



Diocese of Steubenville
Office of Christian Formation and Schools

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Diocesan Directive to Reopening Catholic Schools
A response plan to Ohio's *Reset & Restart Planning Guide*

1. Introduction

Because of the COVID-19 disease (coronavirus) pandemic, Catholic school buildings of the Diocese of Steubenville have been closed to students, educators, and parents since March 17, 2020. But in response, diocesan Catholic administrators, teachers, education support professionals, parents and students boldly navigated an extraordinary set of challenges to meet the teaching and learning needs of our students, and to get us through to the end of the 2019-2020 academic year. It's in that same spirit that Catholic educators and Catholic school communities now stand poised to plan and prepare for the 2020-2021 academic school year.

Purpose of this ***Diocesan Directive to Reopen Catholic Schools*** is to offer a planning response to recent guidance provided by the Ohio Departments of Health and of Education: *Reset and Restart Education Planning Guide*¹; *COVID-19 Health and Prevention Guidance for Ohio K-12 Schools*²; *Early Childhood guidance for Pre-Schools*³; *Responsible Restart Ohio* mandates for Contact and Non-Contact Sports⁴; and *Ohio COVID-19 Risk Level Guidelines for the Public*⁵. The aim is to assist our Catholic school communities in becoming aware of state mandates and guidelines, as well as the considerations needed for reopening our school buildings during the continued presence of COVID-19; and in a way that protects the health and safety of vulnerable members of our Catholic school communities. It is also important to understand that while some elements of this Diocesan Guide are in fact mandated (either by the State or the Diocesan Office of Catholic Schools), many decisions will need to be made by each individual Catholic school **at the local level**, with local policies developed in partnership with local health officials and perhaps even neighboring public school districts.

2. General Guidelines for all Diocesan Catholic Schools

- 2.1. **"Traditional" face-to-face classroom instruction.** As a NORM for all Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Steubenville, Catholic schools shall open in the fall, in accordance with each school's 2020-2021 Academic year school calendar. Catholic schools shall be open for "traditional" face-to-face classroom instruction, Monday through Friday (except for planned in-service days and holidays).
- 2.2. **School-Wide Long-Term Remote Instruction.** Catholic schools shall provide school-wide remote instruction, only in such cases when state or local authorities have mandated (not simply recommended) that school buildings be closed. Catholic schools shall then make every

use of streaming technology and distance learning tools, in order to continue providing instruction and learning support while students remain at home (as was the case last spring).

- 2.3. **Long-Term Remote Instruction for Individual families.** Because of limited human and material resources, diocesan Catholic schools may only offer individual families a long-term **option** of remote or distance learning, after first consulting with the Diocesan Office of Christian Formation and Schools. Should a school choose to offer families a long-term option of remote instruction (outside of the traditional classroom), that school shall:
- Submit a written, detailed proposal describing how long-term remote instruction will take place;
 - Outline any stipulations/qualifications for participation in this option, and;
 - Include a policy of participation in extra-curricular activities, for remote learners.
- 2.4. **Temporary Remote-Instruction/Learning.** In the event that a teacher or student (or group of students) are unable to report to school for on-site instruction/learning because they have tested positive for Covid-19, or are in quarantine (by order of the local health department or a doctor's recommendation), schools shall make every effort to provide **temporary** accommodations for both teacher and students. For example, a teacher who is in quarantine, but is not ill, may choose at their own discretion, to "live stream" his/her instruction from home, directly into a classroom monitored by a substitute teacher or teacher's aide. Teachers might also be able to live stream their own on-site classroom instruction to a student or group of students who are required to stay home, because they are being quarantined for Covid-19 reasons. Where such a live streaming arrangement is not possible or practicable, schools shall make every effort to provide student work and learning support to students, on a temporary basis, who are staying home on account of a COVID-19 symptom, or are in quarantine for Covid-19 reasons.
- 2.5. **Acknowledgement Risks.** Parents shall read and sign the *Diocesan Acknowledgement Risks* form (Exhibit CV-1) as a condition of enrollment of any student in grades Pre-school through 12. The same form shall be read and signed by any student choosing to participate in school sponsored athletics, band, marching-band, choir, cheerleading/majorettes or dramatics; as a condition of participation in any of these programs.
- 2.6. **Ventilation.** Diocesan Catholic schools shall do everything they reasonably can to keep school buildings and classrooms well ventilated, as local circumstances, safety, and weather, will allow. According to the CDC guidance for proper ventilation,⁶ schools shall:
- Ensure 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 to staff or students (e.g., risk of falling or triggering asthma symptoms).
 - If portable ventilation equipment like fans are used, take steps to minimize air from them blowing from one person directly at another person to reduce the potential spread of any airborne or aerosolized viruses.

