



Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls
Office of the Bishop

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Return to Normal: Expectations for In-School Learning 2021-2022 School Year August 3, 2021

In-Person Learning is Important and Ideal

During the 2020-2021 School Year, while in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 23 Catholic schools of the Diocese of Sioux Falls provided in-person instruction and learning (physically present in the classroom). In-person learning was only minimally interrupted by episodes of high infection rates with the school community and/or the faculty. Remote learning offered in the final academic quarter of the 2019-2020 school year confirmed that in-person instruction is the superior model. This realization was found to be particularly true for those students for whom learning may not come as naturally or who may not have the same support mechanisms at home. Thus, the following expectations are established principally because, while a serious health threat to some in our communities, COVID-19 infections are one among many concerns that our schools must take into consideration when safeguarding the health and well being of the students who are enrolled in them.

COVID-19 in its proper context of threat to young persons

As more scientific data comes to light regarding the COVID-19 infections and their impact on the students of our Catholic schools, the following expectations have been developed with the intention that all schools within the Diocese take a uniform approach. Hardship can be experienced among students, families, administrations and faculties, and among our clergy when there is inconsistency from one school to the next. These expectations guard against that hardship in an effort to keep the focus on student learning and the formation of their personal relationship with our Lord and Savior. Mindful of the role of parents as the primary educators of their children, these expectations also ensure their ability to make decisions about their child's personal well-being as they deem appropriate. As Bishop, it is important to me that parents have the freedom to do what is best for their children according to their formed conscience and the facts and circumstances that they, as parents, know intimately for their child.

With the continued collection of scientific data through study of the coronavirus and the ongoing development of medical recommendations for guarding against its spread that result from it, this document is intentionally offered as a "working" document. It is, by its nature, subject to change.

Expectations

For the 2021-2022, the following expectations shall serve as foundational considerations for all pastors and administrators of the parochial (inter-parochial systems), Catholic schools in the Diocese as they author policies specific to the schools/systems they lead:

- **COVID-19 VACCINATIONS**
 - Schools will not require COVID-19 vaccinations of any of its students, faculty or staff members.

- **MASKS**
 - Schools will not require facial masks to be worn by any of its students, faculty or staff members at any point during the school day.
 - This expectation shall apply for all of the following settings: in-classroom instruction, transitions between classrooms or other rooms using throughout the school day, outdoor activities, and school-sponsored extracurricular activities.
 - Schools will permit students, faculty, and staff members to wear masks at any point in time if the individual (his/her parents in the case of students) prefers.

- **ISOLATION IN THE WAKE OF A COVID-19 DIAGNOSIS**
 - Students, faculty and staff members who exhibits signs and symptoms of a COVID-19 infection should leave school immediately.
 - Students, faculty, and staff members who are diagnosed to have a positive COVID-19 infection shall follow the instructions given to them by their medical care provider when deciding when to return to school.

- **QUARANTINE AFTER “CLOSE CONTACT” WITH AN INDIVIDUAL (who has received a positive COVID-19 diagnosis)**
 - Schools will not implement “close contact” tracing protocols. Students, faculty, and staff members will only be asked to stay at home based on symptoms and/or the advice of their healthcare provider.
 - Schools may reserve the right to request a copy of written orders given by the healthcare provider.

- **SOCIAL DISTANCING PRACTICES**
 - Many protocols for maintaining reasonable distances from others were established during the previous school year that have benefits that extend beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. If the benefits of such protocols are identified by a school, they may remain a part of the school’s policy.
 - COVID-19-related social distancing protocols shall only be required when a communicable illness that has been scientifically shown to be capable of transmission through airborne methods is confirmed to be present in the community where the school is located.

- **“AT HOME” or “REMOTE LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS”**
 - In light of the additional workload brought to the teacher, the disruption to healthy classroom dialogue, and the tendency for this modification to lead to diminished student learning outcomes, no school shall provide the accommodation of virtual learning as a provision which parents can voluntarily elect for their child.
 - If circumstances merit it, a school administration may determine that such an accommodation is prudent for a limited time provided the following two conditions are met:
 - the accommodation does not bring an unjust burden to the teacher(s) who would be responsible for providing it, and
 - the particular circumstances of the student’s personal health situation makes it such this accommodation is in his or her best interest.

- **GOOD HYGIENE PRACTICES**
 - Many protocols for regular hygienic cleaning were established during the previous school year that have benefits beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. If the benefits of such protocols extend beyond a defense against the spread of COVID-19, they may remain a part of the school’s policy.
 - Regular hygienic cleaning of surfaces protocols, including the use of anti-microbial lotions for hands, shall only be required when a virus that has been scientifically shown to be capable of transmission after residing on surfaces is known to be present in the community where the school is located.

- **SPECIFIC INQUIRIES**
 - Parents should direct all questions and clarifications about these expectations first to the school where their child attends.

These expectations for the Catholic, parochial schools in the Diocese of Sioux Falls are hereby decreed into effect for the 2021-2022 School Year on this 3rd day of August, 2021.

Most Reverend Donald E. DeGrood
Bishop of Sioux Falls