



Frequently Asked Questions about the 2020-2021 School Year

The Diocese of Scranton Catholic Schools Office continues to plan for the 2020-2021 school year. This effort is being spearheaded by the Diocesan Health and Safety Committee, which is comprised of diocesan and local school administration and clergy along with medical professionals with expertise in pediatrics, health administration and quality assurance.

Using the latest guidance from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Health, American Academy of Pediatrics, and feedback from parents, faculty and staff, the Diocesan Health and Safety Committee created the basic guidance of what to expect for this upcoming school year. Each school is also working with its own committee to implement this framework within its respective school community.

Our goal remains to reopen for in-person instruction five days a week this fall in a way that, above all else, prioritizes the best interest, safety and health of all students, faculty, staff and school families. Given the dynamic nature of the environment, we will continually monitor the data and will be flexible should need arise to adjust our plans. As such, we are enhancing our remote learning options and will be releasing the details of a virtual academy the first week of August.

The questions and answers that follow provide key information about current plans for the 2020-2021 school year.

School-specific questions are best addressed by individual school leaders.

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Health and Safety

Q. Are Diocese of Scranton Catholic Schools going to open in the Fall?

A. Yes. At this time, our goal remains to be able to provide in-person instruction five days a week. Using the latest guidance from CDC, Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Health, and American Academy of Pediatrics, the Diocesan Health and Safety Committee created the basic guidance of what to expect for this upcoming school year.

We will continuously monitor the data from each school, the region, and the state to determine whether we need to activate alternate plans. These alternative plans include enhancing our remote learning options and a virtual offering.

Q. What safety measures will schools take to protect students, teachers, administrators and staff?

A. Each school is developing new procedures based on the “Five Fundamentals of Sharing Good Health” listed below. To the extent possible, students will remain with a set cohort, usually their homeroom class, stay in one desk, and responsibly manage their own personal items to minimize the sharing of items.

1) Daily Temperature Checks

Temperature readings will be required daily for every person entering a school building.

2) Promoting Proper Handwashing & Good Hygiene

Proper handwashing and using hand sanitizer will be stressed upon entering and leaving a building or classroom, before and after lunch and at the end of the day. The uniform policy will be altered so that clothes can be laundered daily.

3) Physical Distancing Measures

Classroom spacing is being developed to ensure physical distancing. Emphasis will also be placed on distancing in hallways, cafeterias and at recess (if applicable). Access by visitors and volunteers will be limited and only considered when absolutely necessary.

4) Masks will be Required

By Order of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, students will be required to wear a mask except when eating or drinking.

5) Cleaning and Disinfection

Every school will increase the cleaning of classrooms, common areas and frequently-touched items including door handles, light switches, counter tops, etc. There will also be increased disinfection during nightly cleanings.

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Q. How will schools be able to maintain physical distance in classrooms?

A. Each school will ensure adequate spacing of desks of at least 3 feet apart and ideally 6 feet apart. The first row of desks must be at least 6 feet from the teacher when she/he is teaching. Large spaces, such as gymnasiums and cafeterias, may be reconfigured to accommodate larger classes, and safe protocols will be created for recess, physical education classes, and outdoor academic experiences. Schedules and movement within the building will also be adapted to maximize physical distancing.

Q. Will I be able to enter the school building to visit my child's classroom?

A. While the presence of parents/grandparents/guardians during the school day is an experience that sets our schools apart, access to the building will be restricted, and only granted on an as-needed basis. This will minimize the spread of germs in our facilities.

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

A. The general rule is, "If you feel sick, stay home." This is an important area for partnership between parents and schools. We expect all parents to take their child(ren)'s temperature and observe their overall health before sending them to school. If the child has a fever of 100.4° F or higher, or if the child shows any symptoms of COVID-19, 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. What will happen if a student shows symptoms of COVID-19 in school?

A. If a student shows symptoms of COVID-19 while in school, he or she will immediately be sent to a dedicated and supervised isolation area. The adults assisting the student will wear additional personal protective equipment (PPE). The student's parents or guardians will be called, and the student will leave school as soon as possible. The student's desk, belongings, and any commonly used objects he or she may have touched (door knobs, pencil sharpener, etc.) will be disinfected. All schools will follow the guidance of their local public health officials regarding any additional steps or communication that need to occur. All members of the school community will be expected to respect the privacy of any student or staff member who may become sick during the school day.

Q. When can a student come back to the physical school classroom 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. If COVID testing is negative or an appropriate alternative diagnosis is given by a physician, it is expected that students will remain absent from school until they are fever free without fever reducing medication for 24 hours and other symptoms are improving. Students who have tested positive for COVID-19 will be able to return to school after 10 days from onset of symptoms and 24 hours fever free, as long as their symptoms are improving. The guidance of local public health department must be followed. Any student with symptoms who does not receive a COVID test will be able to return to school after 10 days from the onset of symptoms and 24 hours fever free, as long as their symptoms are improving.