- 2.7. **Assigned Classroom Seating.** Finally, all Diocesan Catholic school students shall be given assigned classroom seating. Teachers shall maintain a written classroom seating chart. This requirement shall be in effect for all grades K-12, and for both a shared-table, and individual-desk classroom arrangement. Adhering to such a policy is essential, so that in the unfortunate event that a student tests positive for COVID-19, the number of additional students to be quarantined will be greatly reduced.

3. Specific Guidelines

- 3.1. **Assessing for Symptoms.** Since COVID-19 spreads so rapidly, it is essential that all students (and their caregivers), staff, and volunteers conduct daily health screening prior to going to school. This shall include taking their temperature and assessing their symptoms.
- 3.1.1. Schools should take temperatures of all staff and volunteers/visitors as they enter the building, even if the staff member checked their own temperature before leaving home. Schools are encouraged to take student temperatures, as each student enters the school building, as an extra precaution, even with the expectation that parents complete the temperature check and symptom screening with their own children at home.
- 3.1.2. To assist with performing daily and consistent symptom screening, Diocesan schools shall be provided with a *Self-Monitoring COVID-19 Symptom Screening Log* (Form-CV). The *Symptom Screening Log* is based on the CDC's symptom log for students and has been modified to reflect the State of Ohio's Public Health Advisory System for COVID-19. Parents and staff shall maintain these logs at home for their own records, schools shall not collect screening logs for either staff or students.
- 3.1.3. Students and school staff with any one or more of the "Symptoms" (Section 1) listed on the Diocesan *Self-Monitoring COVID-19 Symptom Screening Log* (Form-CV) should not report to school for that day. The CDC states that it is essential for schools to reinforce to students, parents or caregivers, and staff the importance of staying home when sick until symptom free, and at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever (temperature of 100.4 or higher) or signs of a fever (chills, feeling very warm, flushed appearance, or sweating) without the use of fever-reducing medicine (e.g., Tylenol).⁷
- 3.1.4. **Returning to school after having experienced symptoms or a positive COVID-19 diagnosis shall depend upon a number of factors.** "Excluding students from school for longer than what is called for based on COVID-19 symptoms alone, risks repeated, long-term unnecessary student absence."⁷ The following protocols are based upon the guidance provided by the CDC.⁷ These are given as a point of reference. **Schools shall also consult with local health departments** for more local developed policies about when students/staff can report back to school after displaying symptoms:

- If the student/employee/volunteer answers YES to any question in Section 1 (Form-CV) but NO to any questions in Section 2, the individual should not report back to school until symptom-free for 24 hours without fever reducing medications.
- If the student/employee/volunteer answers YES to any question in Section 1 **and** YES to any question in Section 2, the individual should be referred for evaluation by their healthcare provider (and possible testing). CDC states that local health officials and/or healthcare providers will determine when testing for COVID-19 is appropriate, ***schools should not require testing results*** as a part of return to school policies. Even if a student/employee/volunteer has received a *negative* test result, that individual should be allowed to return to school **only after** their symptoms have otherwise improved **and** in accordance with their health care provider’s evaluation or local health department guidelines.
- Students/employees/volunteers **diagnosed** with COVID-19 should stay home, isolate themselves from others, and monitor their health. Returning to school shall depend on the direction of the individual’s health care provider (or in some cases, the local health department). The CDC also offers recommendations for specific situations (See “*When can I be around others*”⁸ & *Diocesan Exhibit CV-4*).
- If a student/employee/volunteer has had **close contact** (within 6 feet for at least 15 minutes) with someone **diagnosed** with COVID-19, he or she should notify their health care provider and stay home for 14 days **after their last exposure** to that person⁸. Obtaining a *negative* COVID-19 test result does not mitigate the required 14 day quarantine. These individuals should also comply with instructions from the local health department (See “*When can I be around others*”⁸ & *Diocesan Exhibit CV-4*).

