



COVID-19 POLICIES & PROCEDURES


DIOCESAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

2021-2022 Academic Year

Catholic education, just like our Catholic faith, is meant to be face-to-face in communion and community with one another. COVID-19 (and variants) has made this simple, humane and yes, divine approach more difficult. Since the best education takes place not by distance learning but in a room or building where students and teachers can interact as human beings, we have adopted these guidelines, while we engage in this great ministry to our young people. The safety of the children and all those engaged in the ministry of Catholic education is of paramount importance.

These policies and procedures have been reviewed, explained and implemented by our schools' faculty and staff. The necessity of these policies is self-evident, but they will be enforced with charity, professionalism, and with the common good of the larger school community in mind. They will be updated as conditions change in consultation with local, state and national health authorities. Parents, we recommend that you speak to your children about how their school may look and operate differently based on the current epidemic and the guidelines provided herein.

We pray for the health and safety of all our families and those who work in our schools. May Our Lord bless our work and keep us safe from harm.



David W. Dean
Superintendent of Catholic Schools

All quotes in the text that are not cited are from the Centers for Disease Control.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Promoting Behaviors that Reduce Spread

1. **Quarantine**—Each principal should make reasonable efforts to educate employees, families, and students about the importance of “staying home when appropriate” according to the Centers for Disease Control (“CDC”) or the local health department materials and guidelines. These include:
 - 1.1 Employees and the parents of students should immediately report to the principal or his or her delegate if they are sick, have tested positive for COVID-19 (which as used herein includes all variants), or have been recently had close contact with a person with COVID-19. “Close contact” or “exposure” means the individual was within six (6) feet of someone for a cumulative total of fifteen (15) minutes or more within a twenty-four (24) hour period.
 - 1.2 Employees and students who have tested positive for COVID-19 or who have recently had close contact, as defined above, with a person with COVID-19 must stay home and quarantine for a minimum period of ten (10) days before returning to school unless otherwise determined by the principal pursuant to these policies and procedures. Principals, in their sole discretion, may ask persons to stay home from school pursuant to the provisions contained herein and in consultation with the Superintendent.
 - (a) If the quarantined person receives a negative test result on at *least* day five (5) of quarantine *and* reports no symptoms, the person may return after seven (7) days.
 - (b) For Employees (not students) previously diagnosed with symptomatic laboratory-confirmed COVID-19

who remain asymptomatic after recovery, retesting or quarantine is not recommended if another exposure occurs or might have occurred within ninety (90) days after the date of symptom onset from the initial COVID-19 infection *unless* that employee develops symptoms within the ninety (90) day period. If symptoms occur, then the Employee should be quarantined pursuant to **Section 1.2**.

- (c) Principals should apply the definition of “close contact” (**Section 1.1**) in determining who must undergo the mandatory quarantine—this standard of exposure may be used to exempt persons from mandatory quarantines (**Section 1.4**). Moreover, the close contact definition *excludes* students who were within six (6) feet of an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 *if both* the student who tested positive and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time—this exclusion does not apply to adults.
- (d) If person is determined to have been exposed (**Section 1.1**) and that person is fully vaccinated then: (i) if he or she has symptoms, then he or she should quarantine pursuant to these policies; (ii) if he or she does not have symptoms the individual may either quarantine pursuant to these policies *or* he or she must undergo a COVID-19 tested three (3) to five (5) days after his or her exposure, even if the person is asymptomatic, and the person must wear a mask indoors at all times for fourteen (14) days following the exposure or until their test result is negative. Questions regarding vaccinations are addressed in **Section 7**.

