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2021-22 Maine Catholic Schools Parent Guide

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT THIS YEAR

Maine's Catholic schools will be opening for the 2021-22 school year with similar protocols in place as when we closed the school year in June. These policies are designed to minimize the requirement for quarantine and school closures in order to provide safe, full-time, in-person learning for our students. Policies will be reviewed periodically to ensure that mask-wearing is in place for as short a time as possible. The plan reflects important guidance from the Maine Department of Education (MDOE), the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

ALL STUDENT IN-PERSON LEARNING

Our plan allows us to welcome back all students for full-day instruction, five days a week, in our school buildings.

COHORT MODEL

Schools may assign grade PreK-8 students to a cohort, a small group that stays together throughout the day, to avoid close contact with others and minimize quarantine requirements if a positive COVID-19 case occurs.

PHYSICAL DISTANCE

Students should keep at least 3 feet away from others. During some activities that require mask removal or result in increased respiration, students may need to keep at least 6 feet of physical distance from others. Schools will have similar procedures to last year for pick-up and drop-off, as well as defined routes within the school building such as one-way stairs, to minimize close contacts.

FACE COVERINGS

All individuals, regardless of vaccination status, will be required to wear a cloth face mask indoors. Face coverings may be removed, with 6 feet of physical distance, at lunch while eating and drinking. Face coverings are not required outdoors. Students with specialized needs may have the option for alternative appropriate face coverings with prior approval from the principal.

TEMPERATURE CHECKS

Parents will be required to complete a temperature and symptom check of their children daily, prior to dropping them off at school.

POOLED TESTING

Schools may be able to participate in the state's weekly pooled testing program. If so, parents will be able to opt-in for their child to participate.

REMOTE LEARNING

Remote learning will be provided during class quarantine and school closures. For individuals required to quarantine, study packets may be provided instead.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

We know that parents have many questions about school. In this document, we have outlined many of the frequently asked questions (FAQ) received from parents about our reopening plan. These questions are divided into four sections, each addressing an important aspect of our reopening process, and are subject to change as the situation changes:

1. Health and Safety: These questions include but are not limited to: physical distancing, face coverings, and facility cleaning.
2. Infection Protocols: These questions address how schools will respond when a student or employee becomes ill.
3. Academics and Programming: These questions relate to how classes will be taught, information about school events (such as Masses or assemblies), and extracurricular activities.
4. Tuition: Questions about tuition payments during the upcoming school year.

Please note that the School Reopening Plan contains general guidance for schools. Each school must apply these guidelines to its own unique school setting. As such, if you have specific questions about how these guidelines apply to your school, we encourage you to contact your school's principal.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Q: What does "reopening our schools" really mean?

A: Gathering as a school community is an integral part of Catholic education. This means that all students are welcome to return to classes for in-person instruction five days a week.

Q: Will students be safe?

A: Safety is always our top priority in Catholic education. In constructing this plan, we have closely studied guidance from federal and state authorities and can implement the requirements.

Q: Will all students be allowed to return to school at the beginning of the year?

A: Yes. Our plan provides for the return of all Catholic school students for full five day a week instruction.

Q: Will students need to wear face coverings at school?

A: All individuals will be required to wear cloth face masks while indoors. Face coverings may be removed, with 6 feet of physical distance, at lunch while eating and drinking. Face coverings may also be removed outdoors. Medical accommodations must be preapproved by the principal.

Q: Do I need to purchase face coverings for my child?

A: Yes. Parents must send their children to school with face coverings. Cloth face coverings must be cleaned after each use and parents should send an extra five-pack of face coverings labeled with the student's name to school to be held by the teacher in case a student forgets to bring one or needs to change during the day. Due to the variety of quality in disposable masks, cloth face masks are recommended. Bandanas, gaiters and masks with vents should not be worn.

Q: Will teachers teach children how to use face coverings?

A: Yes. We know that students (especially young children) will need training to learn how to properly wear face coverings. We will spend time at the beginning of the year helping children learn how to safely keep face coverings in place. We encourage parents and families to spend time prior to the start of school, working with your children on wearing a face covering for longer periods of time.

Q: Will students be required to physically distance at school?

A: Students should remain 3 feet away from others. During some activities, such as lunch, band and chorus, students should remain 6 feet away from others. Schools may assign students to a cohort to provide for better containment should there be a positive case of COVID-19 (see the Infection Protocol section).