3.1.5. Students and their families should be advised that the local health department may contact the family for contact tracing. If contacted, families should notify the contract tracer that the student attended school.

3.1.6. Students who are excluded from school should be afforded the opportunity, as soon as feasible when they are well enough to participate in classwork, to make up any missed classwork without penalty in order to reduce mental or physical anxieties about missed academic opportunities.

3.1.7. Ohio’s health and safety guidance for K-12 schools states that “If a student, staff, or volunteer begins to show symptoms or has a temperature above 100.4°F while at school, they must immediately be separated from other students, staff, or volunteers, given a face covering, and monitored by a staff member wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and maintaining physical distance when possible. The space where an individual waits before he or she goes home should be separate from the nurse’s office and other areas students are likely to visit. Areas of the building that were occupied by a person exhibiting symptoms should be

thoroughly sanitized.”⁹ Schools shall also comply with any additional procedures provided by local health departments.

3.1.8. Finally, schools shall monitor daily absences of students and staff for **trends**. For Faculty and Staff absences, schools shall consult the diocesan schools *COVID-19 Interim Sick Leave and Absence Policy* (Exhibit CV-3). Student absences shall be recorded according to the norms established in the diocesan *Handbook for Schools*. However, students shall not be penalized for staying home when symptomatic or in quarantine or isolation. Schools should consider NOT issuing “Perfect Attendance Awards” and find alternative ways to acknowledge such outstanding student effort.

3.2. **Wash and Sanitize Hands to Prevent Spread.** Ohio’s health and safety guidance for K-12 schools states that “Hand washing and sanitizing are important tools in preventing the spread of COVID-19 by killing the virus. Students, staff and volunteers should practice frequent handwashing for at least 20 seconds when hands are dirty, before and after eating, and after using the restroom.” Students should also wash their hands before and after recess.

- Schools shall provide instruction to staff and students for effective handwashing, and give opportunities throughout the day for students to practice handwashing. The *Health and Safety Guidance* (page 9) provides a wonderful instruction poster that can be printed and posted throughout the school building, but especially in bathrooms and classrooms.
- In addition to handwashing, schools shall provide hand sanitizer (60% to 95% alcohol based) in high traffic areas including entrances to buildings and classrooms. Schools shall instruct students and staff to use the sanitizer.
- Finally, staff, students, and volunteers should avoid touching their mouths, noses, and eyes since the virus easily enters the body through these membranes.

3.3. **Thoroughly Clean and Sanitize School Environment to Limit Spread on Shared Surfaces.**

The CDC’s guidance for schools states that “COVID-19 can spread by a person touching a contaminated surface, and then touching the mouth, nose, or eyes. Use of disinfectants in facilities reduces the spread of infectious disease.¹⁰ Schools shall make every effort to:

- Clean surfaces frequently, paying close attention to high touch areas and shared spaces (such as desks or playground equipment). Spray bottles labeled and filled with EPA approved disinfectant should be available in every classroom as well as the school office (and other high traffic areas). Desks surfaces should be wiped down between classes when the desk is going to be used by another student. Playground equipment should be sprayed down before and after recess (but not between individual student uses).
- The sharing of other schools supplies and materials should be minimized and if items must be shared, sanitized between each user.
- Disinfect all classrooms, hallways, bathrooms and other staff/student use areas daily. The Diocese of Steubenville recommends using an electrostatic applicator for this task. The Diocese will be producing and distributing high quality, pure HOCl (Hypochlorous acid) at minimal cost (cents on the gallon) to Catholic schools and parishes. HOCl is EPA approved

for COVID-19, is completely safe, and disinfects almost immediately. Specifications for this disinfectant solution will be provided to every school so that all concerns about product safety can be easily addressed. HOCl can also be used in spray bottles for purposes noted above.

