



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

128 Cherry Lane, Hicksville, New York 11801



*Office of the
Superintendent*

August 17, 2021

Dear Parents,

We are thrilled to welcome back over 10,000 students to full-time, in-person instruction in our Catholic Schools for the 2021-2022 school year. Thank you, parents, for spreading the word about our successes last year during difficult times. Families are excited about our schools, and we are seeing an upswing in enrollment throughout our diocese. This means we will see more children learning in our classrooms, laughing on our playgrounds, and praying in our chapels!

As in everything we do, our top priority is to provide a safe and supportive environment where all our students can flourish in a community where they are cherished and challenged to grow as children created in God's image. In this unique chapter of history, this means being alert to changing conditions of COVID-19.

We want to share three key ideas about what this means for your children and your school community:

NY State Mandates - In recent days, incoming governor Kathy Hochul indicated she would like a mask mandate in all schools to start the school year, and likely continuing as the school year progresses. As you know, this is a different direction than last year when the governor gave local school districts the ability to develop their own protocols. So, we expect that our Catholic schools will begin the 2021-2022 school year fully-masked.

Return to Normalcy? Although not ideal, starting the school year fully masked will allow students to fully return to all school activities that were restricted last year. This is great news! We will also considerably reduce the number of students quarantined after each positive case. Plastic dividers and student health questionnaires will be reduced or eliminated in schools. Finally, all outdoor activities will operate without restrictions and with masks optional.

What to Expect - Our team at the Diocese of Rockville Centre Department of Education is working to finalize safety procedures and protocols for the coming school year. We anticipate additional state guidance that will further impact our opening plans and protocols. Parents, you will soon receive our final, detailed protocols from your child's school.

We understand that returning to school with masks is not what any of us wanted. But we remain prayerful and optimistic that mask restrictions will be relaxed as the year progresses. There is, however, a plus side to starting the year with a mask mandate for all in schools. Starting the school year with a full mask mandate allows us to give our full attention to the regular jobs that come with opening school in September, without the added pressure of worrying about transmission among staff and students. First and foremost, masks will allow us to begin the school year in a safe way for all. We know we will still have students and staff test positive for Covid this year. When worn by all, masks will prevent the need for larger numbers of students to quarantine due to a classmate having developed COVID-19. We will no longer have to conduct extensive contact tracing. We will no longer have to conduct daily health checks with students. We can allow the students to play and congregate together in the classroom. We no longer need to separate students and distance them to the degree we had to last year. We can get them outside and playing more, without masks! With masks we can bring back class group work and students working on projects. We look forward to the end of pandemic restrictions and hope to reduce mask and other restrictions in our schools this year as vaccines become available to lower age groups and the conditions and positivity levels of the pandemic change.

We will not be offering the full remote option that we had last year. If a student needs to quarantine either because he or she has the virus or was in close contact with someone with Covid, then your child's school will work with you to keep your child up to speed with the schoolwork during those two weeks of quarantine.

We appreciate your support and cooperation with our health and safety protocols to ensure we continue providing in person instruction in a safe and healthy environment.

As one family united in Faith with Christ as our guide, we will continue to meet the challenges ahead and continue to provide the very best in Catholic Education to our children, the hope of tomorrow!

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dr. Denise T. Smith". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Dr. Denise T. Smith
Interim Superintendent