare provider.

7. **Returning to school after a positive COVID-19 diagnosis.**

Students and staff who receive a positive diagnosis for Covid-19 shall not return to school until cleared to do so by their healthcare provider and/or in accordance with local health department guidelines.
8. Close Contact with Covid-19 – In and Out of Classroom Settings

If a student/employee/volunteer has had close contact (within 6 feet for at least 15 minutes, without PPE) with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 outside of the classroom setting, he or she should notify their health care provider and stay home as advised (typically for 14 days after their last exposure to that person). However, the CDC states that anyone who has had close contact with someone with COVID-19 and who meets the following criteria does NOT need to stay home: Someone who has been fully vaccinated and shows no symptoms of COVID-19; Or Someone who has COVID-19 illness within the previous three months and has recovered and remains without COVID-19 symptoms (for example, cough, shortness of breath).^3

If the close contact with Covid-19 takes place within the classroom setting, ODH has provided guidance, depending upon specific circumstances. See Guidelines for Quarantine After Exposure in K-12 Classroom Settings and K-12 classroom exposure quarantine flowchart. School Principals.^4

9. Wash and Sanitize Hands to Prevent Spread.

Hand washing and sanitizing are important tools in preventing the spread of COVID-19 by killing the virus. Students, staff and volunteers should practice frequent handwashing for at least 20 seconds when hands are dirty, before and after eating, and after using the restroom. Students should also wash their hands before and after recess.

9.1. Schools shall provide instruction to staff and students for effective handwashing, and give opportunities throughout the day for students to practice handwashing. Proper handwashing instructions should be posted throughout the school building, but especially in bathrooms and classrooms.

9.2. In addition to handwashing, schools shall provide hand sanitizer (60% to 95% alcohol based) in high traffic areas including entrances to buildings and classrooms. Schools shall instruct students and staff to use the sanitizer.

9.3. Finally, staff, students, and volunteers should avoid touching their mouths, noses, and eyes since the virus easily enters the body through these membranes.

10. Sanitizing the school environment.

Schools shall make a reasonable effort to thoroughly clean and sanitize the school environment to limit spread on shared surfaces. The CDC’s guidance for schools states that “In general, cleaning once a day is usually enough to sufficiently remove potential virus that may be on surfaces. Disinfecting (using disinfectants on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency COVID-19 list) removes any remaining germs on surfaces, which further reduces any risk of spreading infection.”^5 If a facility has had a sick person or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours, clean AND disinfect the space. Schools shall make a reasonable effort to:
10.1. Clean surfaces frequently, paying close attention to high touch areas and shared spaces (such as desks or playground equipment). Spray bottles labeled and filled with EPA approved disinfectant should be available in every classroom as well as the school office (and other high traffic areas). Desks surfaces should be wiped down between classes when the desk is going to be used by another student. Playground equipment should be sprayed down before and after recess (but not between individual student uses).

10.2. The sharing of other schools supplies and materials should be minimized and if items must be shared, sanitized between each user.

10.3. Disinfect all classrooms, hallways, bathrooms and other staff/student use areas daily. The Diocese of Steubenville recommends using an electrostatic applicator for this task. The Diocese will continue to produce and distribute high quality, pure HOCl (Hypochlorous acid) at minimal cost (cents on the gallon) to Catholic schools and parishes. HOCl is EPA approved for COVID-19, is completely safe, and disinfects almost immediately. Specifications for this disinfectant solution will be provided to every school so that all concerns about product safety can be easily addressed.

11. Practice Social Distancing.

The CDC states that “because of the importance of in-person learning, schools where not everyone is fully vaccinated should implement physical distancing to the extent possible within their structures, but should not exclude students from in-person learning to keep a minimum distance requirement.” Social distancing of at least three (3) feet within classrooms and other indoor areas, is recommended.

11.1. School staff should try when possible to maintain 3-foot social distance among students, staff, and volunteers in all school environments, including classrooms, hallways, restrooms, and cafeteria, drop-off and pick-up locations. Where social distancing is difficult, the CDC states that face coverings can provide an additional measure of protection. (see Face Coverings and Desk Shields section below).

