



Catholic Diocese of Saginaw

3/12/21

Dear Catholic School Community,

March 13, 2021 marks the one-year anniversary of the executive order that closed all K-12 schools in Michigan for three weeks during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. In early April of 2020, schools were closed for in-person learning for the remainder of the academic year by executive order. As I reflect on the past year, I am reminded of the many challenges that our students, families, and schools have faced and continue to face, both inside and outside of the classroom. Over the last 12 months, our school staff and faculty have made great efforts to rise to meet these challenges with the goal of providing the best possible learning environment. Parents and community members have also been key partners and advocates during this historical time.

In June and July, teachers, principals, parents, and community members representing every school met virtually to support a return to in-person learning through the development of the Diocesan Preparedness Plan. Each school also created an individual plan. Thanks to the hours of planning invested over the summer, our schools opened on schedule in the fall of 2020. Throughout the current school year, when appropriate, plans and protocols have been modified and updated to incorporate the current guidance and recommendations. This process will continue through the end of the year.

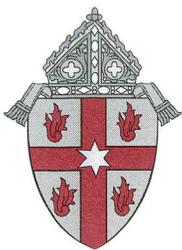
Regarding instruction in the 2020-21 academic year, our schools have experienced a high level of success regarding in-person learning.

- Through mid-February of 2021, our schools offered in-person learning 94.5% of the time when in-person learning was permissible. (High schools were closed by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services for a period in December and January.) The remaining 5.5% consists of days when a school(s) voluntarily moved to school wide virtual learning in response to quarantine numbers or following holiday breaks in an effort to reduce any potential spread.
- Of the days we have been in-person, we have had 75% or better student attendance 87% of the time. When we remove one school from this formula, our remaining schools have had 75% attendance or better 99.5% of the school year.¹
- Since returning to school in January, the rate of infection among staff, faculty, and students has been less than 1%.

Beginning in January 2021, the vaccine became available to school staff and faculty. Specific timing for distribution varied throughout the diocese. At this time, all our school staff and faculty have had the opportunity to receive the first vaccine shot. Many schools have already completed the entire vaccine regimen. I am grateful to the various county health departments and medical organizations that helped to carry out this process.

Over the past 12 months, I have witnessed great collaboration and support among our school leaders and advocates across the diocese as well as on a state and federal level. Our principals worked diligently to support their schools and one another. Throughout the pandemic, we have met frequently and I am humbled by the commitment this group has displayed. On a state level, Catholic school superintendents and leaders of other religious schools, along with the Michigan Association of Nonpublic Schools, have tirelessly worked to ensure that we are

¹ 75% attendance is a common threshold used under normal operating conditions to determine if a day can count as an official school day. This data does not include students/families that voluntarily moved to virtual learning for an extended period of time.



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represented in Lansing and Washington D.C. Furthermore, they have advocated for nonpublic schools to receive a fair, just, and appropriate level of funding from various state and federal programs.

The challenges over the past year have reinforced the benefits and value of a Catholic education. In a time of uncertainty, our Faith continued to be a focal point of our learning and work. Students were able to continue to celebrate school Masses in a safe manner. Many schools welcomed new students and families, providing an increased opportunity for evangelization. Small class sizes allowed us to return to in-person learning with more social distancing and less overall crowding in common areas. The pandemic once again highlighted the committed and dedicated teachers and educators that serve our students. They made in-person learning a priority and found ways to achieve that goal under very trying circumstances.

The success of Catholic schools around the country, including within the Diocese of Saginaw, has been noted in various articles and publications, (see *in the news* at <https://www.saginaw.org/our-schools> for more information). While the efforts and actions our schools undertook included some growing pains, I know that any shortcomings were the result of trying to serve our students and families to the best of our ability. I want to thank our families for continuing to make Catholic education a priority over the past year. Thank you for supporting our schools as we all worked to adapt to learning and teaching in the midst of a pandemic. Education truly is a partnership between the family and the school. This has been very evident over the past year. On behalf of our Catholic schools, we look forward to continuing to build and strengthen that partnership as we move forward.

Respectfully,

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