Q: Will parents/families be required to take their child's temperature every day before coming to school?

A: Yes. A high fever is a key symptom of COVID-19. Parents will be required to take their child's temperature every day before taking their child to school. If your child has had a fever of over 100.4°F within the last 24 hours, your child should be kept home from school. You should contact your child's doctor and the school's main office. Similarly, you should ask your child if he/she has any of the other symptoms of COVID-19, such as a sore throat, coughing, or nausea. If your child complains of new, unexplained, or worsening symptoms, you should keep him/her home and contact your doctor and the school office. For more information about how to handle the potential illness of your child, please see the Infection Protocol section. Schools will require parents to use an online application or paper form to record their child's temperature and the other required COVID-19 health related screening questions each day before coming to school.

Q: How will drop-off and pick-up at school be handled?

A: Each school has carefully evaluated drop-off and pick-up procedures. Schools may use various entrances and exits to minimize contact between student cohorts. Parents should not congregate near school doors or in parking lots. Your principal will communicate specific drop-off and pick-up procedures to you ahead of the start of school.

Q: What does the plan require regarding safety and cleaning of school buildings?

A: The plan includes specific requirements for the ongoing cleaning and disinfecting of all school buildings. Windows and/or vents will be opened to maximize air flow. Barriers may be installed in main office areas. Our plan includes instructions for schools on managing shared areas such as hallways, gymnasiums, cafeterias, and bathrooms.

Q: How will lunch take place when school reopens?

A: Schools must think differently about lunchtime. Maximum occupancy of cafeterias is limited, and students must be physically distant. Each school is developing a customized plan that fits their unique building. Some schools may require students to eat lunch in their classrooms and/or have students use the cafeteria in staggered shifts. Food cannot be brought to school to share unless from a restaurant or store, packaged in individual portions.

Q: What about recess?

A: Schools may conduct recess and will follow defined safety requirements. Face coverings are not required outdoors.

Q: Can parents/family members come into the schools to drop off and/or pick up their child?

A: Parents will not be able to enter the building for drop-off or pick-up. Staff will meet parents and their children outside the building.

Q: Can parents/family members still volunteer at school?

A: We have asked schools to minimize the number of volunteers this year to mitigate risk. Unless a parent/family member is an essential volunteer, as determined by the principal, schools will likely not allow volunteering.

Q: Will extended care (before and after care) be available this year?

A: Yes. Schools may continue to offer extended care. Our plan includes specific requirements for such care (including staff and students wearing face coverings).

Q: My child and/or another member of my household is in an at-risk group for COVID-19. Should I send my child to school?

A: The CDC has defined conditions in which certain people may be more at risk for severe illness through COVID-19. If your child or another member of your household is at-risk, we encourage you to speak to your doctor. Ultimately, you must decide whether you believe it is safe for your child to attend school.

Q: Is it okay for my family to travel during the COVID-19 pandemic?

A: Currently, travel to another state does not require quarantine or testing. The CDC requires COVID-19 testing for international air travel. Unvaccinated international travelers should quarantine for 7 days and be tested 3-5 days after returning.

Q: What happens if there is a COVID-19 surge in Maine and the state imposes more restrictions on schools?

A: If a COVID-19 surge occurs, we will work closely with state officials to determine whether we can continue in-person instruction. Catholic schools are prepared to switch from in-person to remote learning immediately should the governor of Maine issue a Stay at Home order.

INFECTION PROTOCOLS

Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

A: The CDC has identified several symptoms of COVID-19, including high fever (above 100.4°F), sore throat, coughing, nausea, headache, muscle aches, loss of taste or smell, runny nose, fatigue, diarrhea, and difficulty breathing.

Q: What should I do if my child has symptoms of COVID-19?

A: If your child shows symptoms of COVID-19, you should contact your doctor. Your doctor may ask that your child participate in a COVID-19 test. You should alert your school's main office and do not bring your child to school. If COVID-19 symptoms occur during the school day, your child will be immediately sent to the required, designated isolation room and you will be contacted to pick your child up from school.

Q: My child had COVID-19-like symptoms but tested negative for COVID-19. When can he/she return to school?

