



## Frequently Asked Questions about the 2021-2022 School Year

The Diocese of Camden Office of Catholic Schools is actively engaged in assisting Catholic schools as they prepare to continue safe in-school learning for all students in the 2021-22 school year. Guidance developed by the Office of Catholic Schools considers input from elementary and high school principals and teachers, the diocesan Strategic Action Team, and guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the N.J. Department of Health and Education. Plans build on successes and lessons learned from 2020-2021. Priorities remain the same: To maintain the health and safety of students and teachers, sustain the Catholic communities that are so important to the success and development of our students, and continue provide a rigorous academic program for all students. An important goal is to ensure that all students can participate in school fully in-person safely with as little absence due to COVID-19 as possible.

The questions and answers that follow provide information about current plans for the 2021-2022 school year. **Plans may change based on the presence of COVID-19 in the communities served by Catholic schools, new directives that Catholic schools are required to follow, or other factors.** The Office of Catholic Schools will continue to monitor public health information, recommendations, and requirements. This year more than ever, principals, teachers, parents, and students are asked to be prepared for changes to guidance and requirements as the course of the virus changes and to remain flexible to adjust plans if necessary. School-specific questions are best addressed by the school's principal.

### Health and Safety

#### **Q. Will my child be required to get a COVID-19 vaccine?**

A. Safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines that are morally permissible for Catholics are currently available for all individuals ages 12 and older. According to the CDC, vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Many members of Catholic school communities have already received a COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccination for students 12 and older reduces their risk of severe illness and contracting COVID-19. Vaccination among adults and students age 12 and older protects children, even those under 12, because children are at considerably lower risk of encountering and contracting COVID-19 if the people around them have been vaccinated. Vaccinated individuals will be exempt from quarantine requirements if they are considered a close contact of someone who tests positive for COVID-19. However, at this time, vaccination for COVID-19 is not required for Catholic school students in the Diocese of Camden. Parents will be asked to provide vaccination information for their children to the school nurse to aid with quarantine recommendations if they become necessary.

**Q. Will there be additional health and safety measures in place in 2021-2022 like there were last year?**

A. Yes. During the 2020-2021 school year, there were no confirmed cases of COVID-19 due to transmission within a Catholic school in the Diocese of Camden during the regular school day. Students and teachers who had a positive test for COVID-19 encountered the virus outside of school. This happened more often when the number of cases in the community around the school was high. The combination of the use of masks, attention to proper ventilation, social distancing, frequent sanitization and hand washing, keeping groups of elementary students together during the day, and everyone making sure they stayed home when they felt sick all contributed to keeping members of the school communities healthy.

**Q. Will my child be required to wear a mask to school at the beginning of the year?**

A. All students, staff, and visitors to Catholic schools will be required to wear a face mask inside school buildings when the school year begins, according to NJ Executive Order 251. This includes vaccinated students and staff. Masks will not be required outdoors on school premises, except at the beginning of the school day when entering the school building. If and when Executive Order 251 is no longer in effect, we will identify the conditions under which masks will be required in Catholic schools. Decisions about mask requirements in the absence of the executive order or other directive will consider current recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and the NJ Department of Health, data about the presence and/or transmission of COVID-19 in school, and data about the presence of COVID-19 in the communities served by South Jersey Catholic Schools.

**Q. Will exceptions be made to the requirement to wear a mask?**

A. Exceptions will be provided for documented, pre-existing health conditions which prevent the wearing of a mask, as was the case in 2020-2021. Exceptions to wearing masks will not be made on the basis of personal preference or concerns about negative consequences of wearing masks. Please note that vaccinated individuals will also need to wear a mask in school.

