

Catholic Schools stress safety protocols for beginning of new academic year

SCRANTON – With the first day of school quickly approaching, the Diocese of Scranton's Office for Catholic Schools is unwavering in its commitment to protect the health and safety of all students, faculty, staff and administrators.

"Last year provided all of us the opportunity to achieve what many others did not – the ability to open our doors and maximize the amount of in-person learning – because we worked together in following thoughtful health and safety protocols that resulted in minimal interruptions," Jason W.S. Morrison, Secretary of Catholic Education/Chief Executive Officer, and Kristen Donohue, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, wrote in a letter to parents on Aug. 13, 2021.

Using the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Health, American Academy of Pediatrics and



the Children's Hospital of Pennsylvania Policy Lab, the Diocese developed protocols for all of its 19 Catholic Schools to follow this coming year for in-person instruction.

"Of critical importance is the knowledge we all have from living through this pandemic that the environment can change quickly," the administrators wrote. "We will be responsive to those changes as the situation improves or worsens in our communities. This includes every layer of mitigation and may require decisions to be adjusted on short notice."

Like last year, high touch surfaces will be cleaned and

sanitized frequently in every building and hand sanitizer will be available in hallways, near entrances and other high-traffic areas. In classrooms, desks will be placed at a minimum of three feet apart.

For the second year in a row, parents will be asked to complete a daily health questionnaire at home before their child arrives at school – and temperatures of students, faculty, staff and visitors will be taken when they enter a building.

Schools will make every effort to monitor for COVID-19 related symptoms and have specific guidance for dealing with any potential cases.



The hallways at Saint John Neumann Elementary School in Williamsport were quiet over the summer but will soon be filled with students as the new academic year begins. (Photo/Eric Deabill)

Mask requirements will be determined in accordance with the county transmission metrics in which a particular school is located. When a county is classified as having moderate, substantial or high transmission, all individuals will be required to wear masks indoors. When a county is in a low community transmission rate for at least two weeks, masking may

return to optional.

"We all long for a full return to normalcy, but must do so safely. We need to partner together to work through these ever-changing times. With your help and patience, we will achieve that return together. We were successful last year, and will be again this year," Morrison and Donohue wrote in their letter.

Diocese releases guidelines for faith formation programs

SCRANTON – With parishes across the Diocese of Scranton already planning the 2021-2022 faith formation year, the Diocese of Scranton released guidelines on Aug. 13 that parishes should follow to prioritize the safety and health of all students, parents, staff and volunteers.

Parishes continue to have flexibility in the approach to which they offer faith formation programs during upcoming school year. Parishes can hold either in-person faith formation classes, virtual classes or a hybrid approach which combines both virtual and in-person elements.

For any parishes planning to hold in-person faith formation classes, the Diocese of Scranton has put forth the following guidance:

Masks: As Catholics, we are called to provide a Culture of Safety for our children and youth. Because most religious education students are not yet eligible for vaccinations – and in an effort to ensure in-person religious education is able to continue to the best extent possible – the Diocese of Scranton will require masks for students involved in its parish faith formation programs at this time. Masks are an effective tool in mitigating the spread of COVID-19, particularly when there is a large population of unvaccinated individuals.

While indoors, masks must be worn consistently and correctly by all minors and adults, regardless of vaccination status, while attending any religious education classes.

If religious education classes are held outdoors, masks do not need to be worn in most settings. Masks must be worn in crowded outdoor settings or during any activities that involve sustained close contact with other people.

If a student/family is uncomfortable with returning to an onsite/in-person faith formation program for any reason, parishes have been urged to work directly with the student/family and make reasonable accommodations, which might include the possibility of online or individualized meetings and/or providing resource packets for pick-up.

This Diocesan guidance on masking for parish religious education programs is consistent with the protocols being implemented at all of the Diocese of Scranton's Catholic Schools. These protocols will be re-evaluated on a consistent basis and are subject to change at any time and will be communicated to parishes if adjustments are made.

Mask requirements will be determined in accordance with the county transmission metrics and

guidance from various sources, which may include, but are not limited to the CDC and PA Department of Health. The levels of transmission for a county are listed as Low, Moderate, Substantial and High. When counties are in moderate, substantial or high, all individuals will be required to wear masks indoors. When a county is in a low community transmission rate for at least two weeks, masking may be optional for all. Anyone that is not vaccinated at that time, will still be encouraged to continue to mask indoors if desired.

Vaccinations: It is highly recommended that everyone who is eligible be fully vaccinated for COVID-19, whether that be a catechist or student of eligible age.

Classroom Set-up: Classroom desks or tables should face in the same direction whenever possible and parishes should make every effort to maintain three feet of distancing while in a classroom setting.

Cleaning: Clean and disinfect classroom space and frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, sink handles and light switches with regularity. Parishes that utilize Catholic School buildings for space should work with the building principal to ensure sanitization.

