



**"The foundation of all education is a matter of the heart."**

- St. Don Bosco, Patron Saint of Schoolchildren



## **Returning to Classrooms in 2020-2021:**

# **A Framework for Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Manchester**

Our school re-entry policies must be flexible and adaptable in responding to the continual influx of new information. School administrators will modify approaches when specific policies are not working.

For the most up-to-date framework always, refer to our website:

**[www.catholicnh.org/schools/](http://www.catholicnh.org/schools/)**

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## Getting to the HEART of the Matter

Catholic schools in New Hampshire have done an outstanding job in the delivery of remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our parents have been supportive of our efforts to continue delivering a robust, Catholic education and our educators rose to every challenge; in fact, 85 percent of families reported that the level of engagement from teachers was “good” or “excellent. Taking into account the initial research on the effects COVID-19 and the effects the isolation and loss of community has had on children, the Diocesan Catholic schools in New Hampshire are making plans to return to the classrooms beginning on the first day of school for the 2020-2021 academic year.

This framework contains basic guidelines for which all diocesan and parish schools will follow so that, working together as a community of faith, we can meet those challenges. As we continue to pray and wait with great anticipation for new information over the next few months, it is clear that we need to approach our return to the classrooms with the right “HEART set”. All of us, as a Catholic school community, should enter into this process with the understanding that we are trying to maintain an appropriate balance when considering the following points during our decision-making processes:

- **Health, safety, and Wellness** of all students, families, and employees - Catholic schools must be safe and nurturing environments, oriented toward serving the needs of our families.
- **Educational Excellence** – Whether learning in-person or remotely, our academic programs must be rigorous, teach students to recognize the dignity of every human person, and challenge students to fully develop their God-given gifts and talents.
- **Always be practical, flexible, and ready to change plans** to address individual, school, regional, or system needs, informed by real-time information – School leaders need to be ready to address the individual needs of their students, families, and employees and be ready to change all plans as necessary.
- **Routine and Frequent Communication** – We need to remember the Church’s teaching regarding parents as the primary educators of their children. Parents are our greatest partners and with meaningful and timely communication will help us work together to overcome these challenges.
- **Training** - Teachers and staff need robust professional development to meet the ever-changing academic and social-emotional needs of students and to be current with best practices regarding COVID-19. Parents must be engaged partners empowered through consistent communication and support. Students need to be given the age appropriate tools needed so that they can make healthy decisions for themselves, as well as for their fellow students.

The guidelines on the pages that follow come from the HEART as described above and our school leaders have already begun working to meet the guidelines and ensure a safe, clean, and welcoming environment for our students to return in the fall. Over the coming weeks you will hear directly from school leaders regarding school specific plans in concert with these guidelines. While I am sure this document does not answer every question you may have, I do hope that it brings you a bit of comfort and relief in knowing that whatever the challenge, we will face it as a community of faith, together.

May God bless you and your families abundantly and may our Blessed Mother intercede for our children, families, faculty, and staff as we face these challenges together.

Yours in Christ,



Superintendent

## Introduction

The Catholic School Office for the Diocese of Manchester, in response to parental input and in concert with local Catholic school leaders, attorneys, and medical professionals, has developed this framework for the return to classroom instruction in diocesan Catholic Elementary and High Schools.

Catholic social teaching, current recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the State of New Hampshire for all students, employers, employees, and visitors occupying a building/workplace inform this framework.

Additionally, this framework aligns with current standards from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

The framework is designed to help schools keep our employees, our students, their families, and our broader community safe and to reduce the impact the COVID-19 outbreak may have on our schools.

It is based on what is currently known about best practices to prevent the spread of the diseases and **will be updated as new information or requirements become available over the course of the summer and throughout the 2020-2021 academic year.**

**This framework will serve as guidance from which each Catholic school in the Diocese of Manchester will develop a Reopening Plan that addresses the following:**

- 1) The prevention, as best as possible, of COVID-19 and other viruses from entering the building
- 2) Safety protocols during and after school hours
- 3) Best practices for cleaning
- 4) Training of staff and staying current with public health information; and
- 5) Responding to individual situations safely





## PHASE ONE

### Create a Taskforce and begin Inquiry

Each school will create a task force to help lead development of a workplace plan. No one single person should be required to develop and implement a school plan. The taskforce will begin by asking, “What do we need to know and consider?” The taskforce will then assist in the monitoring of the transition back to the classrooms, determine necessary safety protocols, and proactively prepare to respond to issues as they arise. The taskforce should include stakeholders from across the school community including influencers with their ear to ground to hear issues or concerns from students, parents, or faculty. The taskforce should conduct a workplace risk assessment to include student, staff, facility, and PPE. The ultimate goal for the taskforce is to develop, after reviewing this framework and considering CDC and local guidance, a comprehensive safety plan to minimize the influence of COVID-19 on the educational experience of our students and their families.





