



Diocese of Steubenville
Office of Christian Formation and Schools

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Diocesan Directive to Reopening Catholic Schools
A response plan to Ohio's *Reset & Restart Planning Guide*

1. Introduction

Because of the COVID-19 disease (coronavirus) pandemic, Catholic school buildings of the Diocese of Steubenville have been closed to students, educators, and parents since March 17, 2020. But in response, diocesan Catholic administrators, teachers, education support professionals, parents, and students boldly navigated an extraordinary set of challenges to meet the teaching and learning needs of our students, and to get us through to the end of the 2019-2020 academic year. It's in that same spirit that Catholic educators and Catholic school communities now stand poised to plan and prepare for the 2020-2021 academic school year.

Purpose of this ***Diocesan Directive to Reopen Catholic Schools*** is to offer a planning response to recent guidance provided by the Ohio Departments of Health and of Education: *Reset and Restart Education Planning Guide*¹; *COVID-19 Health and Prevention Guidance for Ohio K-12 Schools*²; *Early Childhood guidance for Pre-Schools*³; *Responsible Restart Ohio* mandates for Contact and Non-Contact Sports⁴; and *Ohio COVID-19 Risk Level Guidelines for the Public*⁵. The aim is to assist our Catholic school communities in becoming aware of state mandates and guidelines, as well as the considerations needed for reopening our school buildings during the continued presence of COVID-19; and in a way that protects the health and safety of vulnerable members of our Catholic school communities. It is also important to understand that while some elements of this Diocesan Guide are in fact mandated (either by the State or the Diocesan Office of Catholic Schools), many decisions will need to be made by each individual Catholic school **at the local level**, with local policies developed in partnership with local health officials and perhaps even neighboring public school districts.

2. General Guidelines for all Diocesan Catholic Schools

- 2.1. **"Traditional" face-to-face classroom instruction.** As a NORM for all Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Steubenville, Catholic schools shall open in the fall, in accordance with each school's 2020-2021 Academic year school calendar. Catholic schools shall be open for "traditional" face-to-face classroom instruction, Monday through Friday (except for planned in-service days and holidays).
- 2.2. **School-Wide Long-Term Remote Instruction.** Catholic schools shall provide school-wide remote instruction, only in such cases when state or local authorities have mandated (not simply recommended) that school buildings be closed. Catholic schools shall then make every

use of streaming technology and distance learning tools, in order to continue providing instruction and learning support while students remain at home (as was the case last spring).

- 2.3. **Long-Term Remote Instruction for Individual families.** Because of limited human and material resources, diocesan Catholic schools may only offer individual families a long-term **option** of remote or distance learning, after first consulting with the Diocesan Office of Christian Formation and Schools. Should a school choose to offer families a long-term option of remote instruction (outside of the traditional classroom), that school shall:
- Submit a written, detailed proposal describing how long-term remote instruction will take place;
 - Outline any stipulations/qualifications for participation in this option, and;
 - Include a policy of participation in extra-curricular activities, for remote learners.
- 2.4. **Temporary Remote-Instruction/Learning.** In the event that a teacher or student (or group of students) are unable to report to school for on-site instruction/learning because they have tested positive for Covid-19, or are in quarantine (by order of the local health department or a doctor's recommendation), schools shall make every effort to provide **temporary** accommodations for both teacher and students. For example, a teacher who is in quarantine, but is not ill, may choose at their own discretion, to "live stream" his/her instruction from home, directly into a classroom monitored by a substitute teacher or teacher's aide. Teachers might also be able to live stream their own on-site classroom instruction to a student or group of students who are required to stay home, because they are being quarantined for Covid-19 reasons. Where such a live streaming arrangement is not possible or practicable, schools shall make every effort to provide student work and learning support to students, on a temporary basis, who are staying home on account of a COVID-19 symptom, or are in quarantine for Covid-19 reasons.
- 2.5. **Acknowledgement Risks.** All Catholic school employees and regular volunteers, shall read and sign the *Diocesan Acknowledgement Risks* form (Exhibit CV-2), as a condition of employment or volunteer status. Parents shall read and sign the *Diocesan Acknowledgement Risks* form (Exhibit CV-1) as a condition of enrollment of any student in grades Pre-school through 12. The same form shall be read and signed by any student choosing to participate in school sponsored athletics, band, marching-band, choir, cheerleading/majorettes or dramatics; as a condition of participation in any of these programs.
- 2.6. **Ventilation.** Diocesan Catholic schools shall do everything they reasonably can to keep school buildings and classrooms well ventilated, as local circumstances, safety, and weather will allow. According to the CDC guidance for proper ventilation,⁶ schools shall:
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase the circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example, by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk to staff or students (e.g., risk of falling or triggering asthma symptoms).