Prayer to Begin a New School Year

*Blessed are you, Lord God,
Creator of body and mind and heart;
you have sent the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge
to guide your people in all their ways.*

*At the beginning of this new school year
we implore your mercy:
bless the students, teachers, and staff of our
Catholic Schools and religious education programs,
that together we may grow in faith, hope, and love
as we learn from you and each other
how to follow your Son Jesus.*

*Expand the horizons of our minds,
that we may grow in wisdom,
understanding, and knowledge;
deepen our commitment to seek the truth of your
ways;
and enliven our faith to reach out to those in need.*

*Glory and praise to you, Lord God,
in the Church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever.*

Amen.

Diocesan Catholic Schools welcome two new Assistant Superintendents

SCRANTON – As the 2021-2022 academic year gets underway, the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System is welcoming two new Assistant Superintendents after a nationwide search.

In addition to bringing extensive credentials to their new positions, both Charlene Krushinsky and Michael Slesinski are personally vested in Catholic education and are unwavering in their dedication to the transformative nature of all that Catholic schools offer spiritually and academically.

Krushinsky comes to the Diocese of Scranton with more than 30 years experience in education and a vast knowledge of the Catholic school environment as both an educator and administrator. Beginning her educational career as a fourth grade teacher, she spent the last nine years as a principal in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Phoenix.

The mother of three has a Masters in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University and a certificate in Effective Catholic School Administration from the University of Notre Dame and her principal certification from the state of Arizona. She has also been a principal mentor and presenter with the Latino Enrollment Institute at the University of Notre Dame since 2014. The Institute focuses on creating a welcome environment in Catholic schools for Latino families.

"I'm blessed to be here," Krushinsky told *The Catholic Light*.

Having never experienced snow or winter in the northeast, she believes God led her to this point in her career on the East Coast.

"God opened a door and here I am. I trust in God. It's God's will, not our will," she said.

In just her first few weeks in the diocese, Krushinsky already visited all 19 Catholic schools and met with each principal. She will primarily be responsible for curriculum development and principal mentoring.

"I'm anxious and excited to meet the teachers and I can't wait to go back and visit and meet the children," Krushinsky said. "What I love is the history and the deep roots of Catholicism that are here in the Diocese of Scranton."

As an instructional leader, Krushinsky is committed to a growth mindset and has worked with NWEA Map Growth to improve educational outcomes. She also has a proven record of accomplishment in enrollment and fundraising.

Having put three daughters through the Catholic education system, Krushinsky wants parents and families to know that she is always available to them.

"I would love for parents to know that my door is always open. Feel free to call or email with questions or concerns. We're here to support parents in this journey in providing a Catholic education for their child. They are making the right choice, the best choice, they're investing in their child's future," she added.

Michael Slesinski says he is "tremendously excited" to join the Diocese of Scranton's Catholic Schools team.

After beginning his career as an educator more than 15 years ago, Slesinski most recently worked as an administrator at the district and Intermediate Unit level as a Supervisor for Special Education and Director of Special Services.

Slesinski previously worked in the Luzerne Intermediate Unit, East Stroudsburg Area School District, Mountain View School District and the New York City Department of Education. He attended Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New York his entire life growing up.

As the Diocese of Scranton works to enhance our offerings for students with exceptionalities, Slesinski hopes his knowledge will help all levels of learners in the diocese.

"The idea of being able to bring those tools to schools in our system, so that students who want to be a part of our system can succeed to the greatest extent possible is incredibly exciting for me," Slesinski said.

Slesinski has a Masters in Educational Leadership from Lehman College in New York and anticipates completion of a doctoral degree in Administration and Leadership Studies from East Stroudsburg University this year. He also has obtained a PA Superintendent Letter of Eligibility.

"During the course of the past 15 years of work in education, one of the highlights for me has been working collaboratively with parents and allowing parents to feel comfortable with the different schools where I worked," he added.

In his new role, Slesinski will also focus on technology and school safety initiatives.

"My goal is to take the wonderful things we're already doing in both of those areas and continue to grow them," he said.

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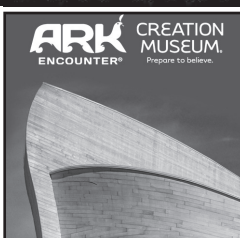
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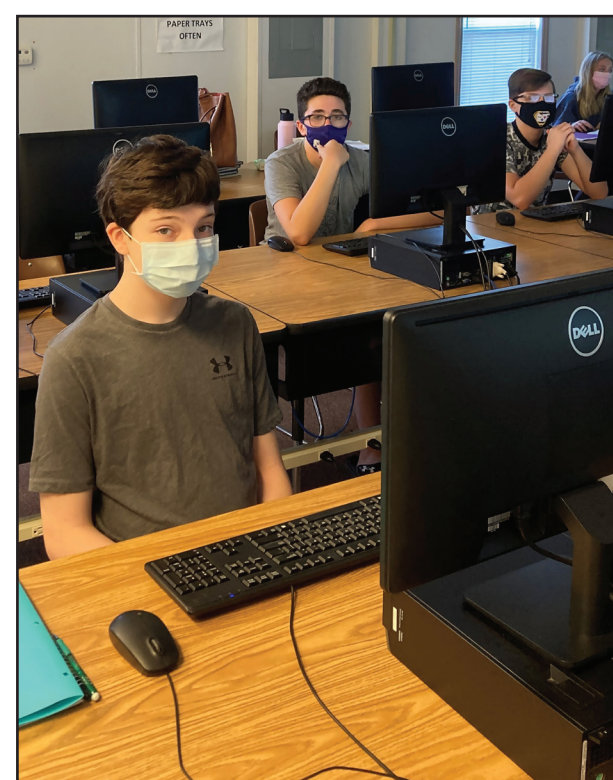
The Diocese of Scranton is committed to educating our students in an environment that is academically excellent and facilitates the development of moral judgment and Christian decision-making. We are proud to share the following successes of our students in the classroom and in their service to others. Each day, our schools are fulfilling their mission of preparing today's youth and young adults to become tomorrow's faith-filled leaders.



