



DIOCESE OF COVINGTON
Department of Catholic Schools

November 28, 2020

Dear Parents,

Over the past week we all experienced many challenges relating to the Governor's executive order that closed schools in Kentucky. Our principals and teachers were once again rushing to provide NTI on short notice, our hourly staff were struggling with lost job hours, and many of you were trying to figure out how to manage your children learning at home with your work schedules.

Our office received countless emails and phone calls regarding this order and the message that we heard overwhelmingly is that parents want to continue in-person learning. Many expressed gratitude for all the hard work our schools have put forth to continue in-person learning and that your children feel safe in school. We also heard from a number of parents and grandparents who expressed serious concerns over the mental health and well-being of the children when they cannot attend school as it leads to isolation, depression, and anxiety.

In light of these messages, I think it is important for you to know what our schools have been experiencing and our original plans. During the month of November, we saw a substantial increase in the number of students and staff impacted by COVID-19. The majority of these increases were students placed in quarantine because a member of their family tested positive for COVID-19. We also saw many students quarantined due to exposure at gatherings or activities outside of the school setting.

Over the last three weeks we had to close six schools to in-person instruction. These were short-term closures and all the students had to switch to NTI. In three schools this occurred because we did not have enough substitute teachers or office staff to keep the school open. In the other three schools, we had a large number of students in quarantine which created teaching challenges. On the morning following the executive order, despite the increased cases and isolated school closures, 24 of our 37 schools had zero COVID positive cases among students or staff.

Overall, our data over the last 14 weeks has shown that COVID cases are not originating in our schools and it is not spreading in the school setting when the protocols are followed. We also found that the quarantine periods for cases and close contacts were effective at mitigating spread. Therefore, despite the rising cases in our counties, we had decided our Catholic schools would remain open and we would continue monitoring each case and school community individually.

As you know, the executive order changed these plans and we were obligated to follow the order. However, on Tuesday, November 25th, the portion of this executive order relating to private, religious schools was struck down. This means that our schools may return to in-person instruction and will no longer be in violation of the law.

While we are very excited to return to the classroom, we also need to remember that the Coronavirus is still spreading rapidly in our local communities. We have seen these impacts over the last few weeks in our schools. Sadly, some of our school cases and quarantines could have been avoided if all of our families would have followed the protocols. Since we all truly desire to sustain in-person instruction then we must recommit ourselves to the protocols. Now, more than ever, our school staff, parents, and students need to be extra cautious both inside and outside of school. In addition to our guidance documents, everyone needs to follow the protocols listed below to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and keep our schools open.

- If your child is experiencing *any* symptoms of COVID, keep him/her home from school until you and your doctor can determine it is not COVID.
- If someone in your household may have COVID-19 or is getting a COVID-19 test due to symptoms or exposure, keep all of your children home until that person receives a negative test.
- If you attended a gathering and someone who also attended is experiencing symptoms of COVID, keep your children home until it can be determined it is not COVID-19.
- Avoid unnecessary travel. If you must travel, follow the Back to School Requirements for quarantining and reporting.
- Do not host student parties, gatherings, or sleepovers. We have seen spread at these events and it puts our school communities at greater risk of quarantines and illness.
- Continue reporting all student illness, positive student or household cases, exposures, and quarantines to your school principal.
- Follow the KY Healthy at Home guidance when not performing essential activities such as work and school.
- Follow the safety protocols of masks, distancing, and handwashing.

Originally we had planned Diocese-wide NTI days following the Thanksgiving break. This decision was based on our data and experiences following the Halloween break. We feel that these extra days of NTI will give time for COVID exposures from the holiday to become evident which should prevent additional class and school quarantines.

Therefore, all Diocesan schools will continue NTI on Monday, November 30th and Tuesday, December 1st. All schools may resume in-person instruction beginning Wednesday, December 2nd. As an extra mitigation effort during this critical time, we will continue to suspend after-school extracurricular activities and winter sports practices until the week of December 14th. As always, school principals may choose to go above this guidance due to individual school circumstances.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving, I do want to express my gratitude to our school principals, their teachers, and staff for all the hard work they continue to do for their students. This pandemic has been very difficult for educators and they continue to work through the challenges to provide a strong, Catholic education to the students entrusted to their care.

I also want to thank you, our parents, for choosing a Catholic education. Our schools are blessed to continue teaching and modeling the Catholic faith and your children not only learn the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, but they are also taught to live it daily. This is especially important during these unprecedented times.

I am especially grateful to Bishop Foys, the members of the Diocesan COVID Task Force, and Laura Keener, our Diocesan COVID coordinator. This team has worked tirelessly to monitor cases, follow community data trends, and ensure our school and parish communities are up-to-date on the latest guidance to keep safety a top priority.

This Sunday is the first day of Advent, the beginning of a new liturgical year. As we begin this journey toward Christmas, let us use our extra time that this pandemic has provided to focus on our own spiritual renewal, repenting and seeking conversion of heart so that we can truly welcome Jesus into our lives and be a light to those around us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kendra M.G." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kendra McGuire
Superintendent of Schools