- If portable ventilation equipment like fans are used, take steps to minimize air from them blowing from one person directly at another person to reduce the potential spread of any airborne or aerosolized viruses.

2.7. **Assigned Classroom Seating.** Finally, all Diocesan Catholic school students shall be given assigned classroom seating. Teachers shall maintain a written classroom seating chart. This requirement shall be in effect for all grades K-12, and for both a shared-table and individual-desk classroom arrangement. Adhering to such a policy is essential, so that in the unfortunate event that a student tests positive for COVID-19, the number of additional students to be quarantined will be greatly reduced.

3. Specific Guidelines

3.1. **Assessing for Symptoms.** Since COVID-19 spreads so rapidly, it is essential that all students (and their caregivers), staff, and volunteers conduct daily health screening prior to going to school. This shall include taking their temperature and assessing their symptoms. Anyone with symptoms (described below) or a temperature above 100°F should stay home. Schools should take temperatures of all staff and volunteers/visitors as they enter the building, even if the staff member checked their own temperature before leaving home. Schools are encouraged to take student temperatures, as each student enters the school building, as an extra precaution, even with the expectation that parents complete the temperature check and symptom screening with their own children at home. St. Mary will be checking the temperatures of students as they enter the building.

Students and school staff with any one or more of the following symptoms should not report to school for that day:

- Chills
- Cough (non-allergy related)
- Recent shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Unusual fatigue, muscle or body aches (not related to recent athletic/physical activity)
- Headache
- Loss of taste or smell
- Sore Throat
- Congestion (non-allergy related)
- Runny nose (non-allergy related)
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Students and school staff with a temperature above 100°F should stay home and not report until they have had no fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of medicine that reduces fevers). For all other listed symptoms, students and school staff should not report to school

until they are either symptom-free **or they have received a medical diagnosis that the symptoms are not COVID-19 related.**

To assist with performing daily and consistent symptom screening, Diocesan schools shall be provided with a “Self-Monitoring Screening Log.” Parents and staff shall maintain these logs at home for their own records, schools shall not collect screening logs for either staff or students. Ohio’s health and safety guidance for K-12 schools state that “If a student, staff, or volunteer begins to show symptoms or has a temperature above 100°F while at school, they must immediately be separated from other students, staff, or volunteers, given a face covering, and monitored by a staff member wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and maintaining physical distance when possible. The space where an individual waits before he or she goes home should be separate from the nurse’s office and other areas students are likely to visit. Areas of the building that were occupied by a person exhibiting symptoms should be thoroughly sanitized.”⁷ St. Mary students exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 will be quarantined to ensure the student is safely monitored until the parents can arrive.

Finally, schools shall monitor daily absences of students and staff for trends. For Faculty and Staff absences, schools shall consult the diocesan schools *COVID-19 Interim Sick Leave and Absence Policy* (Exhibit CV-3). Student absences shall be recorded according to the norms established in the diocesan *Handbook for Schools*. However, students shall not be penalized for staying home when symptomatic or in quarantine or isolation. Staff, volunteers, and students who have suspected or confirmed COVID-19, by a medical professional, cannot return to school until they meet CDC criteria⁸ for returning to school, This criteria has changed recently, and may change again in the future. All students/staff/volunteers who have been identified as a significant exposure consists of someone who you have been within the recommended 6th ft. for more than 15 minutes during the two days before the individual began exhibiting symptoms. The Health Department will contact only those individuals who they feel are at risk. There will be a document that is released notifying parents that there has been a case within the school.

3.2. **Wash and Sanitize Hands to Prevent Spread.** Ohio’s health and safety guidance for K-12 schools states that “Hand washing and sanitizing are important tools in preventing the spread of COVID-19 by killing the virus. Students, staff, and volunteers should practice frequent handwashing for at least 20 seconds when hands are dirty, before and after eating, and after using the restroom.” Students should also wash their hands before and after recess.

- Schools shall provide instruction to staff and students for effective handwashing, and give opportunities throughout the day for students to practice handwashing. The *Health and Safety Guidance* (page 9) provides a wonderful instruction poster that can be printed and posted throughout the school building, but especially in bathrooms and classrooms.
- In addition to handwashing, schools shall provide hand sanitizer (60% to 95% alcohol-based) in high traffic areas including entrances to buildings and classrooms. Schools shall instruct students and staff to use the sanitizer.

- Finally, staff, students, and volunteers should avoid touching their mouths, noses, and eyes since the virus easily enters the body through these membranes.