"Second grade here we come!" Students at **La Salle Academy in Jessup** are looking forward to the new school year.



At the Annual Solemn Novena to Saint Ann, Michael Coval, a student at **Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore**, volunteered at all Masses and Novena services for all 10 days, even the 4:30 a.m. Mass on the Feast Day! He had the opportunity to have his photo taken with the Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton.



Incoming freshmen participated in the Head Start to High School program at **Holy Cross High School in Dunmore**. Students reviewed concepts in math, computers, English, and Latin in preparation for the start of the upcoming school year.



Mrs. Melissa Skutack, principal of **Holy Rosary School in Duryea**, enjoys some summertime fun with students Gianna Fino, Nicholas Riviello, and Roman Riviello at the annual Nativity of Our Lord Parish picnic.



All Saints Academy in Scranton just finished hosting summer enrichment camps, which focused on reading, math, and STREAM activities for various grade levels. Student activities were theme-driven with Kindergarten–2nd graders enjoying "Superheroes," 3rd–5th graders going on a "Camping Adventure," and 6th–8th graders participating in "Sports Camp."



Students, faculty, and staff from **Holy Redeemer High School in Wilkes-Barre** volunteered their time this summer beautifying classrooms as they prepare to return for the 2021-22 school year.



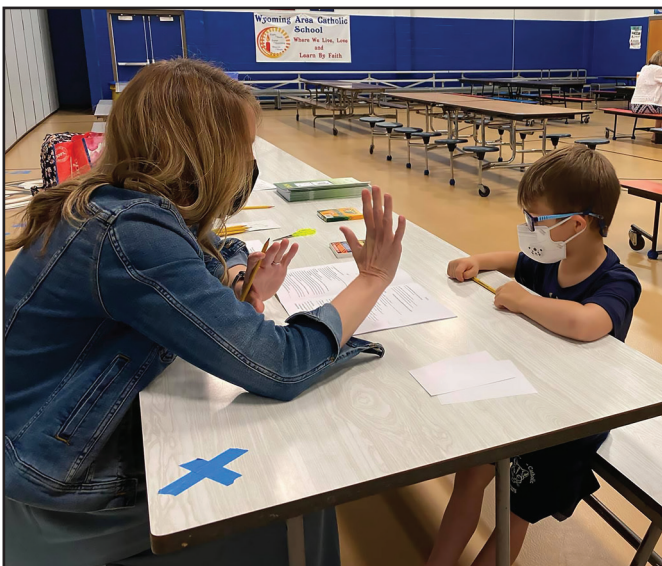
Epiphany School in Sayre recently hosted a school tour for the Class of 1981's 40th reunion. Sister Anne Quigley, first grade teacher, shared information on how the school has changed and grown over the years. Class of '81 member Paul Bednarek said, "We are not only lifelong friends; we are a family."



Congratulations to Grace Aposhian, fifth grade student at **Saint Clare/Saint Paul School in Scranton**, for receiving an Honorable Mention in the Lackawanna/Susquehanna Drug and Alcohol Poster Contest. The poster is on display on Green Ridge Street in Scranton.



Teachers at **Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston** recently met to review the new Envision Math Series. The teachers also discussed various methodologies of utilizing differentiated instruction to tailor their lessons to reach all levels of learners.



Mrs. Stephanie DePhillips, the Kindergarten teacher at **Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter**, administers a Kindergarten Readiness test to Pre-Kindergarten student Bryce Cohen as the school prepares for the 2021-22 school year.



Drishti Matta, Chloe O'Donnell and Yianna Papadopoulos, students at **Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in East Stroudsburg**, put the finishing touches on the school's new mural.



After finishing the book *Twenty-one Elephants and Still Standing* by April Jones, students participating in Storybook STREAM Camp at **Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green** were challenged to design and construct bridges that will hold 21 elephants.



Eighth grader Andrew Walter along with 11th graders Mark Roman and Andrew Mitchell from **Saint John Neumann Jr./Sr. High School in Williamsport** volunteer their time helping to set up classrooms at the Saint John Neumann Elementary School.



Mrs. Charlene Harbach, the Kindergarten teacher at **Saint John Neumann Elementary School in Williamsport**, screens a new Kindergarten student for 2021-22.