



## DIOCESE OF TRENTON

*Department of Catholic Schools*

May 24, 2021

Dear Catholic School Parents and Guardians,

It is hard to believe that there are only a few weeks left in this 2020-21 school year. The Catholic schools and our school families have come a long way together this year. Thank you for your trust in your child's Catholic school and the unparalleled commitment of the principals, teachers, and staff to ensure that all children in our schools get the high quality, faith-based education you expect.

I am writing to express my gratitude for your partnership and to share some important information about the 2021-2022 school year, while inviting your continued commitment to the health and safety of our school communities.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Trenton have offered in-person learning on a full day schedule since the first day of school, with only a few exceptions. During this school year, our schools provided remote learning in cases of parent request or COVID-19 exposure. Those instances of remote learning lent themselves to student participation in all classroom activities. Catholic schools are communities of faith, committed to common values and principles that drive our actions. The successes achieved so far this year are a tangible example of our Catholic communities in action and a testament to what we can accomplish together when we remain committed to our principles.

One of the most critical ingredients for our successes so far this year has been the unprecedented actions of all of our teachers, many whom have taught students in class and online simultaneously. Concurrent teaching of this kind takes enormous preparation and elevated focus all day, every day. It has been exhausting for the teachers, but they have maintained their efforts because they believe deeply that it is their vocation to teach as Jesus did – to serve all students by meeting their specific needs.

Concurrent teaching of in-person and remote students was undertaken as an emergency solution to a crisis situation at the beginning of the school year. As an emergency solution, it will result in some long-term changes in practice (such as greater use of technology, overall). Fortunately, several factors indicate that the kind of full time remote learning our schools have offered this year will not be necessary in the 2021-2022 school year.

- COVID-19 vaccines are increasingly available to parents and other adults, thereby reducing risk of transmission from children to the adults in their lives.
- A growing body of evidence from schools across the country and globally indicates that when proper precautions are in place, like those used by Catholic schools, transmission of COVID-19 among students is relatively rare.
- Catholic schools in the Diocese of Trenton have successfully mitigated the spread of COVID-19 in schools during this current school year. Almost all cases of COVID-19 that have impacted our schools originated outside of the school and did not spread to others inside the school.



It is also important to recognize that in-person learning allows all students to thrive in the dynamic environment of the classroom and allows teachers to more easily assess students' needs and adapt instruction to meet them. All students are important members of their school community, valued personally for the gifts that they share. While our teachers have done an outstanding job of inviting remote learners into the classroom, all students benefit from being a part of the full community in the classroom.

In light of the available evidence and the value of in-person learning, all students enrolled for the 2021-2022 school year are expected to attend school in person. All schools will continue to implement measures to minimize the spread of COVID-19 that are appropriate throughout the school year. Our schools will continue to partner with local health agencies to monitor the COVID-19 situation and adhere to requirements that are in effect at that time. Our schools do not plan to provide a full-time remote learning option that includes teachers simultaneously teaching students in class and online.

Local school planning teams for the 2021-2022 school year will be working to develop solutions for students who may need to be absent from school temporarily due to quarantine recommendations. It is impossible to know if quarantine guidelines will change for the coming school year. If quarantines are recommended in some situations for some students, the school will provide an age-appropriate solution that helps those students to stay on track with their classes. Planning teams will also consider the safety of extracurricular activities and athletics and make recommendations for next year, maintaining flexibility to be responsive to the most current information.

Although it is necessary to begin to plan for next school year, it is important to remember that the 2020-2021 school year is not yet over. Warmer weather and vaccination of many adults invite us all to increased activity outside of school. With only a few weeks remaining in the school year, it is more important than ever that we remain committed to protecting the health and safety of all members of our Catholic school communities. This means acting responsibly outside of school, wearing masks and maintaining distance when appropriate, staying home when sick, and being tested for COVID-19 if necessary. When we take these actions, each of us protects our own health and the health of those around us. Please remain vigilant to these measures as we seek to finish the school year as strong as we started it.

Thank you again for your commitment to Catholic school and your partnership in making the successes we have achieved so far this year possible.

Warmest regards,

Vincent de Paul Schmidt, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Catholic Schools