- 1.3 Employees and students who are sick but have no knowledge of being in contact with someone who has COVID-19 and are not presenting symptoms of COVID-19 should (i) stay home and monitor their health for COVID-19 symptoms (ii) may not return to school for at least twenty-four (24) hours *after* no longer having a fever *without* the use of any fever-reducing medications.
- 1.4 Students in the same classroom as a student who tests positive for COVID-19 must undergo the mandatory quarantine (**Section 1.2**) unless otherwise determined by the principal (**Section 1.2(c)**). If the student who tests positive has siblings in the same household who also attend a diocesan elementary school, then all such siblings will also undergo a mandatory quarantine unless mitigating circumstances exist as determined by the principal—the quarantine for siblings in the same household extends up to the positive student’s first day of no longer having a fever *without* the use of medication (and with improved respiratory function) and continues for ten (10) days afterward.
- 1.5 Students in the same classroom as a student who is *possibly* exposed to COVID-19 but has not tested positive *may* be asked to quarantine (**Section 1.2**) as determined by the principal. If the student who was possibly exposed but has not tested positive has siblings in the same household who also attend a diocesan elementary school, then all such siblings *may* also undergo a quarantine as determined by the principal—the quarantine for siblings in the same household extends up to the exposed student’s first day of no longer having a fever *without* the use of medication (and with improved respiratory function) and continues for ten (10) days or seven (7) days (**Section 1.2**) afterward.
- 1.6 Principals should notify local health officials, pursuant to their instructions, and the Superintendent of any possible exposures or self-reports of COVID-19 and defer to the guidance of local health officials on addressing any health-related issues in consultation with the Superintendent.
- 1.7 Principals should notify employees, families, and students of any exposures and of the measures being taken to address them pursuant to these policies and procedures and with due deference to confidentiality of those involved. A person’s name cannot be shared without their prior approval.
- 1.8 In addition, each principal should adopt procedures that address: (i) isolating potentially ill students while still on campus; (ii) providing PPE and other precautions for employees who must work with potentially ill students; and (iii) protocols for sanitizing said isolation area and related high-touch surfaces.
- 1.9 Employees and parents, on behalf of the students, should, in good faith, notify the principal if they travel internationally.

2. **PTO & Absences**—It is important that both employees and parents err on the side of caution when determining whether or not to quarantine. As such, for the 21-22 school year, the Superintendent requests principals adopt (i) a

flexible approach to PTO that encourages personnel to err on the side of caution and (ii) a flexible absence policy for students that does the same. Regarding employees, absences—other than those mandated by quarantine—should be covered first by the employee’s accumulated PTO. Any employee who believes they cannot remain home due to sickness without fear of reprisal should immediately contact the Superintendent. Parents may have the same recourse regarding the absences provided students. Absenteeism shall be monitored to ensure appropriate staffing and to identify health trends.

3. **Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette**—Each principal is encouraged to make reasonable efforts to educate employees, families, and students about the importance of good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette by either using materials in accordance with or produced by the CDC or local health officials.
 - 3.1 Teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least twenty (20) seconds and increase monitoring to increase adherence amongst employees and students.
 - 3.2 Make reasonable efforts to provide soap at all handwashing locations for employees and students and to provide hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol for employees and older students who may safely use said product.
 - 3.3 Encourage employees and students to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, if possible, or to cough into the inner elbow; used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hands washed immediately with soap and water or, if not readily available, hand sanitizer may be used for older students.

4. **Face Coverings**—The use of face coverings, i.e., masks, is *strongly recommended*, but not mandatory, for employees, students, visitors, or any other persons on campus. Mask are not prohibited and all persons on school grounds may wear a mask if they desire to do so. Principals may make reasonable efforts to have masks available for those who come onto school grounds. Parents may request their student(s) wear masks and the principals will make reasonable efforts to accommodate that request. The appropriateness of a mask is determined by the principal in consultation with CDC and local health department guidelines. Principals are permitted to post signage to the effect that masks are highly recommended (and that vaccinations are recommended, Section 7).
 - 4.1 Masks **should not be worn** by (i) students younger than two (2) years old (ii) any student who has trouble breathing (iii) any employee who has a written medical exemption and (iv) anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove mask without assistance.
 - 4.2 This **Section 4** may be modified by the Superintendent, in consultation with the principal and the pastor, to meet the particular needs or challenges at a location, which includes, but is not limited to, mandating masks for all persons at a location (save for those in **Section 4.1**). These needs could include multiple exposures of COVID-19 or the issuance of a municipal mask mandate or similar legal promulgations.

5. **Adequate Supplies**—In general, principals should make reasonable efforts to support healthy hygiene behaviors by providing adequate supplies, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least sixty (60) percent alcohol (for employees and older students who can safely use hand sanitizer), paper towels, tissues, disinfectant wipes, cloth face coverings (as feasible) and no-touch/foot-pedal trash cans.

6. **Signs & Messaging**—Principals may make reasonable efforts to communicate the guidelines and policies contained herein to employees, families, and students. Free signage, templates, etc., are available on the CDC website.
 - 6.1 “To post signs in highly visible locations (e.g., school entrances, restrooms) that promote everyday protective measures and describe how to stop the spread of germs (such as by properly washing hands and properly wearing a cloth face covering).”
 - 6.2 “Broadcast regular announcements on reducing the spread of COVID-19 on PA systems.”
 - 6.3 “Include messages (for example, videos) about behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19 when communicating with staff and families (such as on school websites, in emails, and on school social media accounts).”