## PHASE TWO

### Plan Development

The next question the taskforce should ask is, “What actions do we need to take initially and in an ongoing way?” It is important to note that the school needs to balance safety, risk, cost, and logistics when developing a plan. Understanding the current needs of the school and the community will help the taskforce prioritize what is necessary and what can logistically be accomplished. The following guidance are points of inclusion that must be addressed in the school's plan to return to the classrooms:

#### **1. Create a culture that promotes staying home or going home when you are sick or not feeling well**

Employees and students must stay at home and not report to school if they are sick or not feeling well. They must also notify a designated contact person at the school by phone. In addition, if employees or students have any of the following symptoms, which could be possible COVID-19 symptoms, they must stay at home and notify the designated contact person:

- a.** Have a fever or feel feverish in the last 72 hours, including chills, or shaking
- b.** Experiencing any new muscle aches or pains, headache, nausea, severe fatigue without apparent cause, or diarrhea
- c.** Changes in sense of taste or smell
- d.** Temperature over 100 degrees
- e.** Sudden onset of respiratory symptoms such as cough or shortness of breath (unless known medical condition such as COPD or CHF). If they suffer annually from allergies (e.g. sneezing, red eyes, runny nose & cough), have them discuss these symptoms with the designated contact person. If they do not normally suffer allergies, they will be asked to get a doctor's note.

If an employee or student gets sick or is not feeling well at school, they must notify the designated contact person and leave the building immediately. If they are not able to leave the building immediately due to their condition or lack of transportation, then they will be directed to a designated isolation area. School leadership will work with employees if they need to remain home after demonstrating symptoms to discuss their available sick time and the possibility of working remotely if the employee is able. If any issues arise, school leadership will work with the diocesan Human Resource Department to explore all options including sick leave and disability time if necessary.

## 2. Health screenings and temperature checks

A screening health survey must be completed on the first day of school for each employee and student. Employees and parents will be asked if there are any changes each day at drop off during the temperature check.

If an employee or student's temperature is over 100 degrees they will stay home. Temperatures will be taken with a no-contact thermometer. The screening survey will require staff and parents to answer the following questions in advance of employees or students entering the building on the first day of school and asked to confirm there are no changes daily.

1. Have they been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 2 weeks? Close contact would include having a household member or co-worker with a confirmed case.
2. Have they been in close contact with anyone who has exhibited any of the following symptoms in the last 2 weeks? This would include a fever, runny nose (outside of allergies), sore throat, new onset of cough, shortness of breath (unless known medical condition such as COPD, CHF, or other pre-existing condition), flu-like symptoms, new muscle aches or pains, chills, nausea, diarrhea, headache, or severe fatigue without apparent cause. Close contact would include having a household member with any of these symptoms.
3. Have they had a fever or felt feverish in the last 72 hours, including chills, or shaking?
4. Outside of seasonal allergies or chronic illness, are they experiencing any new respiratory symptoms including a runny nose, sore throat, new onset of cough, or shortness of breath (unless known medical condition such as COPD or CHF)?
5. Are they experiencing any new muscle aches or pains, headache, nausea, severe fatigue without apparent cause, or diarrhea?
6. Have they experienced any change in your sense of taste or smell?

## 3. Process for when employees or students are not allowed in the building

If a student or employee has a temperature higher than 100 degrees or note a change in one of the screening questions, they are not allowed to enter the building.