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Q. Does my child need a doctor's note to return to school?

A. If your child meets the criteria on our COVID screening checklist ([Attachment A](#)) to stay home from school, he/she will need a doctor's note to return to school. Any other absence from non-COVID related symptoms lasting 3 days or more will require a doctor's note to return. If your child misses one day of school that does not meet the COVID screening checklist criteria (for example, missing one day of school due to a migraine), then a doctor's note would not be required.

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 at least 14 days. When your family member meets the public health and medical criteria for recovery from COVID-19, and if your child shows no COVID-19 symptoms for the 14-day period, your school may allow your child to return upon consultation with public health officials. Your child will be allowed to complete work virtually while quarantining outside of the physical school building.

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 share a classroom or who may have had contact with the student who tested positive will be monitored closely for COVID-19 symptoms, according to the recommendations of the local health department. Some students may be asked to stay home from school for approximately 14 days. If this occurs, students will be allowed to complete work virtually while the class is away from school.

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

A: Should any employee have COVID-19 symptoms or test positive for COVID-19, schools will follow the same protocols used for students (see previous question). If a teacher who teaches your child becomes sick and is unable to work, your school will provide a substitute teacher.

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, school buildings will be deep cleaned and disinfected, and students will transition to remote learning.

Q. Will my child receive education if he/she is home for an extended period due to illness?

A: Yes, we will work with your family to transition to online learning to ensure continuity of education.

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

A: The Diocese has developed a Diocesan Health and Safety planning committee, which is comprised of diocesan and local school administration and clergy along with medical professionals with expertise in pediatrics and quality assurance. This committee will develop overarching guidelines for the 2020-2021 school year. Each school has developed its own Health and Safety committee to implement these guidelines relative to their unique environment. The schools will be communicating their plans to you, and you can reach out to them for school-specific questions.

Q. What if my family travels out of state during the school year?

A. If a teacher or student travels to an area (state or region) with required quarantine according to either Pennsylvania or United States guidelines, that teacher or student should notify the school. Your school will ask you to follow the quarantine guidelines before returning to the school.

Programming and Academics

Q: What if I do not feel safe sending my child back to school? Will there be a virtual academy?

A: Each school is implementing new protocols and doing everything possible to ensure everyone's health and safety. However, we understand that some families still may not wish to return. If your child or a family member is at increased risk for COVID-19, we encourage you to speak to your physician. Ultimately, you need to make the best decision for your family.

The Diocese, through its education subcommittee, is working collaboratively with each school to develop a virtual academy for families. Students who learn remotely will follow a consistent curriculum and keep pace with their peers as though they were in the classroom. Families will need to commit to a particular period of time to engage in this option for planning purposes. Please contact the principal of your child's school if this is an option you are considering.

Q. Will there be bus transportation to school?

A. In most instances, busing is provided by your local public school districts. Given the physical spacing requirements on buses, school districts are developing their plans for bus routes. While we are still awaiting their final plans, we encourage all families who use bus transportation to begin considering alternate transportation options if routes are cancelled.

Q: Will aftercare be available at elementary schools this year?

A: Yes. Schools may continue to offer extended care. Specific standards for health and safety to limit interactions between students from different classrooms will be followed by each school. All health and safety protocols will be the same as during the regular school day.

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. This year, teachers will take additional time at the beginning of the school year to assess student skills to determine what students are ready for academically as they begin a new school year. This will include the NWEA assessment tool that was used last year. If the assessment data indicate it is necessary, the elementary curriculum may be adjusted in specific grades and schools, as determined by the principal, to prioritize English/Language Arts, Math, and Religion. In addition,

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instructional time for each class may be adjusted to accommodate the additional time that some health and safety measures may require. In elementary schools, all major subjects will continue to be taught. There may be some adjustments to minor subjects as determined by the principal and planning teams at each school.

Q. Why should I continue to keep my child enrolled at a Catholic schools vs. a Cyber Charter or public school during this time?

A. Whether you choose the in-person or virtual option for your family, you will experience the same academically excellent and faith-filled experience you have come to know throughout your child's/children's education. We will be able to continue to ensure your child/children achieves his/her God-given potential because we have come to know your child/children in greater depth than anyone else could. Our smaller environment and assessment tools such as NWEA allow us to deliver a differentiated approach to your child's education. Additionally, our dedicated faculty and administrators know your child personally and will be able to help them navigate the challenging nature of this time.

Q. Will my child's classroom look different?

A. Schools will spread out desks and tables in classrooms as much as possible to achieve safe physical distancing. Some furniture that is not essential to teaching may be removed to enhance usable space. Desks and tables will also be arranged so that they face the same direction. Additionally, some non-traditional classroom space may be utilized.

