



Catholic Education Coronavirus Taskforce Newsletter

November 5, 2020

Message from Father John Donia,
School Minister, Bishop Shanahan
High School

Our True Treasure

Dear Friends,

We began the month of November with the liturgical celebrations of All Saints and All Souls. These feasts remind us of the brevity of our lives on earth and the challenge to do God's will in all things.

The world around us is constantly telling us that our importance or significance is determined by our status: our career, vehicle, property, wardrobe, and bank account. We should remember that in the final analysis these things are not necessary. But, it is absolutely necessary that we go to Heaven.

Mother Teresa once said, "At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by, 'I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in.'"

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati is on the way to sainthood not because his family was one of the wealthiest in Italy, but because he gave his time, talent, and treasure to others, especially the poor. Thousands of Turin's poor came to Pier Giorgio's funeral because of his generosity and charity.

I've been to hundreds of funerals and never once have I witnessed a U-Haul truck following a hearse. There wasn't one following Pier Giorgio's casket either. Instead, true treasure followed his casket: his poor brothers and sisters in Christ.

Shortly our attention will turn to the celebration of Thanksgiving. This year has been filled with many difficulties and obstacles which may cause us to focus solely on ourselves and those nearest to us. Now, more than ever, let us allow our thanksgiving for God's abundant blessings to overflow in our love for and service of the poor and forgotten. Next to Christ, they may be the ones most responsible for us getting to Heaven!

Peace,

Father John Donia

From the Office of the
Secretary of Elementary
Education

Elementary Schools Open with Great Success

The opening of school in fall 2020 looked different from any prior year in memory. Principals and teachers struggled to empty classrooms of excess furniture and book cases, and to keep only essential items such as student and teacher desks. Tape measures became an important commodity as desks were strategically placed 6 feet apart and facing the same direction. Face masks, face shields, hand sanitizer, and infrared forehead thermometers arrived at the schools coupled with health and safety signs as well as desks shields. Wi-Fi and broadband capability were examined to ensure that the surge of use could be accommodated. The Ambassador's Fund teamed up with the Foundation for Catholic Education to provide a full body plexiglass shield for classroom teachers. Deep cleaning and sanitation took place in the all of the school buildings.



In this unique year, students would be able to attend either virtually or face to face, five days a week. While the majority of the 102 elementary schools had about 5% of students attending virtually, some schools reported that 75% of the students attend virtually. As the in-person students arrived, they were greeted by friendly teachers taking temperatures and then applying a squirt of hand sanitizer on their hands. In some schools, parents complete a daily questionnaire assuring the school that their child/ren are well enough to be present. Everyone must wear a face covering at all times with face masks breaks being given. Educators adjusted their teaching to provide in class and remote learning allowing them to attend to two

separate groups of pupils.

All the precautions taken for social distancing, mask wearing, frequent hand washing and deep cleaning of the buildings provided the safe environment needed for a successful, face-to-face return to school. While the majority of the schools have not had a case of COVID, some schools have reported minimal cases. The schools have not been identified as the source of the outbreak. Once a school has a confirmed case of COVID, the local County Board of Health is immediately notified. The school follows the guidance they provide. The Office of Catholic Education assists the schools in communications with the community. This attention to detail and focus on health and safety has prevented any larger spread of COVID-19 in our schools.



The question arises as to what parents can do to keep their child/ren and ultimately the school safe from COVID-19. Everyone is aware of the following, if this was a school test, how would you fare on it?

- Practice Social Distancing: this includes refraining from parties and social gatherings with other people including the other students in the class. Do not hold a party or sleep over and do not allow your child to attend a party. These activities are known sources of the COVID cases that have appeared in schools.
- Make tough decisions to refrain from weddings, showers, and family parties including over the holidays. Yes, this is difficult. However, COVID is even harder.
- If anyone in your household has COVID, do not send your child/ren to school for 14 days. Be honest and let the school know.
- If your child/ren is sick, keep them home from school.
- Wear masks at all times when you are out of your house and insist that your children do so also.
- Wash hands frequently for 20 seconds. Get in the habit of washing your hands when you return from any outside activity.



From the Office of the
Superintendent of Secondary
Schools and Schools of Special
Education



Dear Parents,

I am so pleased to be able to share that we have conducted in-person instruction for your children through these first eight weeks of school. During this time, many of the traditional celebrations and activities such as Ring ceremonies and National Honor Society installations have been able to take place because of the competent and safe planning of the local school teams. The adaptability and flexibility of our high school communities has truly been amazing.