**Q. What additional safety measures will schools take to protect students and staff?**

A. Each school is developing procedures and protocols intended to ensure the health and safety of all students, teachers, and staff. Students, faculty, and staff will continue to take regular breaks for hand sanitizing and washing; increased ventilation measures, such as using fans, opening windows, and maximizing fresh air circulation will continue; a physical distance of at least 3 feet between students in the classroom will be maintained; and schools will continue to limit sharing of some materials and supplies. Frequently touched surfaces and frequently used objects will continue to be disinfected at regular intervals throughout the day. Other measures, including daily temperature and health checks, more limited interactions between groups of students, limited transitions between classrooms, and/or eating in the classroom instead of the cafeteria, may be implemented in some schools as they were last year.

**Q. Will schools be able to maintain social distance in classrooms?**

A. Each school will ensure that students maintain a safe distance from each other while in their classrooms and as much as possible in other spaces in the school. How that is accomplished will depend

on the school's enrollment, classroom dimensions and other school-specific needs. The minimum required distance is 3 feet between students.

**Q. When should I keep my child home from school?**

A. In the 2020-2021 school year, parents were exceptionally vigilant about keeping their children home when they felt sick. This partnership with the school was critical for keeping illness out of the school. The general rule this year is the same: "If you feel sick, stay home." If a child has a fever of 100.4° F or higher, or if the child shows any symptoms of COVID-19 (or other illness), he or she should not come to school and should visit a physician. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting and diarrhea. All schools will also monitor visitors to the school, as well as faculty and staff, for these symptoms.

**Q. When can a student come back to school after being absent with COVID-19 symptoms?**

A. All students who are absent from school because they show COVID-19 symptoms should visit a physician and obtain a COVID-19 test. If the test is negative, it is expected that the student will remain absent from school until they are fever free without fever reducing medication for 24 hours and other symptoms disappear. If the test is positive, the student will be able to return to school after following the guidance of their local public health department, which will usually be 10 days after the positive test result, provided that the student is symptom free. Students with positive tests should expect to be absent for approximately 8-10 school days.

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

A: Each school will follow the guidance of its local public health department, which may vary depending on the circumstances of each case. It is likely that you will be advised to keep your child home for a period of quarantine. Your child will be able to return to school when your family member meets the public health and medical criteria for recovery from COVID-19 and your child meets the criteria for returning to school after quarantine.

**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 member of the school community has tested positive for COVID-19. Because each situation is different, the school will consult with its local public health department to determine next steps. Students who have had close contact with the student who tested positive may be advised to quarantine, usually for a period of 7-10 days, but up to 14 days under some circumstances, according to the recommendations of the local health department. Vaccinated students will be exempt from quarantine, and those who have recently had COVID-19 may also be exempt.

**Q: What happens if my child's teacher tests positive for COVID-19 or has to quarantine?**

A: Should any school employee test positive for COVID-19, the school will follow the same protocols used for students (see above). If a teacher who teaches your child becomes sick and is unable to work, your school will provide a substitute teacher or allow the teacher to teach remotely under certain conditions.

**Q. Could my child’s school building be closed down due to COVID-19 this year?**

A: All schools are working diligently to ensure a safe and healthy environment in the coming year. However, if there are multiple confirmed cases of COVID-19 in a school, the school may determine, in consultation with public health officials and the Office of Catholic Schools, that it is advisable to temporarily close to control further spread of the virus. In addition, all schools may be subject to an order to close due to substantial progression of the virus in the region or state. If these circumstances occur, students will transition to remote learning (see below).

**Q: How will I know the specific plans and procedures for my child(ren)’s school?**

A: The Office of Catholic Schools has provided guidelines to all South Jersey Catholic Schools for the 2021-2022 school year. Each school will communicate plans and protocols for the 2021-2022 school year to parents and students when they are finalized.

