



*Rockford Diocese
Catholic Education Office*

WHAT TO EXPECT THIS YEAR:

Important Information about our School Reopening Plan

In early July, the Rockford Diocese released the School Reopening Plan for the 2020/21 School Year in response to COVID-19. This plan is designed to help schools and parents successfully and safely reopen our school buildings to students this fall.

The plan was designed over several weeks during the early summer, and integrates feedback from educators, and others. The plan also reflects important guidance from the Illinois School Board of Education (ISBE), the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and other governmental authorities.

Our Catholic schools have a long history of providing a top-quality Catholic education. We look forward to continuing that education in the school year to come.

Fundamental Principles of our Reopening Plan



ALL STUDENTS

Our plan allows us to welcome back all students for full-day instruction.



COHORT MODEL

Students will be assigned to a “cohort,” which will usually correspond to their homeroom class. Students remain with their cohorts all day. Students within a cohort should remain physically as far apart as possible. To contain any illness, cohorts are not mixed together during the day.



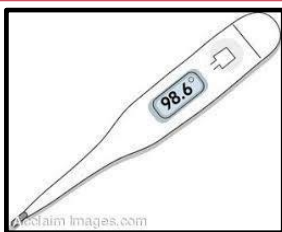
BUILDING LAYOUT

In order to keep cohorts intact, schools are evaluating pick-up and drop-off procedures, routes within the school building, etc. Signage and tape on the floors will be used to assist clarity in traffic flow.



MASKS

All individuals over the age of 2 will be required to wear a mask. Masks may only be removed during designated activities (such as lunch and recess) if students remain physically distant.



TEMPERATURE CHECKS

Parents should take the temperatures of their children daily. Temperature checks will also occur as students enter the school building every day.



INFECTION PROTOCOLS

Our plan provides for clear guidance on how to address individuals with COVID-19 symptoms and/or positive COVID-19 tests.



VIRTUAL LEARNING OPTION

If a COVID-19 surge occurs, we will work closely with state officials to determine whether we can continue face-to-face instruction. If necessary, we will return to at-home virtual instruction.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Parents/Guardians Regarding the Reopening of Catholic School Buildings

We know that parents have many questions about the start of the school year. In this document, we have outlined many of the frequently asked questions (FAQ) from parents about our reopening plan. These questions are divided up into four sections, each addressing a separate aspect of the reopening process. The categories are:

Health and Safety: General health and safety questions, such as social distancing, masks, and facility cleaning.

Infection Protocols: How we will handle instances where students or employees become ill.

Academics and Programming: Questions related to how classes will be taught. This section also includes information on school events (such as masses or assemblies) and extracurricular activities.

Tuition: Questions about tuition payments during the upcoming school year.

Please note that the School Reopening Plan contains general guidance for schools. Each school must apply these guidelines for their own unique school setting. As such, if you have specific questions about how these guidelines apply for your school, we encourage you to contact your school's principal.

Health and Safety

Q: What does “reopening our schools” really mean?

A: Gathering as a school community is an integral part of Catholic education. Our plan is to reopen our school buildings to students this fall. This means that all students are welcome to return to classes for face-to-face instruction. We have developed an in-depth plan that addresses numerous aspects of the reopening process, and how schools will function once reopened.

Q: Will students be safe when school is reopened? Has your plan been reviewed by medical professionals?

A: Safety is always our top priority in Catholic education. In constructing our reopening plan, we have closely studied guidance from federal and state authorities, as well as the Illinois Department of Health (IDPH).

We have confidence that our students can return safely in the fall.

Q: Who decides when a school has met the requirements to reopen? When will this happen?

A: Our plan includes specific requirements that schools must meet in order to reopen. Schools have received Diocesan school reopening guidelines and both the pastor and the principal have signed acknowledgements that the guidelines will be implemented. Schools have been asked to form a “Reopening Team.” The team will assist the principal and think through the school’s specific reopening strategy. The pastor and the principal will determine if/when a school is ready to reopen.

Q: Will all students be allowed to return to school at the same time?

A: Yes. Our plan provides for the return of all Catholic school students for full-day instruction.

Q: Will students need to wear masks at school?

A: Yes. As per directives of the state, all individuals above the age of two will need to wear masks while at school. Masks may be removed for brief periods of time under certain circumstances (such as outdoor play or lunch). However, when masks are removed, students must remain physically distant from one another (at least six feet).

Q: Do I need to purchase masks for my child?