3.3. **Thoroughly Clean and Sanitize School Environment to Limit Spread on Shared Surfaces.**

Ohio’s health and safety guidance for K-12 schools states that “COVID-19 can spread by a person touching a contaminated surface, and then touching the mouth, nose, or eyes. Use of disinfectants in facilities reduces the spread of infectious disease.⁹ Schools shall make every effort to:

- Clean surfaces frequently, paying close attention to high touch areas and shared spaces (such as desks or playground equipment). Spray bottles labeled and filled with EPA approved disinfectants should be available in every classroom as well as the school office (and other high traffic areas). Desks surfaces should be wiped down between classes when the desk is going to be used by another student. Playground equipment should be sprayed down before and after recess (but not between individual student uses).
- The sharing of other school supplies and materials should be minimized and if items must be shared, sanitized between each user.
- Disinfect all classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, and other staff/student use areas daily. The Diocese of Steubenville recommends using an electrostatic applicator for this task. The Diocese will be producing and distributing high quality, pure HOCl (Hypochlorous acid) at minimal cost (cents on the gallon) to Catholic schools and parishes. HOCl is EPA approved for COVID-19, is completely safe, and disinfects almost immediately. Specifications for this disinfectant solution will be provided to every school so that all concerns about product safety can be easily addressed. HOCl can also be used in spray bottles for purposes noted above.
- CDC and EPA links for further guidance on disinfecting school facilities and approved COVID-19 disinfectants can be found on page 10 of Ohio’s health and safety guidance for K-12 schools.

3.4. **Practice Social Distancing.** The Center for Disease Control states that maintaining social distancing of at least six feet between staff and students can reduce the spread of infectious disease, including COVID-19.¹⁰ This will minimize the risk of coming into contact with the virus through respiratory droplets. Social distancing of six feet or greater is very important for preventing this droplet spread when students are speaking loudly, singing, or playing a musical instrument. Please keep in mind that social distancing becomes more important, the longer students are static in one area (such as a classroom), and less “essential” as students move about (outdoor recess or moving from class to class in the hallways). Ohio’s health and safety guidance for k-12 schools provides practical ways to create social distancing in schools:¹¹

- School staff should try when possible to maintain 6-foot social distance among students, staff, and volunteers in all school environments, including classrooms, hallways, restrooms, and cafeteria, playground, drop-off, and pick-up locations. **Where social distancing is difficult, face coverings are even more essential** (see *Face Coverings and Desk Shields* section below).

- For grade levels that utilize student lockers, efforts shall be made to reduce the use of lockers to mitigate the closer contact that this scenario creates. Student should be encouraged to use backpacks as much as possible for classroom/course changes. When the bell rings in the morning students will report to their classrooms without visiting their lockers. They will be dismissed individually to put away coats and other items that need to be stored for the day. Items needed for the day will be stored at their desk in a crate or chair sack.
- Reinforce distancing with visual cues such as floor markings and signs.
- Avoid using shared materials or shared spaces (lockers, cubbies, etc.)
- Reduce the mixing of student groups. Assigned seating will be maintained in areas where it would be easy to mix student groups (before school, lunch and dismissal). Recess will be scheduled individually by the teachers to limit the amount of intermingling among grades.
- Limit the number of visitors to a school and consider eliminating field trips or large group events where intermingling often occurs. We are asking that parents limit their visits to the school to minimize the number of possible exposures.
- Due to the nature of band, choir, theater, and other similar classes, 6-foot social distancing may not be adequate. Teachers and students should maintain at as much distance as possible when actively playing and performing.

3.5. **Face Coverings and Desk Shields.** Ohio’s health and safety guidance for K-12 schools states that “Face coverings are critical to preventing the spread of the virus from person-to-person.”¹² Of all the measures recommended or mandated in both this diocesan guidance and the Ohio guidelines, the strong recommendation that most students wear face coverings is perhaps the most controversial. While face coverings are an important layer of protection from spreading the COVID-19 virus, a recent commentary published in the journal *Pediatrics*, the official peer-reviewed journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, concludes that children infrequently transmit COVID-19 to each other or to adults and that many schools, provided they follow appropriate social distancing guidelines and take into account rates of transmission in their community, can and should reopen in the fall.¹³ Therefore, three factors shall be considered regarding the use of face coverings in Catholic schools:

- What is mandated by the State of Ohio (through the documents cited in this guidance), the Ohio Department of Health, or the Local County Board of Health (of the school’s county residence). These mandates may change in accordance with each county’s own emergency level.⁹
- The grade range of the students, and if the minimum six-foot social distancing can be established, especially in the classroom.
- The current rate of COVID-19 transmission in the school’s county of residence, as determined by Ohio’s Public Health Advisory System.¹⁴

3.5.1. **All Visitors** (including parents/guardians) for grades Pre-K through 12 shall be required to wear a face mask upon entering the school building. If the visitor does not

have a face mask, schools should either provide a face mask or not permit entry into the building.