**Programming and Academics**

**Q. If my child has to quarantine, will temporary remote learning be available?**

Temporary remote learning will be available for students in grades K-12 if the school confirms that they are advised to quarantine according to public health guidelines or if they test positive for COVID-19. Each school will have a process for sharing assignments with students who are advised to quarantine due to close contact of a person who tests positive for COVID-19 and/or login information if attending classes via livestream video is an option. There will be a waiting period of 1-3 days (depending on the school) to begin live temporary remote learning so that teachers can properly prepare for students to join their classes remotely. **Temporary remote learning will not be available for any reason other than close contact or a positive COVID-19 test.** Students who are out sick with COVID-19 symptoms but do not yet have test results will not have access to live remote learning. Temporary live remote learning will also not be available for students who are home sick for non-COVID reasons, for students who travel, or for any other reason. Due to the complexity of the high school schedule and expected low number of quarantine requirements when the NJ regional risk level is low or moderate, live temporary remote learning will be available for high school students only if the NJ regional risk level is high or very high. When the risk level is low or moderate, students will be required to complete work posted online while they are out of school.

**Q: Will extended care (before and after care) be available at elementary schools this year?**

A: Yes. Schools may continue to offer extended care. Specific standards for health and safety will be followed by each school. Social distancing, use of outdoor spaces, and adherence to cleaning protocols will be applied to before and after care programs.

**Q. Will the academic program be different this year?**

A. All schools will continue to offer the rigorous academic program our students deserve and that parents expect. Students in South Jersey Catholic Schools were open for in-person instruction in 2020-2021, and teachers implemented high quality remote learning when necessary. Test results from the 2020-2021 school year indicate that student growth and learning were similar to previous years.

Teachers will still take care to assess student needs at the beginning of the year to address any gaps that may exist.

**Q. Will my child's classroom look different?**

A. Schools will continue to spread out desks and tables in classrooms as much as possible to achieve safe social distancing of at least 3 feet. Some furniture and other items will be returned to classrooms to facilitate a range of teaching strategies and return resources to the classrooms. Desks and tables will be arranged so that they face the front of the room to the extent possible. Despite modifications made to classrooms to promote health and safety in the 2020-2021 school year, classrooms remained comfortable, welcoming communities. We expect that to continue for the 2021-2022 school year.

**Q. Will elementary students share school supplies?**

A. In 2020-2021, most students did not share school supplies (e.g., books, crayons, technology, etc.), including for such subjects as art and music. In 2021-2022, some school supplies will be shared, although schools may ask students to continue to bring personal supplies to maintain a healthy environment.

**Q. How will the academic program continue if my child's school building closes temporarily?**

A. Although we do not anticipate that school buildings will need to be closed temporarily in the coming school year, each school is prepared to transition to 100% remote learning if it becomes advisable to do so. Students will continue to use learning management systems, such as Google Classroom, and videoconferencing technology, such as Google Meet or Zoom, if remote learning becomes necessary. Clear, consistent expectations for student attendance, work, and assignments will be communicated to all students and parents.

**Q. Will there be school Masses in the Fall?**

A. Schools may celebrate school Masses if all participants can maintain a 3 foot distance from one another. If they are not able to do so, then smaller Masses (e.g., one for grades K-4 and one for grades 5-8) will be celebrated.

**Q. Will there be sports programs this Fall?**

A. We anticipate that high school and elementary school athletics programs will proceed in Fall 2021. High schools currently follow the guidelines established by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA). We will continue to monitor recommendations from the NJSIAA and consult with public health officials about any changes that may occur for Fall programs and to determine whether, how, and when Winter and Spring sports may proceed. Elementary school sports programs will also proceed in Fall 2021 if conditions remain favorable. Elementary sports guidance for Winter and Spring will follow the NJSIAA guidance closely, with additional input from public health officials and attention to local circumstances (e.g., community spread of COVID-19).

**Q. Will there be other extracurricular activities at school this Fall?**

A. Yes. Extracurricular activities are allowed in elementary and high schools, provided that social distancing and other protocols are followed. Band, choir, and theater programs may still be modified to

increase distance between participants. School plays and other performances, such as Christmas shows, should be scheduled. Modifications to these performances will be made closer to their scheduled dates if public health information indicates that they should be.