A: Yes. We are asking all parents to purchase masks for their child. Parents may opt to buy disposable or reusable masks. For disposable masks, each mask must be thrown away at the end of every school day and parents should send plenty of extra masks to school with their child. For reusable masks, masks should be cleaned after every use and students should send at least one extra reusable mask at school.

Q: Can face shields be used instead of masks?

A: No. Face shields cannot be used instead of masks, as per directives of the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH).

Q: Will teachers teach children how to use masks?

A: Yes. We know that students (especially young children) will need training to learn how to properly wear masks. We will spend time at the beginning of the year helping children learn how to safely keep masks in place.

Q: Will students be required to physically distance at school?

A: Our plan calls for each student to be part of a larger group of students called a “cohort.” Each cohort will roughly align with a homeroom class. When students are with their cohort, they should remain as far apart as possible, but do not need to keep at least six feet apart. Homeroom teachers are also part of cohorts, and can walk around their classroom to monitor student classwork. When students are around other cohorts, they should remain at least six feet apart. We believe the cohort model provides for better containment should there be a positive case of COVID-19 (see the Infection Protocol section).

Q: Should I take my child’s temperature every day before school?

A: Yes. A high fever is a key symptom of COVID-19. Parents should take their child’s temperature every day before their child is taken to school. If your child has a fever of over 100.4°F, your child should be kept home from school. You should contact your child’s doctor and the school’s main office. Similarly, you should ask your child if he/she has any of the other [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, such as a sore throat, coughing, or nausea. If your child complains of these symptoms, you should keep him/her home and contact your doctor and the school office.

For more information about how to handle the potential illness of your child, please see the Infection Protocol section.

Q: How will drop off and pick-up be handled?

A: We are asking each school to carefully evaluate drop off and pick up procedures. Schools will use various entrances and exits to minimize contact between student cohorts. Parents will be asked not to congregate near school doors. Your principal will communicate specific drop off and pick up procedures to you ahead of the start of school.

In addition, when students enter school every day, they will be asked to participate in three tasks. These are:

A temperature check, administered by a school employee (please note that parents should also take temperatures every day, as noted above).

Students should wash their hands with soap or use hand sanitizer.

Students will be asked if they are feeling well.

If a student has a temperature above 100.4°F or complains of other COVID-19 symptoms, he/she will be immediately sent to the office. Parents will be contacted and asked to pick up the child (see Infection Protocol section for more information).

Q: What does the plan say about safety and cleanliness requirements for school buildings?

A: Our plan includes very specific requirements for the ongoing cleaning and sanitizing of our school buildings. Generally speaking, buildings will be cleaned very frequently, with a particular focus on high-traffic areas and common surfaces. Windows and/or vents should be opened to maximize air flow. Barriers will be installed in main office areas. Our plan contains instructions for schools on managing shared areas such as hallways, gymnasiums, cafeterias, and bathrooms.

Q: How will lunch take place when school reopens?

A: Our plan asks that schools think differently about lunchtime. Cafeterias may only seat 50 or fewer students, and students must be physically distant. As such, each school is developing a customized plan that fits their unique building. Some schools may ask students to eat lunch in their classrooms and/or have students use the cafeteria in staggered shifts.

Q: What about recess?

A: Schools may still conduct recess, but schools must fulfill defined safety requirements. For example, cohorts must be spread out from one another. If recess is outdoors, masks may be removed, but students will stay at least six feet apart.

Q: Can I still volunteer at school?

A: We have asked schools to minimize the number of volunteers this year in an effort to mitigate risk. Thus, your school will likely not allow you to volunteer.

Q: Will extended care (before and after care) be available this year?

A: Yes. Schools may continue to offer extended care. Our plan includes specific requirements for such care (including masks).

Q: My child and/or another member of my household is in an at-risk group for COVID-19. Should I send my child to school?

A: Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has defined [conditions in which certain people may be more at risk for severe illness through COVID-19](#). If your child or another member of your household is in an at-risk group, we encourage you to speak to your doctor. Ultimately you should decide whether it is safe for your child to attend school. A virtual learning option may be available for families that do not wish to return. Contact your school principal for more information.

Q: What do I do if I do not feel safe sending my child back to school?

A: We have taken every step to ensure the safety of students at our schools this fall. However, we understand that some families still may not wish to return. Some families may include individuals in at-risk groups for COVID-19, while others may feel general anxiety. The family will remain enrolled at their current school and will be asked to continue paying tuition. The principal will work with you and your school to determine if/what virtual learning options you may have.