- CDC and EPA links for further guidance on disinfecting school facilities and approved COVID-19 disinfectants can be found on page 10 of Ohio’s health and safety guidance for K-12 schools.

3.4. **Practice Social Distancing.** The Center for Disease Control states that maintaining social distancing of at least six feet between staff and students can reduce the spread of infectious disease, including COVID-19.¹¹ This will minimize the risk of coming into contact with the virus through respiratory droplets. Social distancing of six feet or greater is very important for preventing this droplet spread when students are speaking loudly, singing, or playing a musical instrument. Please keep in mind that social distancing becomes more important, the longer students are static in one area (such as a classroom), and less “essential” as students move about (outdoor recess or moving from class to class in the hallways). Ohio’s health and safety guidance for K-12 schools provides practical ways to create social distancing in schools:¹²

- School staff should try when possible to maintain 6-foot social distance among students, staff, and volunteers in all school environments, including classrooms, hallways, restrooms, and cafeteria, playground, drop-off and pick-up locations. **Where social distancing is difficult, face coverings are even more essential** (see *Face Coverings and Desk Shields* section below).
- For grade levels that utilize student lockers, efforts shall be made to reduce the use of lockers to mitigate the closer contact that this scenario creates. Student should be encouraged to use backpacks as much as possible for classroom/course changes.
- Reinforce distancing with visual cues such as floor markings and signs.
- Avoid using shared materials or shared spaces (lockers, cubbies, etc.)
- Reduce the mixing of student groups.
- Limit the number of visitors to a school and consider eliminating field trips or large group events where intermingling often occurs.
- Due to the nature of band, choir, theater, and other similar classes, 6-foot social distancing may not be adequate. Teachers and students should maintain at as much distance as possible when actively playing and performing.

3.5. **Face Coverings and Desk Shields.** Ohio’s health and safety guidance for K-12 schools states that “Face coverings are critical to preventing the spread of the virus from person-to-person.”¹³

3.5.1. **All Visitors** (including parents/guardians) for grades Pre-K through 12 shall be required to wear a face mask upon entering the school building. If the visitor does not have a face mask, schools should either provide a face mask or not permit entry into the building.

3.5.2. **For Pre-Schools** (students and staff), **specific guidance** has been provided by the Ohio Department of Education in partnership with the Department of Jobs and Family Services.¹⁴

- As a general rule, and unless/until **mandated** differently by State or Local Boards of health, **Pre-School students** shall not be required to wear a face covering of any kind while in school. Parents may be given the option to have their pre-school child wear a face covering as long as consideration is given for the age and developmental level of the child and the physical situation the child is in at that moment. Catholic schools shall not honor this request of the Pre-School parent if the student has trouble breathing or is unable to remove the face covering without assistance.
- For all **Pre-School staff**, the *Transitional Pandemic Requirements* for Licensed Pre-Schools **requires** that all administrators, staff members and employees wear a face covering while indoors, unless not medically appropriate. Face coverings, including cloth masks **or** plastic face shields, shall cover the individual's nose and mouth. Because face coverings can hinder both communication and the learning process for students of such a young developmental age, the use of plastic a face shields are preferred, however Principals and Program Directors should carefully consider all options; especially if a staff member or student is in the higher risk category for COVID-19.

3.5.1. **For All Schools, Grades K-12.** In accordance with the ODH order dated August 14, 2020¹⁵; All students, faculty, staff, and volunteers shall wear facial coverings at all times when:

- In any indoor location including, but not limited to, classrooms, gymnasiums, offices, locker rooms, hallways, cafeteria, and/or locker bays;
- Outdoors on school property and unable to **consistently** maintain a distance of six feet or more from individuals who are not members of their household;
- Waiting for a school bus outdoors and unable to maintain a distance of six feet or more from individuals who are not members of their household; or
- Riding a school bus. For purposes of this Order, a facial covering (mask) is any material that covers an individual's nose, mouth and chin.