Maintaining Healthy Environments

7. **Vaccinations**—Any inquiry into an employee’s vaccination status should be limited to concerns under **Section 1.2(d)** or as otherwise determined by the principal and the Superintendent. As a general rule, the principal (or any other agent of the school) is not permitted to inquire about a person’s vaccination status nor is a principal (or any other agent of the school) permitted to mandate vaccinations or make any policy or procedure predicated upon a person’s vaccination status for any employee, student, or visitor unless explicitly permitted to do so under these policies and procedures. Pastors are permitted however, to recommend vaccination to their community (Section 4).
8. **General Cleaning & Disinfection**—Each principal should adopt a set routine and schedule of sanitization that is feasible and pertinent to their facilities and local resources. The following general guidelines should assist the principal in adopting more specific guidelines.
 - 8.1 “Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (e.g., playground equipment, door handles, sink handles, drinking fountains) within the school and on school buses at least daily or between use as much as possible. Use of shared objects (e.g., gym or physical education equipment, art supplies, toys, games) should be limited when possible, or cleaned between use.”
 - 8.2 “If transport vehicles (e.g., buses) are used by the school, drivers should practice all safety actions and protocols as indicated for other staff (e.g., hand hygiene, cloth face coverings). To clean and disinfect school buses or other transport vehicles, see guidance for bus transit operators.”
 - 8.3 Principals should make reasonable efforts to oversee the safe and correct use and storage of cleaning and disinfection products, including storing products securely away from students. Use products that meet EPA disinfection criteria.
 - 8.4 Cleaning products should not be used near students, and employees should make reasonable efforts that there is adequate ventilation when using these products to prevent student or themselves from inhaling toxic fumes.
9. **Ventilation**—Principals should use reasonable efforts to provide that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk (e.g., risk of falling, triggering asthma symptoms) to students using the facility.
10. **Water Systems**— “To minimize the risk of Legionnaire’s disease and other diseases associated with water, take steps to ensure that all water systems and features (e.g., sink faucets, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown. Drinking fountains should be cleaned and sanitized but encourage staff and students to bring their own water to minimize use and touching of water fountains.”
11. **Modified Classroom Layouts**—While modified classrooms are not mandated, Principals are encouraged to make reasonable efforts to (i) space seating/desks at least six (6) feet apart when feasible, (ii) turn desks to face in the same direction (rather than facing each other), or have students sit on only one side of tables, spaced apart, (iii) create distance between students on school buses (e.g., seat students one child per row, skip rows) when possible, and (iv) make any other effort, as reasonable, to promote social distancing in the classrooms and other communal spaces.
12. **Physical Barriers & Guides**—Principals may, as reasonable and as resources permit, (i) install physical barriers, such as sneeze guards and partitions, particularly in areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain at least six (6) feet apart (e.g., reception desks), and (ii) provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that staff and students remain at least six (6) feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g. guides for creating “one way routes” in hallways).
13. **Communal Spaces**—Principals may, regarding communal spaces, e.g., dining halls, playground equipment, etc., (i) close such communal spaces, (ii) stagger the use of such spaces, implement social distancing, and adopt routines of sanitization, (iii) add physical barriers, as discussed above, to such communal spaces, or (iv) any reasonable approach that adopts the various guidelines provided herein.

14. **Food Services**—Principals may adopt any of the following guidelines pursuant to how their food services are provided at their locations:
- 14.1 Have student bring their own meals as feasible or serve individually plated meals in classrooms instead of in a communal dining hall or cafeteria, while ensuring the safety of student with food allergies.
 - 14.2 “Use disposable food service items (e.g., utensils, dishes). If disposable items are not feasible or desirable, ensure that all non-disposable food service items are handled with gloves and washed with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher. Individuals should wash their hands after removing their gloves or after directly handling used food service items.”
 - 14.3 If food is offered at any event, have pre-packaged boxes or bags for each attendee instead of a buffet or family-style meal. Avoid sharing food and utensils and ensure the safety of students with food allergies.
 - 14.4 Mitigate or suspend shared snacks and other communal meals for celebrations and other activities.