3.5.2. **For Pre-Schools** (students and staff), **specific guidance** has been provided by the Ohio Department of Education in partnership with the Department of Jobs and Family Services.¹⁷ Please note that the ODE/ODJFS guidance for Pre-Schools does not require that children wear masks, and is not specific regarding Pre-School staff.

- As a general rule, and unless/until **mandated** differently by State or Local Boards of health, **Pre-School students** shall not be required to wear a face-covering of any kind while in school. Parents may be given the option to have their pre-school child wear a face covering as long as consideration is given for the age and developmental level of the child and the physical situation the child is in at that moment. Catholic schools shall not honor this request of the Pre-School parent if the student has trouble breathing or is unable to remove the face covering without assistance.
- For all **Pre-School staff**, the diocesan office for Catholic schools recognizes that facial coverings can hinder both communication and the learning process for students of such a young developmental age. Therefore, the staff policy for wearing face coverings of any kind (masks or shields) shall be determined at the local level. The use of at least a face shield is recommended, however, Principals and Program Directors should carefully consider all options; especially if a staff member or student is in the higher risk category for COVID-19.

3.5.3. For all **K-12 Adult Staff** (teachers, Coaches, Office personnel, custodial) and volunteers, the wearing of a face mask has been **mandated** by the State of Ohio¹⁵ (*Please see the Pre-School section below for Pre-School Staff*). At a minimum, facial masks should be cloth/fabric and cover an individual's nose, mouth, and chin.

Exceptions include:

- When wearing a face-covering in a *particular* school setting is prohibited by law or regulation.
- Wearing a facial covering would be in violation of documented industry standards.
- Wearing a facial covering is not advisable for health reasons (A physician's written recommendation shall be required). In which case a face shield, if permitted by the physician, shall be required.
- There is a functional (practical) reason for the staff member or volunteer to not wear a facial covering (i.e., eating lunch).
- Facial coverings are not required when staff works alone in an assigned work area (such as an office).

Under *some* circumstances, Catholic schools *may* allow faculty (teaching staff) the option (in lieu of a face mask) of the use of a face shield. Ohio's health and safety guidance for K-12 schools states that "Face shields that wrap around the face and extend below the chin can be considered as an alternative where cloth

face coverings would hinder the learning process. Some situations where face shields would be useful include”:¹⁶

- When interacting with students, such as those with disabilities, where communication could be impacted.
- When interacting with English-language learners (i.e., English as a second language classes) or when teaching a foreign language.
- Traditional English language arts settings, when teaching younger students who are learning to read, or settings where speech and correct pronunciation are being taught.
- For Teachers who have difficulty wearing a cloth face covering (legitimate physical or health reasons).

It is important to understand that the *option* to use a face shield in lieu of a face mask is not an open option, but may only be considered for the above stated, or other serious reasons.

- 3.5.4. **For students in grades K-12**, diocesan face-covering policy will depend upon the grade range of the student, if the six feet social distancing can be maintained, and **mandates** provided by State or Local Boards of Health in response to elevated local spread of the virus:

Where at least six feet classroom/learning space social distancing CAN BE established:

- Students in grades K-2 shall not be required to wear or use a face covering. Schools *may be* granted an exception, in order to require face coverings (masks or shields) for this grade range, under specific settings and circumstances, from the Diocesan Superintendent, on a case by case basis.
- For grades 3-12, it is recommended, but not required that students wear a face covering (mask). Students may consider wearing a face shield in lieu of a face mask in settings where cloth face masks might present a safety hazard (i.e. science labs), or if a student has difficulty wearing a cloth face covering (legitimate developmental, physical or health reasons). Each Catholic school may choose to adopt a stricter policy if circumstances, or specific settings, make it prudent to do so, for example, a teacher or student is in the higher risk category for COVID-19.
- For grades 3-6, schools may want to consider the option of using “desk shields” at each student desk/table assignment, in lieu of face coverings, to address higher risk concerns.

Where at least six feet classroom/learning space social distancing CANNOT BE established:

- Students in grades K-2 shall not be required to wear or use a face covering, nor is it recommended; but because the six-feet of classroom social distancing cannot be established, the use of desk-top or table-top shields shall be required. Schools

may be granted an exception, in order to require face coverings (masks or shields) for this grade range, under specific settings and circumstances, from the Diocesan Superintendent, on a case by case basis.

