



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Parents/Guardians Regarding the Reopening of Diocese of Joliet Catholic School Buildings

We know that parents have many questions about the start of the school year. In this document, we have outlined many of the frequently asked questions (FAQs) from parents about school's reopening plans. These questions are divided up into four sections, each addressing a separate aspect of the reopening process.

The categories are:

1. **Health and Safety:** General health and safety questions, such as social distancing, masks, and facility cleaning.
2. **Infection Protocols:** How we will handle when students or employees become ill.
3. **Academics and Programming:** Questions related to how classes will be taught. This section also includes information on school events (such as masses or assemblies) and extracurricular activities.
4. **Tuition and Fees:** Questions about tuition payments during the upcoming school year.

Please note: Each school applies guidelines for their own unique school setting. As such, if you have specific questions about how the guidelines apply for your school, we encourage you to contact your school's principal. **Parents should always check their school's policies/handbook for school specific guidance.**

Health and Safety

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

A: Gathering as a school community is an integral part of Catholic education. Our plan is to reopen our school buildings to students this fall. This means that all students are welcome to return to classes for face-to-face instruction. Each school has developed an in-depth plan that addresses numerous aspects of the reopening process, and how schools will function once reopened.

Q: Will students be safe when school is reopened? Has your plan been reviewed by medical professionals?

A: Safety is always our top priority in Catholic education. Schools have closely studied guidance from Bishop Pates, the Illinois Catholic Conference, federal and state authorities, as well as the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). Each school plan has been reviewed by the Bishop's Task Force comprised of medical professionals, diocesan facilities, legal and risk management directors and Superintendent Dr. Michael Boyle. We have confidence that our students can return safely in the fall.

Q: Will all students be allowed to return to school at the same time?

A: Yes. Each school's plan provides for the return of all Catholic school students for full-day instruction.

Q: Will students need to wear masks at school?

A: Yes. As per directives of the state, all individuals above the age of two will need to wear masks while at school. Masks may be removed for brief periods of time under certain circumstances (such as outdoor play or lunch). However, when masks are removed, students must remain physically distant from one another (at least six feet).

Q: Do I need to purchase masks for my child?

A: Yes. We are asking all parents to purchase masks for their child. Parents may opt to buy disposable or reusable masks. For disposable masks, each mask must be thrown away at the end of every school day and parents should send plenty of extra masks to school with their child. For reusable masks, masks should be cleaned after every use and students should have at least one extra reusable mask at school. **These masks must be 2-ply and no gaiters are allowed.**

Q: Can face shields be used instead of masks?

A: No. Face shields cannot be used instead of masks, as per directives of the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). In some circumstances and with medical documentation a face shield may be permitted.

Q: Will teachers teach children how to use masks?

A: Yes. We know that students (especially young children) will need training to learn how to properly wear masks. We will spend time at the beginning of the year helping children learn how to safely keep masks in place.

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

A: Each school is working to have classroom desks at the recommended guideline of 6 ft.

Q: Will the student's temperature be taken before entering the school building and every day before school?

A: Yes. A high fever is a key symptom of COVID-19. If your child has a fever of 100.4°F, your child will be sent home from school. You should contact your child's doctor. 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 these symptoms, you should keep him/her home and contact your doctor and the school office.

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

A: Each school has carefully developed drop off and pick up procedures. Schools will use various entrances and exits to minimize contact between students. Parents will be asked not to congregate near school doors. Your principal will communicate specific drop off and pick up procedures to you ahead of the start of school. In addition, when students enter school every day, they will be asked to participate in three tasks. These are:

1. A temperature check, administered by an adult (please note that parents should also take temperatures every day and check for symptoms).
2. Use of hand sanitizer upon entering the building or classroom.
3. Asked if they are feeling well.

If a student has a temperature of 100.4°F or complains of other COVID-19 symptoms, he/she will be immediately sent to the office. Parents will be contacted and asked to pick up the child.

Q: What about safety and cleanliness requirements for school buildings?

A: School plans include very specific requirements for the ongoing cleaning and sanitizing of school buildings. Generally speaking, buildings will be cleaned very frequently, with a particular focus on high-touch areas and common surfaces. Windows and/or vents should be opened to maximize air flow. Each school's plan contains instructions for managing shared areas such as hallways, gymnasiums, cafeterias, and bathrooms.

Q: How will lunch take place when school reopens?

A: Schools have planned for lunchtime. Each school is developing a customized plan that fits their unique building. Some schools may ask students to eat lunch in their classrooms and/or have students use the lunchroom space in staggered shifts.

Q: What about recess?

A: Schools may still conduct recess, but schools must fulfill defined safety requirements. For example, cohorts must be spread out from one another. If recess is outdoors, masks may be removed, but students should stay at least six feet apart.

Q: Can I still volunteer at school?

A: Schools are asked to minimize the number of volunteers this year in an effort to mitigate risk. Thus, your school will likely not allow you to volunteer.

