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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. 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.

PHYSICAL DISTANCE

Students who are required to mask when at school due to isolation or quarantine must remain 6 feet away from others when not wearing a mask. The mask should only be removed when actively eating or drinking.

FACE COVERINGS

As of March 7, 2022, face masks are optional except for a positive case or close contact. If returning to school after a 5-day isolation or quarantine, a well-fitting mask must be worn for 5 days after returning. If a close contact is exempt from quarantine, a well-fitting mask must be worn for 10 days after their last exposure.

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 if a school closure becomes necessary during an outbreak.

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 masks at school?

A: As of March 7, 2022, face masks are optional except for a positive case or close contact. If returning to school after a 5-day isolation or quarantine, a well-fitting mask must be worn for 5 days after returning. If a close contact is exempt from quarantine, a well-fitting mask must be worn for 10 days after their last exposure.

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

A: Students who are required to mask when at school due to isolation or quarantine must remain 6 feet away from others when not wearing a mask. The mask should only be removed when actively eating or drinking.

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.

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

A: Each school has carefully evaluated drop-off and pick-up procedures. 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 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 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.

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

A: Parents may not be able to enter the building for drop-off or pick-up. If so, 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.

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 your child should wear a mask and if 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, returning from another state does not require quarantine or testing. The CDC requires COVID-19 testing for international air travel. Unvaccinated or symptomatic international travelers are required to quarantine for 5 days. All international travelers should 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 child should be tested as soon as possible. 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 symptoms have improved (including no fever or fever-reducing medications for 24 hours) and provide the negative COVID-19 test result. Schools may be able to accept home tests if the patient and collection date can be verified.

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 cases will be required to [isolate](#) for 5 full days, counting from the day after the test was taken or symptoms began, or longer until symptoms have improved (without fever or fever-reducing medications for 24 hours), followed by 5 days of wearing a mask around others. If testing near the end of the 5-day isolation returns a positive result, the student should continue to isolate for 5 additional days.

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 is not tested, the student must [isolate](#) for 5 full days, counting from the day after the test was taken or symptoms began, or longer until symptoms have improved (without fever or fever-reducing medications for 24 hours), followed by 5 days of wearing a mask. If testing near the end of the 5-day isolation returns a positive result, the student should continue to isolate for 5 additional days.

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

A: An asymptomatic close contact who qualifies for one of the following exemptions is not required to quarantine but must wear a well-fitting face mask for 10 days:

1. The close contact is 18 or older and has received [all recommended vaccine doses](#), including [boosters](#) and [additional primary shots](#) for some immunocompromised people; or
2. The close contact is 5-17 years and completed the [primary vaccine series](#) of COVID-19 vaccines but who have not yet received all eligible boosters; or
3. The close contact had COVID-19 within the last 90 days; or
4. The close contact (staff/faculty/student) participates in school pooled testing (can attend school and school activities but must quarantine in the community).

If an asymptomatic close contact does not qualify for any of the above exemptions, they must quarantine for 5 days and wear a well-fitting face mask for 5 days afterwards. They should be tested 5 days after exposure.

Symptomatic close contacts should be tested as soon as possible and isolate until the test result is known. If not tested, they must isolate for at least 5 days (or longer, until fever-free without medication for 24 hours and other symptoms have improved) and wear a well-fitting mask for 5 days afterward.

The Maine CDC defines a 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 from a person with COVID-19 up to 48 hours before they tested positive or developed symptoms.

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

A: Students will be able to participate in remote learning if a school closure becomes necessary during an outbreak.

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 inform the school community when there is a positive case but may no longer be able to trace all close contacts.

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, the Maine CDC may require a school closure during an outbreak. During a closure, the school will switch to remote learning.

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. 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: 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).

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 may travel to each homeroom for instruction.

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.

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.