

June 15, 2020

Dear Faithful Catholic School Community,

I pray this correspondence finds you and your families safe and well. The California Department of Public Health has released guidance to PK-12 public and private schools for the return to in-person instruction. As a result of this guidance and recent modifications to county public health orders in Santa Barbara, Ventura and Los Angeles, **the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles will resume on-campus instruction in the fall.**

The Department of Catholic Schools has been working diligently with our county public health partners to define modifications to facilitate in-person instruction. **We should anticipate protocols such as, physical distancing; facial coverings; frequent hand washing; keeping students in class-level cohorts; use of outdoor spaces for instruction; and, non-touch temperature checks upon entry, among others.** Details will be presented to school principals and presidents in our forthcoming *Starting the School Year Smart* guidance document which will be based on the state public health department's guidance and input from our school leaders.

Each of our school communities is unique and will customize modifications to meet their respective campuses and student enrollment needs. For example, some schools may see changes to their daily and weekly schedules, integrate technology into lessons, use campus spaces differently, set-up classroom furniture in a new way and other approaches to accommodate these new protocols. Due to the unpredictability of public health conditions and to accommodate student and staff needs, schools will prepare distance learning plans should they become necessary. Schools will be developing their individual return to campus plans in accordance with these modifications.

Over the past three months, we've come to appreciate how vital our Catholic schools are to our children. Our campuses serve as centers of love, learning, faith and community. By the time the new school year starts, students will have been away from their schools for five months. The impact of missing in-person learning over many months cannot be ignored, yet, we are all concerned that returning could bring health risks to our children, educators and the community. Our goal is to strike a balance between preventing the spread of COVID-19 and providing children with the education, nutrition, physical activity, and mental health benefits provided through the reopening of Catholic schools. In a statement made earlier this month, the Southern California chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics is calling for the return to in-person instruction in schools due to *the negative effects of missing in-person educational time as children experience prolonged periods of isolation and lack of instruction.*¹

¹ **Local Pediatricians Urge Collaborative Decision-Making About Reopening Schools**, American Academy of Pediatrics, Southern California Chapter, PASADENA, CA (June 2, 2020).

Indeed, we cannot eliminate the risk of COVID-19 in our communities, but we can reduce it by being flexible, consistent and vigilant. We must use every tool we have available to ensure our students are in school learning, growing and living in the safest environment possible. This is why we, as a sacramental community, must be committed to protecting our children and each other, always. Though some protocols may be inconvenient, they are absolutely necessary to our collective ability to maintain safety. We must work together, parent to parent, teacher to teacher, student to student to support a healthy learning environment under these new conditions.

To ensure the return to campuses is done with the highest attention to health and safety for our students and staff, the Department of Catholic Schools has been working with the State of California and local vendors on the procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). **Through our efforts with the state, we have successfully secured a 30-day supply of face coverings, face shields, hand sanitizer and no-touch thermometers at no cost to our schools. Further, we have pre-negotiated pricing with reputable vendors so our schools can purchase PPE items directly at wholesale cost; details will be included in our guidance to schools.** Finally, we have secured financial support from our philanthropic partners to ensure schools who serve our most impoverished students have the necessary PPE for their students and staff. The lack of funds to purchase PPE should not prevent a school from opening in-person, nor prevent students from learning together.

What we've collectively experienced over the past three months has been nothing short of unprecedented. Despite the challenges, we've witnessed the incredible courage, resiliency and commitment of our Catholic school community in ways we've never seen before. The coming school year will require the same faith, conviction and grace as we come together for our children on our campuses in the fall. What makes our schools so special is the loving and caring families and educators who do all they can to advance student achievement and faith. In these uncertain times, let us lean on each other and ensure our children return with joy, optimism and care.

On behalf of Archbishop José Gomez and our entire school ministry, thank you for your partnership, commitment and solidarity throughout these past several months. We look forward to welcoming you back to campus this fall.

Yours in Christ,

Paul M. Escala
Superintendent of Schools

Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:5-7