



*Diocese of Knoxville Catholic Schools: Preparing Scholars, Leaders, & Saints*

July 24, 2020

Dear Catholic School Communities:

With our first day of school just a little over a week away, I am writing to inform you of a slight revision to our re-entry policies. As we continue to learn more about this virus and the ways in which it is spread, along with the PPE (facial shields) that can protect teachers and students in the classroom, the Diocese of Knoxville has determined that face masks must be worn in the classroom for students in Fourth Grade and higher. Recognizing the subtle nuances of facial expressions on instruction, students in Pre-Kindergarten through Third Grade may wear the facial shields when appropriately socially distanced, but will have to wear facial masks when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Parents may request their students to wear both facial masks and facial shields in the classroom. While facial shields protect the eyes, research shows that face shields do not provide the same level of protection from airborne droplets that cloth face masks do. The *Diocese of Knoxville Re-Entry Policies and Procedures* are attached reflecting this revision.

Our schools remain committed to starting school with teachers and students physically on campus as the AAP has strongly recommended. “The importance of in-person learning is well-documented and there is already evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures in 2020” (AAP, 2020, p.1). With this in mind, we are very conscious of the trajectory of the spread of COVID-19 in counties of our various schools. Please know that we do not necessarily follow the decisions of the local county education system related to on-campus learning and risk operation levels. We will continue to utilize all of the available information necessary to make informed decisions for our schools, but because our operational circumstances differ from those in the public sector, different models of decision-making are employed.

In conclusion, thank you for choosing the gift of Catholic school education for your children. Jesus reassures us in Matthew 17:20 that if we “have faith as small as a mustard seed” nothing will be impossible.

In Christ,

*Sedenna J. Piater, Ed.D.*

Superintendent of Catholic Schools  
Diocese of Knoxville

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

<https://www.jwatch.org/fw116834/2020/07/14/studies-show-importance-face-coverings-limiting-spread>