If an employee or student is not allowed in the building, the designated contact person will contact the employee or the parents for further discussion. If, based on the screening and discussion, the employee or student is not allowed to return to the building, options will be discussed with the employee or the parents of the student and any recommended actions will be documented. These actions may include but not be limited to the following:

1. Quarantining at home for 14 days
  - a. If teaching faculty or students are quarantined, accommodations will be made for remote instruction and learning if they are well enough to work/learn at home.
2. Seeing a doctor
3. Going to the hospital
4. Obtaining a COVID-19 test
5. Checking back in every two to three days
6. Other



#### 4. Arrival, Dismissal, and Entering the Building

Procedures for self-reporting symptoms or changes to health forms and the physical taking of temperatures will be established. A procedure to stagger drop off/pickup times or manage the flow of students through different doorways will be established. There will be **designated** entrances (and exits if applicable) for all employees and students. Do not have more designated entrances than you can logistically monitor. Upon entering the building, employees and students will sanitize their hands and employees will put on a provided or their personal cloth mask (see the section below on Wear a Mask in the Building). Please allow the use of one disposable mask per day.



#### 5. Frequently washing or sanitizing hands throughout the day

Sanitizing stations will be placed at each entry. Anyone entering the building must sanitize their hands upon entry. Employees and students should wash or sanitize their hands at scheduled intervals throughout the day and upon entry into classrooms after traversing through common areas include hallways, lobbies, café, elevators, stairways, meeting rooms, and restrooms. Instructions regarding how to wash hands shall be posted at all sinks throughout the building. Sanitizer must be provided upon entry to each classroom and common area. Individual bottles of hand sanitizer may be provided to each employee, as long as supplies are available. If individual hand sanitizer is not available, then they may wash their hands or use the hand sanitizing stations located in classrooms and common areas in building. Here are some resources from the CDC on handwashing and sanitizing. Keep in mind that handwashing is ALWAYS preferred to sanitizing.

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/show-me-the-science-hand-sanitizer.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hand-hygiene.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/hand-sanitizer-use.html>



#### 6. Employees wearing masks in the building

All employees will wear reusable/washable cloth face coverings over their nose and mouth to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. A cloth face covering will be worn when in close contact with other employees and students and are most essential when social distancing is difficult. All adults when entering the building to drop off children may be asked to wear a cloth face covering over their nose and mouth or when in other school spaces where other individuals are present and social distancing is not possible.

The school has the option to provide masks as long as supplies are available. Employees and visitors may also bring their own cloth masks. If they bring their own, it must cover their mouth and nose, have ear loops or head straps and be washed/cleaned daily (see Using Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID19 from the NH Bureau of Infectious Control below). If using a provided mask, they should keep it for the day. At the end of the day, they will dispose of the mask in the waste receptacles provided at the exit/entrances to the building. They will not use a provided mask for more than one day. If they are using their own cloth mask, then it should be washed daily.



Training based on CDC guidance for use of cloth face coverings for employees should include the following:

1. Review the NH DHHS information about using cloth face coverings.
2. Under all circumstances avoid touching the outside of the mask, the most contaminated area. If you need to touch it, touch it on the inside.
3. If you have to remove the mask, remove it with the ear loops or head strap and lay it face down on a flat surface. When putting it back on, put it on by the ear loops, avoid touching the front and then wash or sanitize your hands.
4. Try to avoid pulling the mask down on your chin (e.g. to take a drink of water), as this can spread germs to your face.
5. When wearing a mask, it must cover your nose and mouth.
6. Keep in mind that the mask does not prevent you from getting a disease from someone else; it mainly protects the people around you.

## 7. Students wearing masks in the building

The New Hampshire Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics states, the “blanket requirements for 6 feet of social distancing and universal facemasks are unnecessary, particularly for younger children who are at the lowest risk and simply cannot learn with those restrictions.” The NH Department of Health and Human Services does not recommend children routinely wear facemasks or face coverings for the reasons outlined below:

- a. CDC guidance states, “Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.”
- b. There are safety issues with young children having cloth, ties, elastics etc. around their mouths and necks which can pose choking or strangulation hazards.
- c. The effectiveness of masks and other face coverings is impacted by proper handling and use and children are more likely to play with the masks, adjust them, or remove them without washing their hands, touch their face, etc. Touching the face and then touching other objects can potentially put other children in a group at risk.
- d. Staff would need to increasingly be in close contact with children to provide assistance with face coverings, which can be counter-productive to maintaining distance as much as possible.

Older children who are able to be compliant with cloth face coverings will be asked to wear them over their nose and mouth when in close proximity to other staff and children when social distancing is not possible.