Exemptions to the K-12 mask order: The requirement to wear a facial covering does not apply when:

- The individual has a medical condition including respiratory conditions that restricts breathing, mental health conditions, or a disability that contraindicates the wearing of a facial covering (a physician's written script shall be required);
- The individual is communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired or has another disability, where an accommodation is appropriate or necessary;

- The individual is actively participating in outdoor recess and/or physical activity where students are able to maintain a distance of six feet or more or athletic practice, scrimmage, or competition that is permitted under a separate Department of Health Order;
- The individual is seated and actively consuming food or beverage;
- Where students and staff can maintain distancing of at least six feet and removal of the facial covering is necessary for instructional purposes, including instruction in foreign language, English language for **non-native speakers**, and other subjects where wearing a facial covering would prohibit participation in normal classroom activities, such as playing an instrument, or a science lab where wearing a mask presents a safety hazard;
- Students are able to maintain a distance of six feet or more and a mask break is deemed necessary by the educator supervising the educational setting;
- The individual is alone in an enclosed space, such as an office; or
- When an established sincerely held religious requirement exists that does not permit a facial covering.
- When students are having trouble breathing or other **immediate** health/safety reasons.

Face Shields. The ODH does not currently recommend the use of face shields as a substitute for masks/face coverings¹⁶. However, schools *may* require that staff and students wear a face shield when not wearing a face mask (as listed in the Exemptions above), as long as wearing the face shield does not present a health or safety risk to the individual, or it is not impractical to do so (i.e., playing a musical instrument, eating/drinking or recess).

3.5.3. **Desk Shields.** For grades K-6, **and** where at least six feet classroom/learning space social distancing **CANNOT BE** established, desk-shields at each student desk/table assignment shall be utilized. School Administrators **may choose** to make use of desk shields where six feet classroom social distancing CAN BE established, or even for the higher grade levels, at their own discretion.

3.6. **Athletics and Outdoor Recess.** OHSAA is working closely with ODE and ODH, and has established its Return to Play Guidelines, and sport specific recommendations for student/spectator participation in athletics¹⁷. Schools shall comply with all guidance from OHSAA regarding school athletic activities, including grade schools that are not OHSAA members.

For outdoor recess at the grade school level (grades K-8), wearing face coverings may not be required *unless*:

- As per the ODH mask order, students are unable to **consistently** maintain a distance of six feet or more from individuals who are not members of their household, or;

- There is an elevated local spread of the virus (levels 3 or 4) and the local county board of health recommends or mandates a stronger policy.

3.7. **Responding to the Ohio Public Health Advisory System.** *Ohio's health and safety guidance* states that "wearing a face covering is especially important during times of *elevated community spread*, particularly when social distancing is not possible."¹⁸ All of the above policies and recommendations shall be regarded as amenable to elevated levels of community spread and therefore stronger policies may be implemented, should a school's county of residence rise to *Risk Level 3 or Level 4* (and school buildings are permitted to be open). Catholic schools shall cooperate with local and state authorities regarding stricter policies than what is given in this directive, doing everything reasonable to enable the school to remain open for "traditional" face-to-face classroom instruction.

Notes:

1. <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Reset-and-Restart/Reset-Restart-Guide.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>
2. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/schools/K-12-Schools-Guidance.pdf>
3. <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Reset-and-Restart/Early-Learning-and-School-Readiness>
4. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/Games-Leagues-Conferences-Tournaments-Contact-Sports.pdf>
And <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/General-Non-Contact-Sports.pdf>
5. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/public-health-advisory-system/>
6. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html> - See *Ventilation*
7. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/symptom-screening.html>
8. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprevent-getting-sick%2Fwhen-its-safe.html
9. See footnote #2, p. 7
10. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>
11. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>
12. See footnote #2, p. 12
13. See footnote #2 p. 13
14. <https://emanuals.jfs.ohio.gov/ChildCare/ChildCareCenter/Rules/5101-2-12-02-2.stm>
15. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/publicorders/DO-K-12-facial-coverings.pdf>
16. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/faqs/COVID-19-FAQs-Face-Shields.pdf>
17. <https://ohsaa.org/news-media/articles/ohsaa-releases-return-to-play-guidelines-and-sport-specific-recommendations>
18. See footnote #2 p. 13