



Office for Schools

July 24, 2020

Dear Catholic School Parents,

This has been an historic year. Over the course of the past months, our Catholic schools in the Diocese of San Diego have been working hard on their plans for a safe reopening of campuses in the fall. Throughout this process, we have been in regular consultation with county, state and federal authorities regarding their public health guidance. The safety of our Catholic school communities remains our highest priority. Our children are a treasure, and our school leadership and families are to be applauded for their efforts in working together for their education, faith formation and protection.

Last Friday, Governor Newsom made a major announcement on the reopening of public and private schools in our state. He also released a major policy document, [COVID-19 and Reopening In-Person Learning Framework for K-12 Schools in California, 2020-2021 School Year](#), announcing new statewide mandates affecting all public and private schools. In this document, the Governor states that “schools and school districts may reopen for in-person instruction at any time if they are located in a local health jurisdiction (LHJ) that has not been on the county monitoring list within the prior 14 days.” As I draft this communication to you, both counties our diocese serves—San Diego and Imperial—are currently on the Monitoring List. **This means that we cannot reopen for live classroom instruction under the current public health conditions** and that all public and private schools must be prepared to begin the school year using on-line Distance Learning. You can find the data tracker for the Monitoring List on the San Diego Health & Human Services Agency [website](#).

To be clear, this is not our decision.

There is one exception to this order. Local health officers may grant a waiver to allow elementary schools to reopen in-person instruction if the waiver is requested by the district superintendent, in consultation with labor, parents and community-based organizations. When considering a waiver request, the local health officer must consider local data and consult with the California Department of Public Health. The protocol and framework for this process have not yet been defined, but **we will be pursuing this option with our county health officials as soon as those guidelines are created and available**. What this process will look like, how long it may take, and whether or not we will be successful still remain to be seen.

Through the California Catholic Conference, which is the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in California, our bishops have called on Governor Newsom to rapidly develop safe procedures to reopen schools. In the statement released this week, [California Catholic Bishops Call on Governor to Rapidly Develop Safe Procedures to Re-Open Schools](#), our Bishops say:

“We urge the Governor to expedite issuing regulations that will enable local health authorities to grant waivers for pre-K, primary, and secondary schools to open for in-person instruction... Fast action by the Governor will allow decisions to be made on a case-by-case basis at the local level, by those public officials, along with educators, who are in the best position to evaluate safety concerns in individual schools.”

What can you do? We are in support of this effort by our California Bishops in urging the Governor to expedite regulations that will enable local health authorities to grant waivers to reopen schools for in-person instruction. There are nearly 11 million Catholics in California, and the Catholic Church is the largest private provider of healthcare, social services and education in the state.

I am grateful to the many parents who have reached out to our offices these past few days expressing both concern and desire in reopening our Catholic school campuses. We owe equal thanks to all families and school members who helped inform our process through our diocesan surveys. While we explore the waiver option, I ask you and your families to join us in advocating for the safe and expeditious reopening of our Catholic schools by filling out this short, [2-minute state-run survey](#). This is an opportunity for you to make your voice heard with our public policy makers. Alternatively, write a personal letter to the Governor sharing your stance on the safe reopening of California schools. Letters can be addressed to:

Governor Gavin Newsom
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Lastly, I want to assure you that we will reopen our schools with academic quality and fidelity to our Catholic faith. Any Distance Learning model we administer during the 2020-2021 school year will be a designed framework based on research and best practices. It will not be a hurried reaction to a crisis. Numerous working groups with Catholic school teachers and leaders have articulated a robust and rigorous Distance Learning program for our students. The Office for Schools has pivoted its professional development plan for the coming school year to provide essential teacher and student supports in multiple contexts.

Please continue to consult your principals and pastors on the specific plan for your Catholic school. I will update you with more diocesan information as these conditions unfold.

Stay strong. Be blessed. God is with us.

In Mission,



John Galvan
Director, Office for Schools