For more information, please see these website pages:

<https://www.covidguidance.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt381/files/inline-documents/2020-05/guidance-day-camps.pdf>  
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/coronavirus-mask/art-20485449>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-facecover.html#:~:text=In%20light%20of%20this%20new,community%2Dbased%20transmission>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>  
<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2006372>

## 8. Maintain 6 feet social distancing when possible, especially when not wearing a mask

## 9. Conduct meetings by phone or video conference

Whenever possible, meetings should be conducted by conference calls or via Microsoft Teams, Zoom GoToMeeting, or another video meeting platform. If it is necessary to conduct an in-person meeting, then all participants should be at least 6 feet from one another.

## 10. Disinfect desk areas and shared supplies

Desks will be disinfected with an EPA approved disinfecting wipe or disinfection solution between each student use and at the end of the school day, including shared computer keyboards, mice, or any other shared student supplies. Shared supplies and materials among students will be limited.

## 11. Visitors

No visitors or volunteers are allowed in the building unless they follow these same policies and procedures as employees and students. Delivery people should not enter the building beyond a certain designated location and all packages should be left in said designated location.

## 12. Common areas

Employees must wear a mask in all common areas. (see section on Wearing a Mask in the Building)

### **Holy Mass:**

Schools will follow the diocesan guidelines for Holy Mass and other liturgical services. If possible, larger schools should consider contacting their local pastors to request an increase in the number of Masses to accommodate fewer students, alternating groups of students each week, or cohort specific services.

### **Lunch and the Cafeteria:**

Employees and students must wash/sanitize their hands upon entering and exiting. Schools will work with their food service company to develop protocols for food preparation and food personnel. Schools should consider pre-packaged lunches, canceling lunch programs, and staggered lunch schedules. Students will eat in classrooms or other common areas if social distancing cannot be maintained.

### **Elevators:**

Only one person will be allowed on the elevator at a time (unless an adult needs to escort a student). Elevator buttons should be sanitized by maintenance staff throughout the day.

### **Restrooms:**

Employees and students must wash hands upon entering and leaving. On leaving, they will use a paper towel to turn off the water and open the door(s) to avoid contact with their hands after they have washed them. Throw the paper towel away after exiting in the waste bins provided. The school should consider manageable plans for mitigating the spread of contagion in bathrooms, including staggering times of use and frequent sanitization throughout the day.

## 12. Common Areas *(cont'd)*

### **Conference Rooms:**

Avoid the use of conference rooms whenever possible. Employees and students must sanitize their hands upon entering and exiting. All attendees must be at least 6 feet from each other and wear masks at all times in the conference room. Tables must be sanitized after every meeting with the disinfecting wipes or spray bottles provided in each conference room.

### **Office Machines:**

When using office machines, including shared printers and copiers, masks must be worn and social distancing will be practiced. Hands should be washed or sanitized with sanitizer, which should be provided next to each machine. Office machines should be cleaned and sanitized throughout the day by maintenance.

### **Outside Areas and Playgrounds:**

Outside areas may be used for lunches, gym, recess, etc. Masks should not be worn by students when participating in physical exercise. Only one class/cohort will be allowed on the playground at a time. There will be limited sharing of playground toys, balls, etc. to one class/cohort. Students and employees will wash or sanitize their hands upon re-entering the buildings.

## 13. Other exposure mitigations

Employees and students will not use another person's phone, personal electronic device, coffee mug, glass, or other items. If this is necessary due to a work issue (e.g. you are fixing something on a computer), then the item used must be disinfected before another person uses that item. They should avoid touching their face, cover their coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the sleeve of your shirt or coat, and keep windows open to the extent possible to circulate the air.

## 14. All schools should have a communication plan to educate staff, families, and children about COVID-19 health and safety practices at the school

Schools should understand the importance of explaining the "why" and not just informing the community of the plan as this may prevent as many questions or concerns for families and employees. Continual reminders should be sent to the community about the symptoms and the school safety plan. It would be preferred that employees, parents, and students be taught how to implement these plans before the start of the school year. This should include adding an appendix to the school handbook, remote meetings with parents and employees in advance, and other means of meaningful communication. It is important to remember that parents consider safety of paramount importance when selecting a school for their children.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR Individual School Plans

The above framework is based on current information from the CDC and the State of New Hampshire. It is important to note that no two schools are exactly the same and there are important geographic variations between them. Understanding this, there are a number of points of consideration that taskforces should discern whether or not to include in their school specific safety plan: (Please note there may be other variables specific schools may need to consider in their plans.)

