



Diocese of Springfield
Office of the Bishop

August 27, 2021

Dear Catholic Schools Pastors and Principals,

The beginning of the school year has quickly come upon us. Some of you have already opened and several will be opening in the coming days. Please know that you, your faculty, staff and student bodies will be in my prayers- asking God to bless us with a safe and successful new school year.

As we continue to confront the challenges of COVID 19, we have provided guidance for parishes and schools based on the advice of subject matter experts and the existing science. We should respect this information and not supplant it with our own feelings and beliefs. I may know much about faith and spirituality, and our educators have great knowledge about academics, but we must respect and depend on experts in environmental science to provide their learned advice in this complex area.

In analyzing the recent DESE guidance, it is clear that public schools will not be universally masked at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. DESE, in fact, allows for numerous exemptions. While we have adopted a different approach and language, the end results are very similar. In fact, I would suggest that since DESE has removed other certain safety provisions like social distancing and air purification systems- our diocesan policy is more comprehensive.

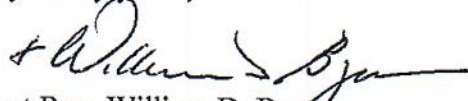
The Catholic Schools Office has done a tremendous amount of work and research to develop the Fall Reopening Guidance. Understanding the need to allow for different approaches to that guidance, enclosed with his letter you should find a document which clarifies what DESE recommends and outlines three scenarios for implementation. I ask that every school adopt one of these approaches.

Since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, the diocese has adapted policies and procedures which been prudent and respectful of the well being of all with whom we encounter. We have been well served by listening to and abiding by expert advice. I see no reason to change course now.

Please know our Catholic Schools Office is here to assist you in these challenges.

I pray for your success and for an end to this health crisis.

Prayerfully yours,


Most Rev. William D. Byrne
Bishop of Springfield

Enc.



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Dear Families of our Catholic Schools,

May God's peace be with you. We have already opened several of the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Springfield and are off to a good start. Please know that your family and the student bodies of our schools are in our prayers and the prayers of Bishop Byrne - asking God to bless us with a safe and successful new school year.

The Catholic Schools Office has done a tremendous amount of work and research to develop the Fall Reopening Guidance. As we continue to confront the challenges of COVID 19, the Diocese of Springfield has provided guidance for parishes and schools based on the advice of subject matter experts and the existing science.

In analyzing the recent DESE guidance, it is clear that public schools will not be universally masked at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. DESE, in fact, allows for numerous exemptions and exceptions. While we have adopted a different approach, the end results are very similar.

The Diocese of Springfield strongly encourages the wearing of masks. The guidelines presented by our school's office are consistent and in many ways more rigorous than the DESE directives that apply to their schools. The difference is that our schools do not use the word "mandate" because even the public school system is not universally mandating the use of masks. We also do not use the word "exemption" as the public schools have. Instead, we have confidential communications with our families respecting the needs of their child(ren) so as not to publicly label any child in our care.


All of our schools are already using guidance and scenario documents that have been created to support their needs. These documents provide direction for properly handling positive cases if they arise, social distancing, and environmental controls. They also provide direction to schools in working closely and confidentially with families regarding the masking of their children. Some of our schools have been contacted by their local departments of public health and are working closely with them in applying any directives that have been put in place.

Since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, our schools have adapted policies and procedures which have been prudent and respectful of the well-being of all with whom we encounter. We know that there is the potential that our own indicators may require us to pivot, but we have also demonstrated our willingness and flexibility to do so if the need arises.

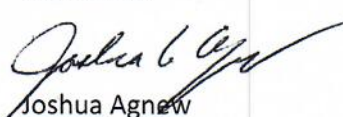
Please know our Catholic Schools Office is here to assist each school, each family, and each child in reaching their fullest potential in Christ.

Be assured of our continued diligence and prayers for your family.

In Christ through Mary,


Daniel R. Baillargeon, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Catholic Schools

Pax Christi,


Joshua Agnew
Assistant Superintendent of Catholic Schools