- For grades 3-12, *Ohio's health and safety guidance* states that "Where social distancing is difficult, face coverings are even more essential."¹⁸
 - **For grades 3-6**, desk-shields at each student desk/table assignment shall be utilized. While seated at a desk with a desk-shield, students may be permitted to remove their face masks. However, where desk-shields are not utilized (i.e., when students are not sitting at a desk with a desk-shield, or as they move about the room, or into the halls, or use the restroom), students shall wear a face mask, unless they are unable to do so for a health or developmental reasons.
 - **For grades 7-12**, it shall be required that students wear a cloth face mask, unless they are unable to do so for health or developmental reasons. Students shall wear a face shield in lieu of a face mask in settings where cloth face masks might present a safety hazard (i.e. science labs).
 - **For all grades 3-12**, Schools shall help parents to understand that the use of face masks (or face shields) helps to protect the entire school community, but especially our teachers, who we want in the classroom and not sick at home or in the hospital! Each Catholic school therefore *may choose* to adopt a stricter policy for the use of face coverings, if circumstances make it prudent to do so, for example, a teacher or student is in the higher risk category for COVID-19.

Exceptions, in all cases, to the requirement to wear a mask or face shield include:

- When students are having trouble breathing or other immediate health/safety reasons.
- When students are sitting apart from others and are able to social distance.
- When students are eating or drinking, or for other such temporary functional (practical) reasons.
- "Health or developmental reasons" to not wear a face mask (as noted in the various scenarios above), shall be determined in partnership by the student's parents, physician, and/or education specialist (if there is one). If it is determined for "health and developmental reasons" that a student should not wear a face mask, schools may request that the student wear a face shield in lieu of the face mask (with parent, physician, and/or education specialist recommendation/approval).

3.5.5. Finally, schools shall inform parents that it is their right to require a mask or shield for their child, even where this diocesan *Directive* or local school policy is not mandating a face covering of any kind.

3.6. **Athletics and Outdoor Recess.** OHSAA is working closely with ODE and ODH, and has established its Return to Play Guidelines, and sport-specific recommendations for

student/spectator participation¹⁹ in athletics. Schools shall comply with all guidance from OHSAA regarding school athletic activities, including grade schools that are not OHSAA members.

For outdoor recess at the grade school level (grades 3-8), wearing face coverings shall be less of a concern *unless*:

- The activity places students in close proximity that is static.
- There is an elevated local spread of the virus (levels 3 or 4) and the local county board of health recommends or mandates a stronger policy.

3.7. **Responding to the Ohio Public Health Advisory System.** *Ohio's health and safety guidance* states that "wearing a face covering is especially important during times of *elevated community spread*, particularly when social distancing is not possible."²⁰ All of the above policies and recommendations shall be regarded as amenable to elevated levels of community spread and therefore stronger policies may be implemented, should a school's county of residence rise to *Risk Level 3 or Level 4* (and school buildings are permitted to be open). **This will especially be the case for the policy regarding the use of face coverings.** Because face masks are considered a higher level of protection than face shields; and face coverings provide a higher level of protection than "desk shields"; the options to use one or the other may change. What was previously presented as "recommended" may be mandated. Students in grades K-2 *may* be required to use a face shield or face mask, and students in grades 3-12 *may* be required to use a face mask or both a mask and a face shield, even where social distancing can be established, should local risk levels and/or circumstances demand it. Catholic schools shall cooperate with local and state authorities regarding stricter policies than what is given in this directive, doing everything reasonable to enable the school to remain open for "traditional" face-to-face classroom instruction.

Notes:

1. <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Reset-and-Restart/Reset-Restart-Guide.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>
2. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/schools/K-12-Schools-Guidance.pdf>
3. <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Reset-and-Restart/Early-Learning-and-School-Readiness>
4. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/Games-Leagues-Conferences-Tournaments-Contact-Sports.pdf>
And <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/General-Non-Contact-Sports.pdf>
5. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/public-health-advisory-system/>
6. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html> - See *Ventilation*
7. See footnote #2, p. 7
8. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html>
9. See footnote #2, p. 10
10. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

11. See footnote #2, p. 12
12. See footnote #2 p. 13
13. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/07/200710100934.htm>
14. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/public-health-advisory-system/>
15. See footnote #2, p. 13
16. See footnote #2, p. 14
17. See footnote #3
18. See footnote #2, p.12
19. <https://ohsaa.org/news-media/articles/ohsaa-releases-return-to-play-guidelines-and-sport-specific-recommendations>
20. See footnote #2 p. 13