



# CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ARLINGTON

## Office of Catholic Schools

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June 28, 2020

Dear Parents,

I pray that the early days of summer have been good to you and your families. Thank you for your partnership in Catholic education throughout these past several months. Additionally, I wish to express my appreciation for your counsel about how best to proceed into the 2020-2021 school year. The Diocese has received letters from many of you with ideas and considerations for how we can best move forward. Your passion for Catholic education and your deep concern for the well-being of your children is inspiring and motivating.

Our focus is to address the health and safety of our students, but also to meet their academic, spiritual, social, and emotional needs. Our intent is to offer in-person instruction, 5 days/week starting in August, if at all possible. We have been working closely with all diocesan schools in developing their reopening plans.

On June 9, Governor Northam issued Phase Guidance for Virginia Schools that outlined the principles to be applied as we plan for reopening schools and offering in-person instruction to students. The phased guidance, which aligns with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is designed to help schools mitigate risks associated with COVID-19. The guidance provides recommendations for the types of in-person instruction and programming that should be offered in each Phase (*Note: school phases are aligned with the existing Forward Virginia phases*), as well as the corresponding health, safety, and physical distance measures. In Phase III, all students may receive in-person instruction provided that appropriate physical distancing measures are in place.

Private schools are ultimately responsible for deciding how best to adhere to this guidance, and may choose to offer in-person instruction and programming that varies somewhat from the phased guidance due to facility constraints or other issues. In making these determinations, principals and pastors will consult with parents, teachers and staff.

After careful review, consideration, and consultation, we have determined that diocesan schools in the Catholic Diocese of Arlington will be allowed to submit “notifications of intent to vary” from the recommended Phase III health mitigation strategy of 6-foot physical distancing. The variance will allow consideration of models where distancing in certain situations can be less than 6 feet, but no less than 3 feet. Judicious local application of this variance can increase the possibility that schools will be able to offer in-classroom instruction 5 days a week in conjunction with the Phase III Guidance.

Per state directive, each of our schools has been preparing a customized mitigation health plan. These plans will outline the procedures they will take, in response to CDC guidance, to promote behaviors that reduce spread and maintain healthy environments and operations that support the



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health and safety of our school communities. School mitigation health plans are submitted to the Office of Catholic Schools, the Virginia Council for Private Education, and to local health agencies. The plans will be shared with each school community directly from the principal or, when applicable, the pastor when completed.

The last quarter of the 2019-2020 school year was unprecedented and full of uncertainty. Moving forward, we are planning proactively for different virus-related scenarios that may present themselves during the 2020-2021 school year. There may be times during the school year that Executive Orders are issued for the Commonwealth to revert to Phase II or even Phase I status. If that happens, we will listen to public health guidance, explore our options, and base all our decisions on the overall well-being of our students, faculty/staff, and the entire community. Our goal is to continue providing continuity in your child's education while maintaining a safe environment.

Thank you again for your prayers, partnership and support of Catholic education in our Diocese. We look forward to the coming school year and will continue throughout the summer to do everything we can to welcome your children back to the schools in August.

Sincerely in Christ,

Joseph E Vorbach III, PhD, MEd  
Superintendent of Schools