Q: Is it okay for my family to travel out of town during the COVID-19 pandemic?

A: We recommend that you not travel out of town during the current pandemic. However, if travel is necessary, we encourage you to become familiar with the [IDPH's Travel Guidelines](#). If you or a member of your household travels to another country or to a state identified by the IDPH as having a surge in COVID-19 cases, your school may ask you to wait for 14 days until returning your child to school.

Q: What happens if there is a COVID-19 surge in our area and the state imposes more restrictions on schools?

A: If a COVID-19 surge occurs, we will work closely with state officials to determine whether we can continue face-to-face instruction (even on an alternate schedule). If necessary, we will return to at-home virtual instruction.

INFECTION PROTOCOLS

Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

A: The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has identified several [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, including high fever (above 100.4°F), sore throat, coughing, nausea, headache, muscle aches, loss of taste or smell, runny nose, fatigue, diarrhea and difficulty breathing.

Q: What should I do if my child has symptoms of COVID-19?

A: If your child shows [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, you should contact your doctor. Your doctor may ask that your child participate in a COVID-19 test. You should alert your school's main office and not send your child to school.

If the symptoms occur during the school day, your child will be immediately sent to the office and you will be contacted to pick your child up from school.

Q: My child had COVID-19-like symptoms, but tested negative for COVID-19. When can he/she return to school?

A: If your child does not have COVID-19, but has another illness, you should keep your child home until the illness' symptoms disappear. Your school will require you to provide a negative COVID-19 test and/or a doctor's note before your child can return to school.

Q: What should I do if my child tests positive for COVID-19?

A: You should immediately contact your doctor for additional instructions. You should also contact your school's main office. You should not send your child to school.

Q: When can a student return to school after receiving a positive COVID-19 test?

A: If a student tests positive for COVID-19 or does not seek medical attention, students must isolate and not return to school until they have met CDC's [criteria to discontinue home isolation](#). This includes:

- ✓ Three or more days without a high fever;
- ✓ A reduction of other COVID symptoms by at least 75 percent; and
- ✓ At least 14 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

Q: What should I do if a member of my household (who is not my child) tests positive for COVID-19?

A: You should immediately contact your school's main office. Your school will ask that you keep your child home for at least 14 days. If your family member recovers from COVID-19 (through meeting the criteria in the previous question) AND your child shows no COVID-19 symptoms for the 14-day period, your school may allow your child to return.

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

A: Should any employee have COVID-19 symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, we will follow the same protocols used for students (see above). If your child's teacher becomes sick and is unable to work, your school will provide a substitute teacher.

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 student has tested positive for COVID-19. All students in the cohort will be monitored closely for COVID-19 symptoms. If more than one student tests positive for COVID-19, it is likely that the entire cohort will be isolated (sent home) for at least 14 days. Students will be allowed to complete work virtually while the cohort is away from school.

Q: Could my child’s school building be closed down due to COVID-19 this year?

A: We will do our best to ensure a safe and healthy environment in the coming year. However, if numerous cases appear in a single school, resulting in the isolation of multiple classes/cohorts, we may need to close the school building and transition all students to virtual learning for a time. Parents will be updated regularly should that need arise.

ACADEMICS AND PROGRAMMING

Q: Will my child’s curriculum be changed this year?

A: Schools will still deliver high-quality instruction in core subjects (religion, language arts, math, science, and social studies). Special requirements will be in place for departmentalized classes and special area subjects (see sections below). The implementation of safety and health requirements (outlined earlier in this FAQ) will create new complexities in instruction, but our commitment remains to provide your child the best possible faith-based education.

Q: Will my child’s classroom look different?

A: We have instructed schools to spread out desks and tables in classrooms as much as possible. In order to maximize floor space, we’ve asked teachers to remove non-essential furniture and other items. We have also asked that desks and tables be arranged so that they face the front of the room. These steps were taken to minimize risk of any infection in the classroom.

Q: Will students share school supplies?

A: No. We are asking schools to ensure that students not share school supplies (e.g., books, crayons, technology, etc.), including for such subjects as art and music. Exceptions may be made for activities outdoors (such as outdoor physical education classes). If it is impossible to avoid sharing supplies, such as computers in a computer lab, such supplies must be cleaned after every use.

Q: I have a child in preschool or kindergarten. Is high-quality learning possible?

