



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

August 5, 2021

Greetings to our Catholic school communities!

It is an exciting time for our schools in the diocese as we begin our 2021-2022 school year! Our school leaders, faculty and staff have been busy preparing for your child's return to the classroom, and we are completely delighted to have the students back in our buildings! We especially want to welcome all our new families and students who will be joining us for the first time this year. We are thrilled to have you in our schools! As we accompany you in the education of your children, we are looking forward to the gifts and blessings this new school year will bring!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all that have communicated with me during the last few weeks. I truly appreciate your thoughtful letters and the recommendations that have been made to help us ensure the safety and welfare of our students and communities. Please accept my sincere apologies to those that I have not yet responded directly. I have prayerfully read each one and I hope that each of you will always feel comfortable bringing your concerns and thoughts to my attention. These letters and telephone calls have certainly contributed to the discussion and planning for our school opening regarding COVID policies. Like many of you, I had so hoped that the crisis of the pandemic would have passed. Yet, we are once again in the midst of a rise in illnesses within our communities. The rise in cases of the highly transmissible Delta variant of COVID-19 has us once again trying to determine a course of responsive action in uncharted territory.

I want to assure you that the first and foremost responsibility to our families is to provide a safe and healthy learning environment that is permeated by the love for our students and employees in our Catholic schools family. It is our responsibility to protect our children. While at this time the diocese has affirmed that wearing of protective facial covering/mask is the parent's right to determine the best protective measure for his/her child, I would like to strongly encourage all our school families, students, leadership, faculty and staff to consider the use of masks in the classroom when distancing cannot be maintained. Please keep your focus on our primary goal: to educate children in a healthy, safe, and happy Christ-centered Catholic school on site! As you prayerfully consider this choice, and regardless of what you decide, please remember that respect for either parental choice will be demonstrated and supported.

We remain aware as ever of our responsibility to protect our children and families. We will continue to monitor the environmental changes and will update you on any revisions regarding policies or procedures from the diocese. In this regard, I have attached a letter from Bishop Stika containing the diocesan plan for the environmental triggers that will promote prompt and responsive action concerning COVID-19 mitigation policies. We are prepared to respond quickly to environmental changes. Our goal is to work with you to always ensure the safety of our children!

Thank you for your support and for your partnership in the education of your children!

In Christ,

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