



## **Diocese of Rockford**

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## **Elementary Schools**

## **Reopening Plan**

**July 2020**

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# Letter from the Catholic Education Office

We hope this letter finds all of you healthy, and happy. After just completing, arguably, the most difficult and challenging period in the history of our Diocesan Catholic school system, you all deserve a respite from the stress and worry that Covid-19 brought on all of us.

Although there is still much uncertainty about how the pandemic might affect education in the coming months, we want to assure you that the Diocesan Catholic Education Office has developed this plan to re-open our schools for the 2020-21 school year. We have studied guidelines provided by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), the IDPH (Illinois Department of Public Health), the ISBE (Illinois State Board of Education) as well several county health departments to formulate a plan that will allow our elementary and high schools to re-open on time. We obviously cannot see into the future and predict what the Covid-19 situation may look like in late August. Still, we are confident that by taking necessary health precautions, our Catholic schools will once again be open and be able to provide the same high-quality education it has for over 100 years.

We hope you find this document helpful and know that the Catholic Education Office will continuously communicate with our school administrators as these guidelines are adjusted by local and national health officials. We will make sure you, as stakeholders, will have access to updated plans either on-line or in hard copy.

All of us at the Catholic Education Office are committed to ensuring that our students receive the best Catholic education possible in as safe and secure an environment as possible. We look forward to the return to on-site education. The school environment may look somewhat different, but the quality and commitment will not change.

Let us continue to pray over the coming weeks and months for an end to the pandemic and a return to our school buildings for our students, teachers, and administrators.

God Bless and Stay Safe,

*Michael Kagan*  
Superintendent of Catholic Schools  
Diocese of Rockford

*Vito C. DeFrisco*  
Assistant Superintendent of Catholic Schools  
Diocese of Rockford

# Reopening School Plan Timeline

The COVID-19 pandemic is being carefully monitored throughout the Diocese of Rockford. The decision to reopen schools will be made by the Bishop.

The safety and mental, social, emotional, and physical health of all in our school communities is paramount. The strategies and tactics included in each of our school's reopening plans will contribute to and align with the parish, state, and national efforts to minimize the spread of COVID-19 virus.

These Diocesan guidelines provide each school with direction and guidance for actions to be taken in the following four areas:

1. Health and Safety
2. Physical Infrastructure
3. Lunch/Cafeteria/Recess
4. Extended Care

The principal of each school, with direction from the Catholic Education Office and in collaboration with the school's Reopening Team, will adopt these guidelines and develop a plan specifically for his or her school community and school physical plant. Plans should be developed at each school and available by mid-July.

## School Reopening Plan Development Timeline

### **Early July - the Principal will:**

- ✓ Collaborate with parish/school staff members to review the Diocesan guidelines with school and parish personnel.
- ✓ Identify a school Reopening Team consisting of the pastor, principal, school faculty members, school support staff members, parish staff, and local healthcare professionals.

### **Mid/July - the Principal will:**

- ✓ Convene a meeting in early July with the school's Reopening Team.
- ✓ Provide professional development for the Reopening Team relative to what is being expected of them and reviewing Diocesan and local health guidelines.
- ✓ Review the Diocesan reopening guidelines to adapt them for their specific school building needs.
- ✓ The Reopening Team finalizes and implements the school reopening plan.

### **August - the Principal will:**

- ✓ Convene a meeting in early August with the Reopening Team to review/edit the plan
- ✓ Review and provide professional development for all school staff members about the plan and the strategies outlined in the Diocesan guideline and the School Reopening Plan.

# Communications

- ✓ Clear rational, decision-making, and communication with all stakeholders are extremely important.
- ✓ The decisions that were made as a result of this plan were made by each school in consultation with the Diocesan Catholic Education Office and followed the ISBE, IDPH, and CDC guidelines.
- ✓ Communication with the pastor, parish, diocese, state, and local education agencies, and local public health department.

Schools are expected to:

- Establish and maintain a strong relationship with the pastor, parish, diocese, state, and local education agencies, and local public health departments to communicate clear and thorough messages.
- Communicate appropriate messages to students, teachers, staff, and families so they feel the school is as safe as possible, including but not limited to:
  - Who is making decisions and what the decisions are
  - School-based mitigation efforts

## Development of the plan – key considerations

### HEALTH AND SAFETY

- ✓ School staff will consistently monitor the temperature of all who enter the building. All who enter the building are expected to wear masks.

