



## PITTSBURGH CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Catholic School Community,

My thoughts and prayers are with you all as we continue our journey through this unusual and challenging time in our lives. We have now completed the first quarter of school, and I want to take a moment of your time to reflect on our successes, our challenges, and path in future days. I must tell you that I am in my fourth rewrite of this letter as the situation and numbers change hourly.

First, I want to thank you for your collaboration and support as we opened our schools and offered five day a week instruction (in-person and virtual). We had three schools that started the school year in the hybrid model. As we entered our 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, all schools were on track for to provide 5 day a week in-person instruction with the continued option for fulltime virtual instruction. As you can see from our recent press releases, this is a fluid situation. Our teachers are well prepared to pivot in and out of virtual instruction.

Our teachers have gone above and beyond in providing both options. In six months' time, they have learned and implemented instruction from a new educational platform due primarily to their steadfast commitment to Catholic education. While they make it look easy, it is not! I encourage everyone to consider the work they are doing and send them our love and thanks.

We face many challenges in the days ahead as the COVID infection rate continues to rise. It is our goal and intent to keep our schools open five days a week for in-person instruction, but we recognize that we may need to shift quickly as our schools continue to monitor their specific circumstances:

- The infection rate within the school (number of cases)
- Their ability to staff the school appropriately
- Community spread that may impact the school

These variables may require individual schools to go virtual for short periods of time (5 – 14 days) depending on the situation. This has already happened at a few of our schools. I would suggest that every family develop an emergency childcare plan just in case. To be clear, ***it is our intent to navigate this COVID uptick with our school doors open for in-person instruction, but we must be prepared for the challenges ahead.*** Your support and collaboration are critical to our ability to make this possible. I remind everyone that all of our schools offer a fully virtual option for remote instruction. If your family is more comfortable with remote learning, please contact your principal for more information.

Please continue to follow health and safety protocols at home and in school. Nearly 100% of the cases we've seen in our schools are from external exposure related to a family gathering, social event, or sporting event. The holidays are upon us, and we are all desperate to have family celebrations that resemble years gone by. I have family in Maine that comes every year for Thanksgiving, but we have agreed to forego that plan this year. While not the same, we are choosing to zoom instead. For those who are considering travel over the holidays or having guests from out of state (states on the PA list for quarantine), please note that students and teachers will need to complete a 14 day quarantine before returning to school. It saddens me to suggest restrictions on family time, but this is a substantive strategy to ensure the health and safety of our school communities.

To further assist in this effort, our grade schools will delay the start of interscholastic winter sports until January. It is our hope that this will limit the number of quarantines during the next two months. Our best chance for continued in-person instruction is to temporarily limit the activities that involve students from outside the local school setting. Due to the nature of basketball, a single positive case could cause multiple infections and quarantines. As a mother of two former basketball players, I understand the disappointment players and families may feel because of this decision. Sports and other extracurricular activities are very important to the overall wellbeing of our children, but we need to be prudent and focused on our primary goal of keeping our children healthy and in school. For many of our dedicated families, the normalcy of having students in school allows them to stay employed.

As we look at the data from the first quarter, it is important to note that we are a family of 32 elementary schools, 7 diocesan high schools, 13,000 students and 1200 teachers and staff members. We had thirty-five reported positive COVID-19 cases from September 1 through November 1. Of those:

- 11 involve elementary school students
- 8 involve high school students
- 8 involve teachers
- 8 involve staff members

Since November 1, we have seen 23 more positive cases (7 staff members/16 students). We pray for a quick recovery for all those who have tested positive. *Please note that the number of*

*positive COVID-19 cases for last two weeks is fast approaching the number for the first two months.* The protocols we have in place are working as evidenced by the absence of school spread. This is a critical element to keeping schools open. We intend to remain extra vigilant as we enter the challenges of the winter months. Our goal is to do our part to keep cases and quarantines at a minimum.

Please continue to pray for our teachers and administrators who are working very hard to provide in-person and virtual instruction to our students. I ask for your patience and compassion as we all navigate the days ahead. This situation is new to all of us, and we truly are doing the very best we can with the very best intentions. Most of all, remember our schools are certainly places of academic excellence but they are, first and foremost, places of faith.

As always, you are welcome to reach out to me by email or phone. God bless you and may our Blessed Mother shelter us all under her loving mantle. I leave you with my prayers and gratitude for all you do.

Your sister in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle A. Peduto". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

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