



Catholic Education Office

Diocese of Rockford

555 Colman Center Drive
P.O. Box 7044
Rockford, Illinois 61125

(815) 399-4300 Voice
(815) 399-6278 Fax

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Dear Parents/Guardians,

We write to you today to inform you of the guidelines developed by the Diocesan Catholic Education Office for the opening of our Catholic schools and religious education programs for the 2021-2022 year. The Catholic Education Office is firmly committed to providing solid faith-filled academic and religious education programs in a safe environment.

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has recently issued guidelines, adopting the July 7, 2021 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for our return to school in the fall.

The following is a summary of the critical information included in the new CDC guidelines:

- Students benefit from in-person learning, and safely returning to in-person instruction in the fall 2021 is a priority.
- Masks should be worn indoors by all individuals, age two and older, who are not fully vaccinated. Consistent and correct mask use by people who are not fully vaccinated is especially important indoors and in crowded settings when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Fully vaccinated is two weeks after receiving the second dose of a two-dose vaccine, and two weeks after receiving a one-dose vaccine.
- CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask-wearing by people who are not fully vaccinated, to reduce transmission risk. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet, such as when schools cannot fully re-open while maintaining these distances, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies, such as indoor masking.
- Students, teachers, and staff should stay home when they have signs of any infectious illness and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care.
- Localities should monitor community transmission, and occurrence of outbreaks to guide each school.
- Masking is required of all passengers and drivers on buses and other transportation used for a school-related activity.

Diocesan Guidelines for Catholic Schools and Parish Religious Education Programs:

Beginning with the start of the fall 2021 school year and religious education program, all grades and family catechesis will return to in-person learning with a normal schedule. The Catholic Education Office has adopted the above bullet-point guidelines of the CDC effective immediately for our schools and religious education programs.

Fully vaccinated individuals are not required to wear masks. Parents individually determine whether they and their child will wear a mask while attending school or religious education gatherings. Schools and religious education programs will adhere to social distancing of three (3) feet, handwashing, cleaning and disinfecting, and, where appropriate, quarantining, as has been the procedure since March of 2020. Temperature screening is not required. The Catholic Education Office will continue to monitor the COVID positivity rate in each of the Diocese's 11 counties, and work with our school administrators, religious education leaders, and local county health departments to continuously evaluate school and religious education program COVID protocols.

Schools and religious education programs will strive to provide distant learning for students or families, as the case may be, who are under quarantine consistent with CDC guidance or requirements from a local public health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH).

Our Catholic schools and religious education programs will follow this plan unless the CDC, the IDPH, a local county health department, and/or the ISBE directs us otherwise, or where the Catholic Education Office decides to modify this plan, as it deems necessary, in the event of a specific outbreak, or other factor.

Please note, at this time, no one will be asked about his or her vaccination status or to document that status. The cooperation and good will of all is presumed in this matter.

The success of Catholic Schools and our religious education programs depends on the partnership between the families we serve and our school and parish. Thank you for your support of Catholic Education, and we look forward to another successful school year.

Sincerely in Christ,

Vito C. DeFrisco
Director of Educational Services
Superintendent of Schools

John Jelínek
Director of Religious Education and Formation