A: If your child does not have COVID-19 but has another illness, you must keep your child home until the following three requirements are met: 1. Your child is symptom-free (no fever or fever-reducing medications, sore throat, diarrhea, runny nose, difficulty breathing, nausea) for 24 hours; 2. A doctor's note clearing your child to return to school; 3. Provide the negative COVID-19 test result. Home tests cannot be accepted.

Q: What should I do if my child tests positive for COVID-19?

A: You should immediately contact your doctor for additional instructions. You should also inform your school's main office. You should not send your child to school. Privacy laws prevent the school staff from sharing the student's or staff's name if they have a positive test result. Positive or symptomatic cases will be required to [isolate](#). Students who are siblings of a positive student who live in the same household and do not qualify for exceptions (see below) must [quarantine](#) until 10 days after their last exposure.

Q: When can a student return to school after receiving a positive COVID-19 test?

A: If a student tests positive for COVID-19 or does not receive medical attention for symptoms, the student must [isolate](#) until at least 10 days have passed since the test or since subsequent symptoms first appeared, at least 24 hours without fever or fever-reducing medications, and symptoms of COVID-19 (other than loss of taste and smell) are improving. In addition, parents must provide a doctor's note clearing the student to return to school.

Q: What should I do if a member of my household (who is not my child) tests positive for COVID-19?

A: You should immediately contact your school's main office. Close contacts¹ who have been exposed to COVID-19 and do not qualify for an exception (see below) must [quarantine](#) until at least 10 days have passed since their last exposure².

Q: Can my student participate in remote learning while in quarantine?

A: Students will be able to participate in remote learning while their class or school is in quarantine. If an individual is required to quarantine, in some cases study packets may be provided instead.

Q: What happens if my child's teacher tests positive for COVID-19?

A: Should any employee have COVID-19 symptoms or test positive for COVID-19, schools will follow protocols from the Maine CDC. If a teacher becomes sick and is unable to work, your school will provide a substitute teacher. Parents will be notified.

Q: What happens if another student in my child's class tests positive for COVID-19?

A: Your school will make all parents aware that a student has tested positive for COVID-19. If a student tests positive for COVID-19, the positive student will be required to [isolate](#). Close contacts who do not qualify for an exception must [quarantine](#) until at least 10 days have passed since their last exposure. Students will be able to participate through remote learning during class quarantine and school closures.

The following exceptions to quarantine may be allowed:

- 1) Fully vaccinated³, no symptoms: not required to quarantine but should test 3-5 days after exposure.
- 2) Proof of COVID-19 recovery within past 90 days, no symptoms: not required to quarantine. If unvaccinated, should be tested as soon as possible and re-tested 5-7 days later.
- 3) Exposure occurred in school, participating in school weekly pooled testing program, no symptoms: can attend school and school activities but must quarantine outside of school.
- 4) Exposure to positive student occurred in classroom, with at least 3 feet of distancing, universal masking policy, assigned seating, and no symptoms: student can participate in class but not school activities and must quarantine outside of school. If unvaccinated, should be tested as soon as possible and re-tested 5-7 days later. This exception does not apply to adults.

Q: Could my child's school building be closed due to COVID-19 this year?

A: We will do our best to ensure a safe and healthy environment in the coming year. However, if a state-wide Stay at Home order is issued, we may need to close the school building and transition all students to remote learning for a time. Parents will be updated regularly should a school closure be required.

¹ The Maine CDC defines close contact as being less than 6 feet away for a cumulative total of 15 minutes within 24 hours, or physical contact for any amount of time, with or without masks, from a person with COVID-19 up to 48 hours before they tested positive or developed symptoms.

² A person who cannot avoid close contact with a household member with COVID-19 may need to quarantine for the duration of the household member's illness plus an additional 10 days.

³ A person is considered fully vaccinated at least 14 days after completing the vaccine series.

ACADEMICS AND PROGRAMMING

Q: Will my child's curriculum be changed this year?

A: Schools will continue to deliver high-quality instruction. Special requirements may be in place for departmentalized classes and special area subjects (see sections below). The implementation of safety and health requirements (outlined earlier in this FAQ) will create new complexities in instruction, but our commitment remains to provide your child an academically rigorous, faith-based education.

Q: Will my child's classroom look different?

A: We have instructed schools to spread out desks and tables in classrooms as much as possible. Plexiglass dividers may also be in place if possible. In order to maximize floor space, non-essential furniture and other items have been removed. We have also asked that desks and tables be arranged so that they all face the front of the room. These strategies will minimize risk of any infection in the classroom.

