



**ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION**

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Dear Parents and Guardians of Elementary Students,

I write today to update you and share general plans for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (AOP) elementary schools as we return for the 2021-2022 school year. In the spring, I wrote to everyone saying it was our goal to open without any mitigation unless there was a new wave of COVID-19 and its variants. As you are aware, a new wave of COVID-19 has surfaced and has been surging in recent weeks, particularly among unvaccinated individuals. Unfortunately, large numbers of our students are under the age of 12 and not yet eligible for vaccination. We must take all possible mitigation measures to protect them and every member of our school communities.

Similar to what we experienced last year, the guidance from federal, state and local health organizations varies and is ever-changing. As a general rule, the Office of Catholic Education (OCE) will follow the guidance of the county health departments in which our elementary schools are located. Each county uses a different metric to measure the level that COVID-19 poses in each community, which is a complicating factor. Some entities take into consideration local vaccination levels or local positivity and transmission rates. Some consider hospitalization rates and available beds for COVID -19 patients. We believe that using county level data, although based on different metrics, is most relevant to our school communities, the guidance of the local health departments takes precedence over that. Since this information is more relevant to our school communities, the guidance of the local health departments takes precedence over that of the national organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and American Academy of Pediatrics. As we go forward, it is possible that our Catholic elementary schools in different counties will have different guidance and guidelines.

Last year, Archdiocesan Catholic schools navigated immense challenges to provide safe and effective in person learning for its students based on a well-thought-out plan and with the cooperation of parents. It is still our goal to provide Catholic Education through an in-person learning model for all students enrolled in the 102 Catholic elementary schools in the AOP. Although we feel conditions are better this year, we still need to employ some of the mitigation practices that were successful last year.

We have spent a great deal of time considering all aspects of this issue and adjusting our plan as conditions have changed. Although we had hoped to be in a position to allow optional masking, that is not possible at this time. We will be employing a flexible strategic approach that will be responsive to the transmission level of COVID -19 in the community. When community spread is low, there will be less mitigation practices and when community spread is high, greater mitigation practices will be in place. Some of the mitigation practices that we will use, include the following:

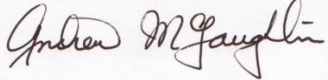
- **Daily Health Monitoring:** We ask that parents monitor the children daily and not send their children to schools if they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19.
- **Social Distancing:** Schools will be following recommendations for keeping desks apart by three feet or the greatest extent possible.
- **COVID-19 Tracking:** Each school will monitor and report to appropriate entities any confirmed COVID cases in their local school population.
- **Cleaning and Sanitizing:** All schools will continue with the enhanced cleaning and sanitization practices that were implemented last year in addition to providing the greatest degrees of ventilation and fresh air circulation possible.
- **Masking:** Depending on the level of COVID-19 in the community, masking will be either mandated or optional. Currently, all of our counties are highly recommending or mandating masks. Therefore OCE will mandate that schools will open requiring masks for staff and students and we will reevaluate the need regularly.
- **Strategic Cohorting:** Depending on the level of COVID-19 in the community a modified version of cohorting will be used.

A chart of how these practices could be used in the absence of county guidance is on our website listed below. Because we had such success last year following the guidance of the local communities, we are confident that using a similar practice this year, we can have a wonderful, safe in-person school year this year as well.

We hope to have this additional information on the website by August 25, 2021 at:

<https://aopcatholicchools.org/catholic-schools-onward-cso-2/>. Be assured that the Office of Catholic Education will continue to monitor the data provided by the local health departments and make adjustments to this plan as deemed necessary. If local health departments or governmental agencies mandate specific mitigation practices, we will follow these mandates. Again, as with our success last year, we rely on your support in these areas.

Yours in Christ,



Andrew M McLaughlin, Ed.D.