### SPACE/PHYSICAL/SOCIAL DISTANCE

- ✓ Physical distancing in corridors, bathrooms, stairways, and school office space will be directed and monitored by floor markings, signage, and student supervision by all school staff.

### RETURNING TO SCHOOL

- ✓ All students will return on the first day of school, based upon the school's regular calendar and current Diocesan guidelines.

### SCHEDULING

- ✓ Students will remain in their respective cohort/family (homerooms) groups throughout the day as much as possible.

# School Reopening Guidelines

## HEALTH AND SAFETY STRATEGIES

1. To ensure consistent temperature monitoring and hygiene standards:

- Diocesan schools will monitor the COVID-19 guidelines published by the ISBE (Illinois State Board of Education) and the IDPH (Illinois Department of Public Health).
- All employees will be trained in health and safety protocols relating to COVID-19.
- Per State and federal guidance, members of a school community who are sick should not return to school until they have met the criteria to return.
- Temperature monitoring devices are available and will be used each morning student, staff, and visitors enter the school building.
- Signage will be placed in main entranceways noting that persons may not enter the building if they have any currently known symptoms of COVID-19, such as:
  - Fever
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath
  - Difficulty breathing
  - Chills
  - Fatigue
  - Muscle and body aches
  - Sore throat
  - New loss of taste or smell
  - Congestion or runny nose
  - Nausea
  - Vomiting
  - Diarrhea
  - Headache
- Social distancing will be maintained
- Face masks will be worn at all times
- Additional substitute teachers will be available if needed.
- Schools are encouraged to hold parent programs such as back-to-school nights, and parent-teacher conferences virtually. Where not feasible or practical, they should be held individually, with the teacher meeting only with the child and the child's parent(s).

- When students are reported absent, school personnel should request specific information and ask about COVID-19 exposure and/or diagnoses.
- COVID-19 diagnoses and exposure cases should be reported to the local health department.
- The school will follow the ISBE, IDPH, CDC guidelines for students who were suspected of having COVID-19, whether they were tested or not, which state that 72 hours must elapse from the resolution of fever without fever-reducing medication and 10 days must pass after symptoms first appeared.
- Students diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19 will be tracked. Tracking methods include checking in with the school nurse/principal upon returning to school to verify the resolution of the symptoms and that any other criteria for the quarantine have been met.
- Students or staff returning to school following a quarantine period as a result of COVID-19 are required to check in with the school nurse or building administrator before there are admitted back into the school building.
- Any individual within the school environment who shows symptoms should be immediately separated from the rest of the school population, held in a designated quarantined area, and picked up as soon as possible.
- All quarantined areas will be cleaned and disinfected after each use per the health department guidelines.
- All individuals in the school building are required to wear face masks unless they are younger than 2 years of age; having trouble breathing, or are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance.
- Schools should develop procedures to ensure 6-foot social distancing from other persons as much as possible.
- Individuals who have a temperature greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit /28 degrees Celsius or currently known symptoms of COVID-19 (see above), may not enter the building.
- Frequently clean touched surfaces.
- Students should be given assigned seats and arranged in the same direction - if possible spaced 6 feet apart.
- Restrict sharing and borrowing any items.
- Restroom breaks should be scheduled so that students of the same homeroom attend together.
- If students cannot eat lunch in their classrooms, student numbers in the cafeteria are required to follow gathering limits as outlined in Phase 4 of Restore Illinois which is 50 individuals.

- Limit any nonessential visitors, nonessential volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations, as much as possible.
- Face masks must be worn on the bus and no more than 50 individuals as outlined in Phase 4 should be on a bus at one time.
- Ensure that naptime mats and coats are spaced at least 6 feet apart as much as possible.
- Consider placing students head to toe at naptime to further reduce the potential for viral spread.
- All groups/organizations that use the school building are to submit a plan to the pastor and principal that addresses procedures for program implementation during the public health emergency.
- All school activities must follow the gathering limits of Phase 4 of the Restore Illinois Plan.
- At this time school field trips are to be discontinued until state and local health officials determine that it is safe to resume them.
- Disinfecting spray and wipes are available and will be used in all areas of the school building.
- Hand sanitizer is available in all classrooms and offices in the school building.
- Cleaning protocols have been established and are implemented throughout the school day with additional deep cleaning/sanitizing nightly.
- In the classroom student desks should be spaced as far apart as possible and facing one direction. If tables are used in the classrooms, students should be separated as much as possible.
- Ventilation and airflow have been checked and where possible increased throughout the building.
- Protocols have been developed if a student/staff displays symptoms or tests positive during school.
- Procedures for consultation with local authorities for reporting positive tests.
- Should a student, staff member, or visitor exhibit signs of illness during the school day, the school will provide (if available) an N95 Mask for the individual who is showing signs of being sick and the staff members assisting them.