Q. Will students share school supplies?

A. No. Students will not be able to share school supplies (e.g., books, crayons, technology, etc.), including for such subjects as art and music. For any supplies that still may be shared, like computers, these will be cleaned after every use.

Q. Will learning in the classroom look different this year?

A. The implementation of physical distancing protocols and other health and safety safeguards will require some adjustments to student movement within and between classrooms. The integration of technology within the classroom will increase as teachers will be using it to promote student collaboration and engagement within lessons and activities and for some assessments. The consistent Learning Management System (LMS), G-Suite or Google Classroom, will be used by each school. Additional online instructional and supplemental resources will be identified and implemented to support student learning. The combination of resources will allow an even greater amount of personalization to meet the needs of all students. It will also allow students who are absent for an extended period of time to stay engaged with the classroom. Teachers, as always, will use their expertise to determine the most effective use of technology and instructional strategies appropriate to the skill and content they will teach.

Q. How will the academic program continue if school buildings are closed again?

A. Each school's plan for full time remote learning for all students if buildings are closed temporarily is responsive to the feedback provided on the recent parent survey. Students will continue to use the technology and programs used in the classroom so that the transition is as smooth as possible. Clear, consistent expectations for student attendance, assignments, and assessments will be communicated to

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all students and parents. Guidelines have been provided to all schools for increased live interaction with teachers, with the length and type of interaction (e.g., whole group vs. small group) determined by the age/grade of the students. The intent is to have a remote learning experience, if necessary, that more closely resembles the structure, interactions, and work of in-school learning.

Q. How are you supporting the faculty and staff during this time?

A. Our faculty and staff have always been and continue to be our greatest asset. Just as we are diligently working to ensure the safety of our students, we are working to ensure a safe work environment for our employees. We have engaged their input through a survey, and their interests are also represented on the Diocesan committee through local administrators. The faculty and staff are actively engaged and represented on the Health and Safety committees for each school.

Some of the specific areas we will focus on are increased professional development (instruction, assessment, technology, and safety protocols), providing a clean/sanitized work environment, support from our human resources office, and access to personal protective equipment if needed.

Q. Will there be school Masses in the Fall?

A. While parishes have opened for Mass, they have specified capacity and distancing requirements. To ensure our Catholic identity continues to be a lived experience within our schools, each school will coordinate with their local pastor(s) to determine how to best experience Mass. This may be achieved through a combination of virtual and in-person settings.

Tuition and Fees

Q. The pandemic has affected my family's income. Is there financial assistance available?

A. The Diocese of Scranton Scholarship Foundation awards financial assistance based on need using objective criteria. If your income has been affected by the pandemic, please be in touch with our tuition office to discuss the possibility of financial assistance or an alternate payment plan. Additionally, schools may have financial assistance, and we encourage you to reach out to your principal. All of our schools also offer additional tuition reduction opportunities. More information can be found at <https://www.dioceseofscranton.org/catholic-schools/apply-for-tuition-assistance/>.

Q. Will there be any changes to tuition this year due to adaptations to the learning environment?

A. Tuition will remain as posted for the full year. During a normal year, tuition alone does not cover all of the expenses to run our schools. On average, the cost to educate each student is approximately \$2,000 more than his/her current tuition cost. Additional revenue sources, such as the roughly 20% directly from our parishes, allows us to keep tuition lower than the actual cost.

For the upcoming year, we are facing additional expenses related to costs for increased technology, training, and cleaning protocols. However, we remain committed to providing an excellent Catholic education even though it may look a little different.

Q. Will fees be changed this year?

A. Fees are set by the individual school and may be adjusted if a program or activity is cancelled.

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Attachment A

Part of our Partnership in Sharing Good Health will require teachers, staff and students/parents to review this Screening Tool at home each day prior to coming to school. While it will not be collected, it is imperative that the screening be completed at home to ensure everyone’s safety.

Diocese of Scranton School Symptom Screening Tool

Part I: If you answer “yes” to questions 1, 2, or 3, please contact your school prior to sending your child to school.

1. Are you/is the student taking any medication to treat or reduce a fever such as Ibuprofen (i.e. Advil, Motrin) or Acetaminophen (Tylenol)?
2. Have you traveled to an area (state or region) with required quarantine according to either Pennsylvania or United States guidelines?
3. Have you/your child been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last 14 days or told by the Department of Health that you/your child should quarantine?

Part II

1. Are you/is the student experiencing any of the following?

Group A 1 or more symptoms	Group B 2 or more symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever (100.4 or higher) • Cough • Shortness of breath • Difficulty breathing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sore throat • Runny nose/congestion • Chills • New lack of smell or taste • Muscle pain • Nausea or Vomiting • Headache • Diarrhea

Stay home if the student or you (the faculty or staff member):

- Have one or more symptoms in Group A **OR**
- Have two or more symptoms in Group B **OR**
- Are taking fever reducing medication **OR**
- Are within a window for recommended quarantine

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