11.2. For grade levels that utilize student lockers, efforts shall be made to reduce the use of lockers to mitigate the closer contact that this scenario creates. Student should be encouraged to use backpacks as much as possible for classroom/course changes.

11.3. Reinforce distancing with visual cues such as floor markings and signs.

11.4. Avoid using shared materials or shared spaces (lockers, cubbies, etc.)
12. **Face Coverings and Desk Shields.**

The ODH recommends consistent mask wearing for those who are unvaccinated. The CDC states that when indoors, “Mask use is recommended for people who are not fully vaccinated including students, teachers, and staff. Children under 2 years of age should not wear a mask.” Diocesan Catholic schools shall not mandate the use of facemasks, even for those who are not vaccinated. However, because of the ODH and CDC recommendations, schools shall permit students, teachers, and staff to wear a face mask, should they choose to do so.

12.1. Parents who CHOOSE to send their children to diocesan Catholic schools, do so with the full knowledge and understanding that diocesan Catholic schools do not mandate the use of a facemask for students, teachers, and staff who are not fully vaccinated against Covid-19; nor shall unvaccinated students, teachers, and staff be required to social distance by a different standard than for those vaccinated.

12.2. School employees and volunteers who CHOOSE to work in a diocesan Catholic school, do so with the full knowledge and understanding that diocesan Catholic schools do not mandate the use of a facemask for students, teachers, and staff who are not fully vaccinated against Covid-19; nor shall unvaccinated students, teachers, and staff be required to social distance by a different standard than for those vaccinated.

12.3. The Diocese of Steubenville no longer recommends or mandates the regular use of desk shields, but they may be used at the request of a student’s parent. Teachers may use a desk shield for their own desk, should they choose to do so.

13. **Athletics and Outdoor Recess.**

13.1. OHSAA is working closely with ODE and ODH, and continues to revise its sport specific recommendations for student/spectator participation in athletics. Schools shall comply with all guidance from OHSAA regarding school athletic activities, including grade schools that are not OHSAA members.

13.2. For outdoor recess at the grade school level (grades K-8): Until further notice, no specific requirements or guidelines are being asked of Catholic schools at this time.

14. **School Bus Transportation.** Families that utilize public school bus transportation should be aware that “the CDC continues to require that masks be worn on all public transportation, including school buses. This requirement is regardless of vaccination status.”
15. Acknowledgement Risks.

Parents, Volunteers, and employed Staff shall read and sign the Diocesan Acknowledgement Risks form (Exhibit CV-1). The Acknowledgement of Risks simply states that:

Parents who enroll their children in a diocesan Catholic school; and volunteers/employees who choose to work in a diocesan Catholic school; do so with full knowledge that diocesan Catholic schools shall: 1) Not require Covid-19 vaccination as a condition for enrollment, volunteer work, or employment; 2) Not require the use of desk shields, or the wearing of facemasks for those who are not vaccinated, unless mandated by the Ohio State Department of Health; 3) Not require that unvaccinated staff/students practice social distancing by a different standard than that used for the vaccinated.

Therefore, Parents who enroll their children in a diocesan Catholic school; and volunteers/employees who choose to work in a diocesan Catholic school; do so at their own risk and shall agree, on behalf of themselves, their enrolled child (if applicable), their heirs, successors, and assigns, to hold harmless and defend [SCHOOL], its officials, directors and agents, (including chaperones, volunteers, or representatives associated with the school), and the DIOCESE OF STEUBENVILLE, its officials, directors and agents; in connection to illness from the COVID-19 Virus/Pandemic, or injury or cost of medical treatment in connection therewith; arising from said enrollment/volunteering/employment, or participation in/attendance at school sponsored events.

Notes:

5. See link to note #2 – “Cleaning and Disinfection.”
6. See link to note #2 – “Physical Distancing.”
7. See link to note #2 – “Consistent and Correct Mask Use.”