

Executive Summary

Re-Opening Task Force Report

A task force consisting of staff from the Office of Catholic Schools, principals, teachers, and nurses was assembled in May for the purpose of developing a plan for the re-opening of our Catholic schools. Below is a summary of the key elements of this plan. The complete 37-page document will be made available to all of the schools of the Diocese in early June. This plan is subject to change with or without notice depending on directives received from the State of Ohio.

Tiered Response

The Diocese of Columbus is committed to re-opening our Catholic schools to return to normal operations this Fall to the extent possible in consideration of health and safety regulations. That said, the Task Force realizes that we must be prepared for a resurgence of the pandemic and must have back up plans in place. We recommend that all schools have three response plans:

Tier 1 – Normal operations, face-to-face instruction.

Tier 2 – Blended learning, with partial in-person attendance and partial remote instruction.

Tier 3 – Full distance learning, with all instruction provided in a digital format.

The detailed plans will vary by school based on a number of factors, including enrollment and building size, and will be determined by the school principal.

Safety Guidelines

The Diocese of Columbus will adhere to the health and safety guidelines and regulations provided by the CDC and the State of Ohio, including the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Department of Health. We will be prepared to implement distancing, enhanced cleaning procedures, health checks, and other recommendations that may come as more is learned about this situation this summer.

Commitment to Catholic Education

The schools of the Diocese of Columbus are first and foremost Catholic schools, committed to forming disciples of Christ through education and teaching our students in the values of the Catholic Church. Each plan for the 3 tiers described above must be grounded in and focused on our Catholic faith. Great care will be taken to ensure that our students will have, to the fullest extent possible, uninterrupted opportunities to engage in Catholic education, including time for religious education, prayer, service, and access to the Sacramental life of the Church.

School Preparation

During the summer months, school buildings will be prepared for the return of students in the Fall. These preparations will include thorough cleaning and sanitization of buildings, posting signage for health and safety practices, determining social distancing implementation in classrooms, creating a separation space for anyone who may exhibit signs of illness during the school day, assessing staffing levels for nurses, designating a person to serve as the Covid-19 point of contact, collecting adequate supplies of disinfectants and hand sanitizer, and conducting community surveys.

Phased Approach to School Year

Schools will be implementing a phased approach to start the 2020-21 school year. Though the actual start date of the school year is a local decision, all schools will implement a phased approach. Prior to the first day of school, each school will allocate additional days to prepare the faculty for the return of students, review health and safety regulations, develop professional development opportunities, and prepare for a potential Tier 2 or 3 response. During the week of the first day of school, students will be brought back to school in smaller groups (usually by grade level or several grade levels) for orientation and individualized assessment. The normal school schedule will resume once this period has concluded.

Preparation for Tier 2 or 3

Schools will develop local plans for a potential Tier 2 or Tier 3 response. These plans will take into consideration best practices for addressing social-emotional concerns and ensuring student well-being. In addition, schools will identify essential curriculum, assessment and grading practices, develop student-centered distance learning, create digital classroom management and engagement practices ensuring equity for vulnerable populations of learners, and determine professional development needs for faculty. These plans will also assess the technology capabilities of each school and the needs of the school's students and families and work to address any deficiencies.

Communication Plan

Each school will develop a written plan for managing education amid the threat of a Covid-19 resurgence. These plans will be distributed to parents and will be posted on school websites. They will be regularly evaluated and updated as situations change. These plans will encompass safety protocols, health and cleaning guidelines, building procedures, and educational needs.