### 1) Timing

- a. Re-evaluate the calendar and consider earlier or later start dates especially if time is needed to prepare. Re-evaluate vacation lengths and end of school dates. Consider how much time these added precautions may add to an average school day. Changes to the calendar should only be approved after much communication and explanation to parents and employees.

### 2) Additional Safety Measures

- a. Determine PPE, cleaning supplies, and other materials necessary for purchase.
  - 1.) Each school is required to have the following items; infrared thermometers, pulse oximeters, face masks, plexiglass for office use as needed (nurse, front office), sanitizing stations, disinfectant wipes and cleaning materials, gloves, hydrostatic cleaning machines and signage to indicate social distancing procedures.
- b. Determine materials you may require parents to purchase for their children.
  - 1.) All non-essential uniform items that cannot be washed daily (ties, blazers, etc.) will not be required.
- c. Determine what will happen if an employee or student refuses PPE. How will you handle requests for reasonable accommodations?
- d. Consider classroom cohorts
- e. Include a plan for minimizing larger gatherings when you cannot social distance.
  - 1.) Consider maximum gathering sizes. (e.g., 50% capacity for gathering spaces)
  - 2.) Consider ventilation/fresh air flow– see CDC Guidelines.

### 3) Staff and Students Who May Be Immune Compromised or at High Risk Despite PPE or Safety Protocols

- a. Create a process for remote learning plans for these students or teachers.
- b. Include a substitute plan in the event long-term subs are needed.

### 4) Co-Curricular Activities

- a. Specific protocols for Music, Band, Art, Athletics, Recess, Computers, Field Trips, etc.

### 5) If Someone Tests Positive Or Has Symptoms

- a. Utilize either a time based strategy (e.g., the person is out until they've demonstrated no symptoms for 14 days) or a test based strategy (e.g., the person is tested again and the results are negative, keeping in mind a negative molecular test is not sufficient and they would need 2 negative tests at least 24 hours apart).
- b. Even if asymptomatic, there still needs to be a time or test-based strategy.

### 6) Contact Tracing/Documentation

- a. Plan to document cases and contact tracing to assist in reporting, communication, and discerning the school's course of action.



## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR Individual School Plans *(cont'd)*

### 7) School Sponsored Transportation

- a. Those providing transportation should maximize space between riders.
- b. Keeping windows open might reduce virus transmission.
- c. Transportation vehicles must be cleaned and disinfected after each use.

### 8) School Liability Protection

- a. Waiver, consent forms, and informed consent will only be for activities for which the school already requests these items.

### 9) Signage

- a. Schools should consider signage at designated entrances to remind students, employees, and parents of your safety protocols and screening questions.

### 10) Plan In the Event the School Needs to Immediately Return to Remote Instruction

- a. Schools should have a plan in place to immediately shut down safely and switch to remote learning. This may be necessary due to an outbreak in the school or due to a significant increase in cases in a region or the entire state and the Bishop, in consultation with the Superintendent, decides a region of schools or the entire system of schools needs to switch to remote learning.







### PHASE THREE

## Implementation and Monitoring Ongoing Health Updates and the Effectiveness of the Plan

Before the school year begins, schools will need to train staff and inform students/families about their safety plans. Planning prior to the start of the school year and proactively answering questions will create less confusion and stress once the year begins. Determine who will train staff, and what the training will entail. The Reopening Plan needs to be widely known and understood by employees, parents, and students. Proper time will be needed to install and prepare the space for reopening.

After the school year begins, the task force or taskforce should continue to meet regularly to monitor the effectiveness of the plan and provide feedback to the principal/head of school on specific incidents and the school's response. A particular focus should be on maintaining proper and frequent communications to employees, students, and families. The taskforce should also assist the school leadership, including the superintendent, with the discernment to return to remote learning if an outbreak occurs in the school. If a case of COVID-19 is confirmed, the school must be in immediate communication with the superintendent. With the possibility for the need to leverage remote instruction for separate individuals during this plan or the entire school community at some point during the year, the school team should assess the strengths and weaknesses of their remote instruction to date and plan for continued professional development across all academic, faith, and co-curricular areas.

