



15 July 2021

CATHOLIC DIOCESE
of
BATON ROUGE
Office of the Bishop

To the Priests, Principals, and the Faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge:

Protecting our brothers and sisters and providing a healthy and safe environment for all, especially for our children, faculty, and staff of our Catholic Schools, are chief concerns of our Church. Offering this protection has been the motivating principle guiding the creation of policies and procedures for our churches and schools throughout this pandemic.

On Tuesday, July 13, 2021, the Catholic Schools Office promulgated its *Back to School Policy* in an effort to reopen our schools in person and on time, all while providing consistency in protocols to manage safe operations. Now that the state superintendent of education has clarified the department's return-to-school guidelines as being recommendations and not requirements, we have reconsidered elements of the policy that was distributed earlier this week.

Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge will return to classes in August adopting the following protocols:

- Masks will be optional;
- There is no requirement to prove vaccination status;
- Field trips and elementary sports programs will be resumed;
- Daily temperature checks will be eliminated;
- Guidance will be reexamined regarding other protocols including quarantine and physical distancing.

We will begin the school year in this way. I must be upfront that these guidelines are always subject to change based on circumstances in our communities related to COVID-19, new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Louisiana State Department of Education, and our experience in the classroom.

My office has received and heard the concerns of parents - the first teachers of their children - and other concerned members of the community regarding the difficulties of creating a safe environment for children amid changing variables. As your bishop, I promise to re-evaluate these and any other guidelines as necessary for the duration of this health crisis.

Hope in the Lord,

Most Reverend Michael Gerard Duca
Bishop of Baton Rouge