- Physical education will be taught outdoors if possible. If it becomes necessary to teach physical education indoors, physical education teacher will instruct the students in the classrooms wearing a mask and practicing social distance. Students will also be required to wear masks during this time.
  - If physical education is held indoors but not in the classroom, students must adhere to social distancing and all activities must allow for 6-foot distances between students.
  - Changing in locker rooms for physical education classes should be avoided and students are required to use hand sanitizer before and after physical education classes.
  - Handshakes, high fives, or other physical contact is prohibited.
2. To ensure physical distancing in corridors, bathrooms, stairways, and school office space:
- Students will remain in their classrooms as cohorts (or “family groups”).
  - Instruction will be delivered by the homeroom teacher for preschool through grade 5. For grades 6 through 8, subject-specific teachers move from classroom to classroom. The homeroom teacher will be part of the cohort/family group.
  - As a cohort/family group, the student and homeroom teacher are required to wear masks during instruction and practice social distancing as much as possible.
  - Specials teachers (art, gym, music, and library) will visit the classrooms. The students and the specials teachers are required to wear a face mask and practice social distancing.
  - Face masks are worn by everyone (students, teachers, office staff, and visitors) while in the school building.
  - COVID-19 safety signage and guidelines are posted throughout the school.
  - Hall/corridor traffic plans have been established and marked to maintain social distancing.
  - Physical distancing will be directed and monitored by floor markings, signage, and student supervision by all school staff.
  - All faculty/staff members have been trained in COVID-19 school safety guidelines.
  - Traffic flow in and out of the restrooms will be monitored.
  - Classes will be separated during recess. After each cohort/family group uses the playground and/or any other shared equipment, it will be sanitized and ready for the next cohort/family group.

## **PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE STRATAGIES**

1. Traffic patterns will be different, and entering and exiting the building may change.
  - Students, staff, and visitors are required to enter the school building from one entrance and exit through another.
  - Signs will be posted throughout the building directing the flow of foot traffic entering and leaving the school building.
  - Students are required to follow similar foot traffic patterns to minimize the spread of the virus.
  - Touch points throughout the building during the day will be sanitized, this includes all restrooms after each use.
  - The building will be deep cleaned regularly before students arrive each morning.
  - Drinking fountains will be used for filling up water bottles only. Students/visitors are not permitted to drink directly from the water fountains.
  - If possible, Plexiglas will be installed in the school office as a protective barrier between visitors and staff members.

## **LUNCH/CAFETERIA/RECESS**

1. Changes will be made to how lunch is prepared and or served, and recess will be adjusted for safety.
  - Students are required to use hand sanitizer before and after lunch.
  - Students are required to eat lunch in their homerooms with their own cohort/family group.
  - Hot lunch meals will be delivered to classrooms and students will remain in their classrooms for the lunch period.
  - Cafeteria/lunch workers are required to wear appropriate PPE, including gloves and facemasks while preparing and/or distributing lunches.
  - Social distancing is required during the lunch period.
  - Social distancing will be followed during recess. Scheduled recess periods will be varied to allow students to remain in their respective cohorts/family groups.
  - Playground equipment may be unavailable and if it is, all equipment will be cleaned and sanitized before it is used by the next cohort/family group.

## **EXTENDED CARE**

1. Before and aftercare programs will be changed for the safety of the students and staff members.

- All Extended Care programs (before and after school), will adhere to the above guidelines

### **Summary**

Our goal is to provide the best possible academic program in a safe environment. We hope you find these guidelines helpful. We understand that you still may have many questions as we reopen the school. We know that these guidelines do not address everyone's concerns, but they have been developed for the safety of the staff, students, and the families we serve. At this time, athletic activity guidelines for elementary schools have not been published yet. Please be assured that we will continue to update these guidelines as necessary. We will also keep you abreast of any changes.

Each of our Diocesan schools is required to follow these guidelines and have them available for all stakeholders to review. Thank you for your continued support of Catholic education and we look forward to a positive, productive, and healthy school year.

If you have any questions, please contact your local school principal.

The Catholic Education Office  
Rockford Diocese July 14, 2020