Maintaining Healthy Operations

15. **Vulnerable Employees & Students**—Each principal should communicate an openness to work with and listen to employees or students who may present a higher risk to COVID-19 due to some health vulnerability, e.g., over the age of sixty-five (65) and/or underlying medical conditions. Regarding employees, Principals should consult the Superintendent and diocesan legal counsel when making human resource (“HR”) decisions. Regarding students, principals should discern options that may limit the student’s exposure risk.
16. **Field Trips & Activities**—Field trips and other in-person activities are permitted. Principals should discern whether any pertinent measures (e.g., social distancing) that may reduce risk are prudent and should remain cognizant of the rules of any third-parties involved.
17. **Sports**—Each principal reserves the right, pursuant to the guidelines herein, to “pursue options to convene sporting events and participation in sports activities in ways that minimizes the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to players, families, coaches, and communities.” Such options could include: limiting the capacity of indoor facilities, suspending handshakes or “high-fives” between teams; no sharing of sporting equipment, clothing, towels, and beverages, designated ingress and egress doors for each facility, and no access to communal drinking fountains.¹
18. **Identifying Small Groups and Keeping Them Together (Cohorting)**—Each principal may determine if reasonable efforts are to be made in order that employee and student groupings are as static as possible by having the same group of students stay with the same staff (all day for young students, and as much as possible for older student). Overall, limit mixing between groups if possible.
19. **Staggered Scheduling for both Employees and Students**—Principals may adopt procedures to “stagger arrival and drop-off times or locations by cohort or put in place other protocols to limit contact between cohorts and direct contact with parents as much as possible” and provide flexible worksites and hours for employees pursuant to diocesan HR guidelines. Parking lot triage may also be adopted to assist with timely drop off of students each day, which would include children remaining in vehicles while school staff take temperatures before students exit vehicles. Principals may also adopt an employee triage station for employees to check in each day upon arrival where their temperatures will be taken.
20. **Designated COVID-19 Point of Contact**—Principal should “designate a staff person to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns (e.g., school nurse)” and communicate with all employees, families, and students in order that all stakeholders at the school know who this person is and how to contact them. Should an ambulance need to be called for a sick student or employee, the designated staff shall not alert 9-1-1 that the party in question has COVID-19, but that he/she is exhibiting symptoms of respiratory distress, etc. School staff do not have the authority to diagnose any disease but should prepare emergency responders appropriately.

¹ See DMSAA Policies and Guidelines on COVID procedures at sporting events

21. **Staffing & Training**—Principal should make reasonable efforts to train employees on the safety protocols contained herein and create a roster of “trained back-up staff” that could assist when an employee is quarantined.
22. **Temperature & Symptoms**—The principal may establish routine temperature screenings or symptom checks for employees, students, and visitors pursuant to the most updated CDC guidelines regarding symptoms. Pursuant to the CDC, a fever constitutes “the temperature of 100.4°F [38 °C] or greater, or feels warm to the touch, or gives a history of feeling feverish) accompanied by one or more of the following: skin rash, difficulty breathing, persistent cough, decreased consciousness or confusion of recent onset, new unexplained bruising or bleeding (without previous injury), persistent diarrhea, persistent vomiting (other than air sickness), headache with stiff neck, or appears obviously unwell.”
23. **Well-being of the Employees and Students**—The principal should take reasonable efforts to attempt to provide various means of support to both employees and students to provide them both natural and supernatural means of support, which includes, but is not limited to: (i) additional opportunities for prayer, devotions, and liturgies, (ii) additional opportunities for recess or recreational time, (iii) extended periods spent outdoors, whether for recreation or for class, and (iv) anything that would assist the whole of the human person, both body and soul, in coping and processing this extraordinary time. In addition, the CDC recommends:
 - 23.1 “Encourage employees and students to take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories about COVID-19, including social media if they are feeling overwhelmed or distressed.”
 - 23.2 “Promote employees and students eating healthy, exercising, getting sleep, and finding time to unwind.”
 - 23.3 “Encourage employees and students to talk with people they trust about their concerns and how they are feeling.”
24. **Waiver**—The Office of Superintendent, in consultation with the diocesan principals, diocesan legal counsel, and other dioceses, has provided the *COVID-19 Liability Release & Waiver: Diocesan Catholic Schools* as a prudent and mandatory precaution in providing Catholic education during a pandemic. Waivers signed for the last academic year (2020-21) **ARE STILL IN EFFECT** and **APPLY TO THE 2021-22 ACADEMIC YEAR**. Only those families who have not signed the waiver are mandated to do so this year.
25. **School Year and Academic Calendar**—Each principal may, in consultation with the Superintendent, make certain adaptations to the school year and academic calendar, e.g., extended breaks, etc., that he or she feels are necessary for the health and well-being of the students.
26. **Testing**—Each principal may make reasonable efforts to have employees tested for COVID-19 pursuant to their circumstances and resources.
27. **Changes to these Policies**—These policies and procedures are subject to change without notice pursuant to changes in guidance from the CDC or local health officials or as necessary by pursuant to the discretion of the Superintendent.

End of Policies & Procedures