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

A: Yes. Schools may continue to offer extended care if feasible and all health and safety guidelines are followed as outlined in their plan.

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: Centers for Disease Control (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 in an at-risk group, we encourage you to speak to your doctor. Ultimately you should decide whether it is safe for your child to attend school.

Q: What do I do if I do not feel safe sending my child back to school?

A: We have taken every step to ensure the safety of students at our schools this fall. However, we understand that some families still may not wish to return. If you feel you do not wish to return for physical instruction this year (or at least at the start of the year), please contact your school's principal and more information will be provided.

Infection Protocols

Q: My family has traveled to a state on the restricted list. Do we need to self-isolate for 14 days?

A: No, at this time the isolation guidelines for travel from restricted states only applies to residents of the City of Chicago.

Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

A: The Centers for Disease Control (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 not send your child to school. If the symptoms occur during the school day, your child will be immediately sent to a designated area 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 should keep your child home until the illness' symptoms disappear. Your school will require you to provide a negative COVID-19 test and/or a doctor's note before your child can return to school.

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 contact your school's main office. You should not send your child to school.

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 seek medical attention, students must isolate and not return to school until they have met [CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation](#).

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. Your school will ask that you keep your child home for at least 14 days. If your family member recovers from COVID-19 (through meeting the criteria in the previous question) AND your child shows no COVID-19 symptoms for the 14-day period, your school may allow your child to return.

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

A: Should any employee have COVID-19 symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, we will follow the same protocols used for students (see above). If your child's teacher becomes sick and is unable to work, your school will provide a substitute teacher.

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. Those who had contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 or is suspected of having COVID-19 should isolate at home and monitor for symptoms for 14 days. Close contact means the individual was within 6 feet of the individual with symptoms for more than 15 minutes.

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, because of the nature of the virus, it could be a possibility at some point.

Academics and Programming

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

A: Schools will still deliver high-quality instruction in core subjects (religion, language arts, math, science, and social studies). Additional requirements will 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 the best possible faith-based education.

Q: Will my child's classroom look different?

A: To minimize the risk of any infection in the classroom, we have instructed schools to spread out desks and tables in classrooms to physical distancing of 6 ft. To maximize floorspace, we have asked teachers to remove non-essential furniture and other items. We have also asked that desks and tables be arranged so that they face the front of the room.

Q: Will students share school supplies?

A: No. Schools have ensured 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. If it is impossible to avoid sharing supplies, such as computers in a computer lab, such supplies must be cleaned after every use.

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

A: Yes. Our early education teachers will continue to provide the best possible quality of instruction in preschool and kindergarten. While health and safety requirements are in place, our teachers will continue to work hard in the coming year to ensure your child grows intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

Q: Will students still change classes?

A: As feasible, schools will make decisions regarding departmentalized settings for their individual school. It is recommended that students remain in cohorts and teachers move into the classes rather than the students moving to classes.

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

A: Yes. As feasible for each school, special subject area teachers will travel to each class' homeroom for instruction whenever possible. This will be particularly likely for such subjects as art, music, health, and foreign language. If students visit spaces such as the gymnasium, computer/STEM lab or library, the room must be cleaned after every class.

Q: Will tests still be given this year?

A: Yes. It is important that we continue to gauge student academic growth throughout the school year. As such, you should anticipate tests including standardized tests to be administered in your child's class.

Q: Will students participate in field trips?

A: No. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools will not participate in in-person field trips during the 2020/21 school year.

Q: I need to meet with a teacher or my school principal. Can these meetings occur?

A: Yes. To minimize visitors in the building, these meeting can take place virtually via phone or video chat.

Q: Can we still have meetings of stakeholder groups, such as the School Board, Home-Family Association and other organizations and clubs? What about fundraising events, such as an annual gala?

A: Such meetings will be at the discretion of the school. Meetings can be held in person with capacity limitations, social distancing, and masks, or can be held virtually.

Q: Will school masses still take place?

A: The diocese has defined a specific plan for parishes that allows for the celebration of mass under very specific conditions. Schools will follow this plan, in close coordination with the local pastor and parish, in determining how/whether masses may be celebrated.

Q: How will extracurricular activities be impacted this year?

A: Each school provides guidance on specific extracurricular activities.

Tuition and Fees

Q: Will schools still collect tuition this year?

A: Yes. While this school year may look different, our schools will continue to provide a rigorous academic experience while supporting the moral and spiritual development of each student. Our Catholic schools depend upon tuition revenue to compensate our employees who do this work and support other school-related expenses.

Q: I am having difficulty paying tuition, what do I do?

A: Some families may have difficulties paying tuition due to the loss of income during workplace closures and schools are ready to support those in need of assistance. 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 their own local needs. Fees may be adjusted if a program or activity has been directly impacted by COVID-19. For example, if a fee is collected for a particular field trip, it is likely that the fee will not be collected this year (as field trips will not occur).