Q: Will students share school supplies?

A: No. We are asking schools to ensure that students not share school supplies (e.g., books, crayons, technology, etc.), including for such subjects as art and music. Exceptions may be made for activities outdoors (such as outdoor physical education classes). If it is impossible to avoid sharing supplies, such as computers in a computer lab, such supplies will be cleaned after every use.

Q: I have a child in preschool or kindergarten. Is high-quality learning possible?

A: Yes. We are working closely with our early education teachers to continue the best possible instruction in preschool and kindergarten. While health and safety requirements are in place, our teachers will continue to work hard to support your children's intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth.

Q: Will students still change classes or classrooms?

A: Prior to the pandemic, many of our schools offered departmentalization, in which students changed classes for core subjects (religion, language arts, math, science and social studies). This model was particularly common at the junior high level. In some cases, teachers may go to the students' classroom instead.

Q: Will schools still offer classes in special subject areas (e.g., art, music, physical education (PE), library)?

A: Yes. As with departmentalization (see last question), special subject area teachers will travel to each homeroom for instruction whenever possible.

Q: Will tests be given this year?

A: Yes. It is important that we continue to gauge student academic growth throughout the school year. As such, students and families should anticipate tests to be administered in your child's class. These tests will include the NWEA tests.

Q: Will students participate in field trips?

A: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools will not arrange in-person field trips until such time field trips are deemed safe. If field trips are allowed, contact with the non-school community will be avoided.

Q: My child has an Individualized Service Plan (ISP) because of an identified learning, behavioral or physical need. Will the needs of my child still be met this year?

A: As each Individualized Service Plan (ISP) is different, your school will be evaluating each plan to determine whether additional accommodations or modifications are needed for COVID-19-related health and safety protocols. Your school will contact you if it is determined that changes need to occur. If you have urgent questions, contact your school directly.

Q: If a parent wants to meet with the teacher or principal, how can these meetings occur?

A: These meetings may be held in-person in some cases with appropriate safety precautions or virtually.

Q: Can we still have stakeholder group meetings, such as the School Board, Home-Family Association and Booster Club?

A: Such meetings should take place virtually.

Q: What about fundraising and community events, such as an annual gala?

A: Fundraising and community events may be held in-person in some cases with appropriate safety precautions or may be held virtually.

Q: Will school Masses still take place?

A: The diocese has created a plan for parishes that allows for the celebration of Mass under specific conditions. Schools must follow this plan, through close coordination with the local pastor and parish, in determining whether/how Masses will be celebrated.

Q: Will First Communion, Reconciliation, and Confirmation take place this year?

A: Your child's school and parish will continue to provide preparation for the Sacraments of First Communion, Reconciliation, and Confirmation. For the celebration of the Sacraments, schools and parishes must follow a specific plan defined by the diocese. Your pastor and parish will determine the timing and schedule of these sacraments.

Q: How will extracurricular activities be impacted this year?

A: Our plan provides guidance on extracurricular activities. Highlights include:

- Athletics: Our sports programs will adhere to the Maine Principals' Association guidelines.
- Band: Rehearsals may be held indoors in a well-ventilated area if participants are masked with 6 feet of physical distance. Bell covers must be used for wind instruments.
- Non-Musical Drama/School Play/Christmas Program: May be conducted indoors if wearing masks with at least 3 feet of physical distance between students or outdoors.
- Choir/Musical Theater: Practices with a maximum length of 30 minutes can be held indoors in a well-ventilated area if participants are masked with 6 feet of physical distance.

TUITION AND FEES

Q: Will I still have to pay full tuition should the school need to move back into remote learning?

A: Yes, our schools need to continue to pay teachers and school staff to support your children during remote learning.

Q: I am having difficulty paying tuition, as my own workplace has been impacted by COVID-19. What do I do?

A: We know that some families may have difficulties paying tuition due to the loss of pay during workplace closures. If this is happening to you, please contact your school's principal. We understand your situation and will do our very best to work with you.

Q: Will fees be changed this year?

A: Each school develops their own fees based upon local needs. Fees may be adjusted if a program or activity has been directly impacted by COVID-19, for example, if a field trip cannot be held.

If you have any other questions about the coming school year, please contact your school principal directly. They welcome your inquiries.