A: Yes. We are working very closely with our early education teachers to continue the best possible quality of instruction in preschool and kindergarten. While health and safety requirements are in place, our teachers will continue to work hard in the coming year to ensure your child grows intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

Q: Will students still change classes?

A: Many schools offer departmentalization, in which students change classes for core subjects (religion, language arts, math, science and social studies). This model is particularly common at the junior high level. In order to protect classes in cohorts, we are asking that students not move to different classrooms in departmentalized settings. Instead, the teacher will go to the students’ homeroom and teach them there. The non-homeroom teacher should remain at least six feet apart from students at all times.

Q: Will schools still offer classes in special subject areas (e.g., art, music, PE, etc.)?

A: Yes. As with departmentalization (see last question), we will ask special subject area teachers to travel to each class’ homeroom for instruction whenever possible. This will be particularly likely for such subjects as art, music, health, and foreign language. If students visit spaces such as the gymnasium, computer/STEM lab, or library, the room must be cleaned after every cohort.

Q: Will tests still be given this year?

A: Yes. It is important that we continue to gauge student academic growth throughout the school year. As such, you should anticipate tests to be administered in your child's class. These tests will include the standardized tests of the Diocese.

Q: Will students participate in field trips?

A: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Diocesan schools will not be participating in in-person field trips during the 2020/21 school year.

Q: My child has a Student Support Plan (ISP) because of an identified learning, behavioral or physical need. Can the needs of my child still be met this year?

A: As each Individual Service Plan (ISP) is different, your school will be evaluating each ISP to determine whether additional modifications are needed in light of COVID-19-related health and safety protocols.

Your school will contact you if it is determined that changes to the ISP need to occur. If you have urgent questions, you should not hesitate to contact your school.

Q: I need to meet with a teacher or my school principal. Can these meetings occur?

A: Yes. These meeting can take place virtually via phone or video chat.

Q: Can we still have meetings of stakeholder groups, such as the School Commission, Home-and School Association and Booster Club? What about fundraising events, such as an annual gala?

A: Such meetings should take place virtually.

Q: Will school Masses still take place?

A: The Diocese has defined a specific plan for parishes that allows for the celebration of Mass under very specific conditions. Schools will be asked to follow this plan, in close coordination with the local pastor and parish, in determining how/whether masses may be celebrated.

Q: Will First Communion, Reconciliation, and Confirmation take place this year?

A: Your child's school will continue to provide preparation for the Sacraments of First Communion, Reconciliation, and Confirmation. For the celebration of the Sacraments, schools and parishes must follow a specific plan defined by the Diocese. Your school will work closely with your pastor and parish to determine the timing and schedule of these sacraments.

Q: How will extracurricular activities be impacted this year?

A: Our plan provides guidance on specific extracurricular activities. Highlights of this guidance include (by activity):

- ✓ Athletics: We are awaiting further information from the state regarding athletics. More information will be provided to parents as it is known.
- ✓ Band: Rehearsals for small groups (15 or fewer) may take place for non-wind instruments (e.g., percussion, strings, etc.). Students must be physically distant. Rehearsals must occur virtually for wind instruments (woodwinds and brass).
- ✓ Choir, Drama/School Play, Christmas Program: Due to ongoing health concerns, we are asking schools to conduct such programs virtually or cancel them for the coming school year.
- ✓ Other Activities: For other activities (e.g., chess, debate, etc.), schools must meet specific health and safety requirements. If such requirements cannot be met, these activities should be conducted virtually or canceled.

TUITION AND FEES

Q: Will schools still collect tuition this year?

A: Yes. While this school year may look different, our schools will continue to provide a rigorous academic experience while supporting the moral and spiritual development of each student. Our Catholic schools depend upon tuition revenue to pay our employees who do this work and support other school-related expenses.

Q: I am having difficulty paying tuition, as my own workplace has been impacted by COVID-19. What do I do?

A: We know that some families may have difficulties paying tuition due to the loss of pay during workplace closures. If this is happening to you, please contact your school's principal. We understand your situation and will do our very best to work with you.

Q: Will fees be changed this year?

A: Each school develops their own fees based upon their own local needs. Fees may be adjusted if a program or activity has been directly impacted by COVID-19. For example, if a fee is collected for a particular field trip, it is likely that the fee will not be collected this year (as field trips will not occur).

If you have any other questions about the coming school year, we invite you to contact your school principal or the Catholic Education Office.

Thank you for your continued support of Catholic education.