



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SPOKANE

Office of Education

August 13, 2020

Dear School Communities,

In the last few weeks The Diocese of Spokane has been working closely with school administration to determine the best course of action for this coming academic school year. As school principals and pastors, we are faced with challenging decisions around how to operate our schools and serve our faith communities in the midst of the pandemic. As we discern what this next school year may look like, I am amazed at the collaboration, dedication and support of our administration, teachers and community. As information and guidance are in constant flux, we are formulating the best plan of action for all scenarios involved.

Last week, Governor Inslee explained if every school reopened classrooms, we would see “meaningful and dangerous levels” of increased transmission. At the same time, he highlighted the need for flexibility across the state and provided a new framework for all schools and local public health officials to follow. The framework categorizes counties into high, moderate and low risk with recommendations for remote learning, hybrid learning, in-class learning and extracurricular activities.

The safety of students and staff and the care for the common good of the community remains paramount in our decision-making process, while maintaining our deep commitment to our Catholic identity. Schools within the Catholic Diocese of Spokane will continue to follow the guidance from Governor Inslee’s office and the local Spokane Department of Health (DOH) as a minimum standard.

It is the intent of the Diocese of Spokane Catholic schools to reopen in the fall. Working with the Department of Health in the various counties in which our schools reside, we have identified a *phase-in* model to have in-person instruction, beginning with specific populations. Based on the suggestions from the DOH, this localized approach ensures decisions are based on the most current health and safety information from each county, which is vital for the safety of our students, staff and the local community. Schools who need more individualized models will work closely with their local Department of Health.

This progressive *phase-in* model would serve as a guide-post for prioritization of students in greatest need for in-person learning, such as our youngest learners (Pre/K-2), and children with special health or education needs. For areas classified as high infection rates, DOH allows for flexibility for in-person learning for a small number of children most in need. Data shows the most crucial period for learning is within primary grades which may not be effectively delivered through remote instruction. Schools will phase in students according to their student population, physical facilities, and other variables. The *phase-in* model provides a path towards more in-person learning as rates of infection decrease and reflect the recommendations of the Decision Tree Provision for In Person Learning by the Spokane DOH.

Schools are prepared to educate and review all new procedures and protocols with students as they establish new routines and expectations this year. Students will experience important safety changes at our schools, including temperature checks, social distancing and mandatory masks/face coverings at all locations.

In past weeks our teachers have been working on plans for remote continuous learning as need arise. Teachers will continue to provide ongoing faith formation, academic instruction, and assistance to students in whatever model is implemented.

Due to the fact our schools reside within the boundaries of several counties and districts, the first day of school will depend upon each location. Please continue to follow your school's news for a more definitive date.

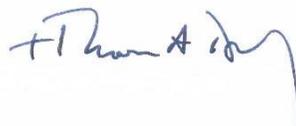
As we have all experienced things continue to change, and they change quickly. Schools have been asked to be nimble in their planning. We must be prepared to move seamlessly between in-person and remote learning based upon new developments caused by COVID 19. Because of this we must stress the importance of families having a backup plan to prepare for any rapid change in the school environment.

My prayers and gratitude are with you all.

*“Start by doing what's **necessary**; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.” - Francis of Assisi*



Katie Rieckers
Director of Schools



Most Reverend Thomas A. Daly
Bishop of Spokane