As I visit each school, I am able to see the hybrid model of instruction in action. It is a tremendous tribute to the talents of our teachers who are called to rethink and re-plan every aspect of each lesson on a daily basis. They are called to prepare for the at home audience of students as well as those front and center in the classroom. Recently, I heard that NBC Today Show co-anchor, Savannah Guthrie refer to each group as, "the roomies and the Zoomies." I have seen amazing lessons with the Zoomies and the roomies interacting as they solve calculus problems or discuss the best methods of science research.

It has been our goal to provide our students with as many in-person learning experiences as possible. As always, to be fully successful, we need the strong partnership of home and school. COVID safety precautions within the school day have kept teachers and students safe from any wide-spread outbreaks. Our greatest challenge, is social gatherings outside of school hosted by families who may not require masks or social distancing. In one or two cases, a well-intentioned family hosted a

sleeper of students, causing a number of students to catch the virus and an entire athletic team to quarantine.

As the number of cases rise throughout the five counties of the greater Philadelphia region that comprise our Archdiocese, may we ask that families commit to social distancing, mask wearing, and the essential pre-screening before a student attends athletic practices, games, or in-person classes? In that way, your family is committing to caring about the physical health and safety of all families within your school community.

Know that we continue to monitor each local school case as well as the transmission of COVID spread by county in Pennsylvania. We also continue to communicate with the local county health departments as they review trends and offer guidance.

As we approach Thanksgiving, we are so thankful for each and every family in our school communities and are most especially thankful for our extremely dedicated teachers and administrators who demonstrate each day commitment to your children and to the mission of Catholic Education.

May God bless you and your family!

Sincerely,

Sister Maureen

Sister Maureen L. McDermott, I.H.M. Ph.D.
Superintendent of Secondary Schools

From the Coronavirus
Taskforce Chairperson

Keeping Students Safe *Tips for Parents*

This past summer your Catholic school leaders worked very hard to develop Health & Safety plans for schools to reopen on time in the fall. These plans have been very effective in helping us to operate safely over the past two months and to deliver a high quality education centered on Catholic values and academic excellence.

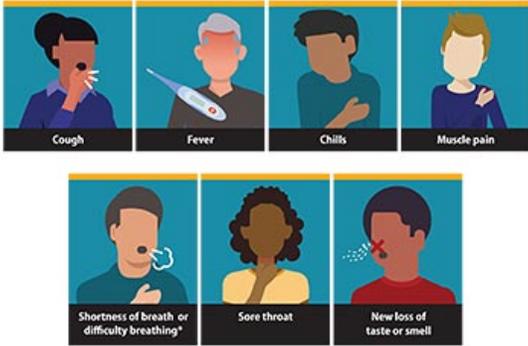
With Coronavirus cases increasing in our area, here are some helpful reminders to help keep students safe.

- All students should remain home if sick. We need all parents to commit to this fundamental principle.
- If your child has been in close contact with someone with COVID, they need to be quarantined and remain home for the required period.
- If your child has been tested for COVID, they need to remain home while awaiting the test results.

- If your child tests positive, they need to be quarantined at home and the parent needs to notify the school they are enrolled in the same day you get the test results. If a sibling is in a different school, then the sibling should remain home as well and both schools should be notified.

Symptoms of Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Know the symptoms of COVID-19, which can include the following:



Symptoms can range from mild to severe illness, and appear 2-14 days after you are exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19.

***Seek medical care immediately if someone has emergency warning signs of COVID-19.**

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Bluish lips or face

This list is not all possible symptoms. Please call your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you.



[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

When cases are reported to school administrators, they will obtain details from the parent/guardian reporting the incident and will immediately be in touch with the county health department to determine if any other students or staff need to be quarantined. Fortunately, in most instances due to our strong safety protocols very few individuals in our schools get quarantined. Whenever there is a case, we notify parents of the incident to help increase your vigilance in looking for symptoms.

Wearing face masks, maintaining social distancing and regularly washing hands is very effective at keeping stopping the spread of the virus. The cases we have seen in schools are coming from outside of schools where there are gatherings of family members or friends in which COVID safety protocols are not being followed.

With the Thanksgiving holiday approaching, if you are going to have your family gather, make a plan for how you can keep your family safe this holiday. The CDC has a very good webpage with advice on how you can gather safely, we recommend visiting it for some practical tips.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>

We are also asking all school parents to consider getting a flu vaccine this year as an essential part of protecting your health and your family's health this season. Flu vaccines are useful any time during the flu season and can often be accessed as late as January.

We appreciate your support of all the new safety protocols put into place this year.

Please wear a mask.



Maintain a distance of 6 feet whenever possible.



[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)