

Catholic Diocese of Saginaw

8/18/21

Dear Catholic School Families,

I hope that this summer provided you and your family with a chance to enjoy time with one another and recharge after a challenging 2021-22 school year. As we prepare to welcome our students back to school, please review the update below. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out.

COVID-19 Protocols

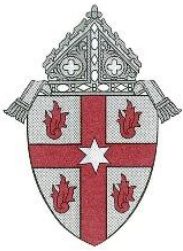
Unfortunately, we once again find ourselves preparing to welcome our families back to school in the midst of COVID-19 concerns. There are only two orders in place at this time. A [CDC order](#) that in part, requires masking while on public transportation, including school buses. Schools are also still required to report COVID-19 cases in school buildings and at school events. Beyond these orders, each school has been empowered to make decisions related to COVID protocols based on local conditions. You can and should expect our schools to:

- Follow any orders issued by local health departments or the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS)
- Report any COVID-19 cases in the school to the local health department, as required by law
- Support the local health department with contact tracing and communications related to quarantine/isolation
- Welcome the use of a mask by any student, parent, guest, staff or faculty member that would prefer to wear a mask (if not required)
- Continue to share information related to vaccines, especially for those under 12, to allow parents and guardians to make informed decisions regarding medical treatment for their child

Catholic Social Teaching, response to questions about Critical Race Theory

Within the educational landscape, the topic of Critical Race Theory (CRT) has gained a significant level of attention over the past year. Recently, I have received some questions from parents about CRT. Our Catholic schools have and will continue to utilize the [Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching](#) to form and inform our students in respect to their role and responsibility in our larger society. These seven themes include: (1) life and dignity of the human person, (2) call to family, community, and participation, (3) rights and responsibilities, (4) option for the poor and vulnerable, (5) the dignity of work and the rights of workers, (6) solidarity, and (7) care for God's creation. More information on Catholic social teaching can be found [here](#).

Specifically on the issue of racism and our responsibility as Catholics to address it, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued [Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love, Pastoral Letter Against Racism](#). The USCCB has also developed and shared [resources to combat racism](#) for all age segments of our educational system and beyond. Promoting the value and sanctity of all life has always been at the center of our schools. By our very nature, our Catholic schools have embedded in them a set of values that makes the implementation of any other specific framework or theoretical approach unnecessary. Our Catholic schools have been and continue to be



Catholic Diocese of Saginaw

well positioned to educate and support our students and families as we work to address social justice topics.

Faith-Based, Professional Development for Staff and Faculty

When we plan and prepare for our system-wide professional development, three key goals drive the formation of the day. First, how can we provide an opportunity for spiritual development and growth for staff and faculty? Second, how can we support and enhance the important work school staff and faculty are engaged in? Third, how can we leverage the expertise of existing school staff and faculty to benefit students throughout the diocese.

This year, through a partnership with Ruah Woods, we have worked to create an opportunity to support two of these goals simultaneously. Over the past few years, our schools have experienced an increase in questions about and concerns related to same-sex attraction, gender dysphoria and various other LGBTQ topics. A stronger understanding of Church doctrine will allow our school staff and faculty to respond with compassion, confidence and accuracy when these questions and topics arise in the classroom, hallways, or at school sponsored activities.

The breakout sessions were led by Ruah Woods and centered on the *Theology of the Body* approach. Grade level specific sessions were held to aid our staff and faculty in addressing this material in an age appropriate fashion. Those who serve in faith formation and religious education programs at our parishes were also invited to attend.

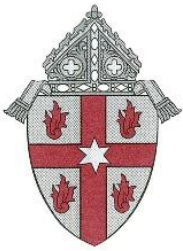
Emergency Aid for Non-Public Schools (EANS)

Last spring, our Catholic schools, if eligible, had an opportunity to apply for funding through the EANS program. After initial requests were reviewed, a significant level of funding was still available. Therefore, schools that applied and were approved, will have the opportunity to apply for a second distribution equal to the first amount that was granted. Applications for the second distribution are due by August 27, 2021. In total, eligible schools in the diocese will have access to nearly two million dollars of funding through EANS.

In terms of actual reimbursement for approved past expenses, or the ability to access funds for current and future expenditures, the state of Michigan is currently working with a third party to facilitate this process. We hope and expect that a system will be in place by October of 2021. Once these funds can be accessed, schools may face some delays in obtaining some items, especially technology equipment, due to back orders and delays on essential components.

Staffing Challenges

This summer has proved to be especially challenging in regard to finding candidates to fill various openings in our schools. Our principals have been working diligently to identify and secure excellent teachers and other school staff to fill open positions. Retirements and a decline in the enrollment in teacher preparation programs on the state and national level, in combination with various other factors may force some of our schools to begin the school year with substitute teachers.



Catholic Diocese of Saginaw

We are also working to fill open teaching positions with professionals that have relevant academic and/or professional experiences that will allow them to support our students in specific content areas. We will continue to work to surround our students with individuals committed to providing an excellent, faith-based Catholic education. This may require some rearranging of schedules and creativity in terms of faculty assignments. On behalf of our principals, we appreciate your understanding and patience as we work through this process.

Catholic Advocacy Network, Stay Informed and Up-To-Date on State Policy

Our Catholic schools are committed to supporting our students as well as our families in respect to your faith journey. The Catholic Advocacy Network is one tool that can aid in accomplishing this goal. Consider joining the Catholic Advocacy Network. Each legislative session, the Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC), <https://www.micatholic.org/>, evaluates bills introduced into the Michigan House and Senate based on their impact on human dignity, social justice, and the common good. The MCC provides an opportunity for Michigan Catholics to stay updated on current policy issues and to contact their lawmakers about these issues. Your participation is critical to support, or oppose, policies that impact Catholic schools. To get involved, consider signing up by e-mail to the Catholic Advocacy Network (CAN): <https://www.micatholic.org/advocacy/catholic-advocacy-network/>.

Thank you for your continued support of Catholic education. Please join me in continuing to pray for a healthy, safe, and impactful school year. I am grateful to the faculty, staff, and administration at each of our schools who carry out this great responsibility and privilege daily. The Office of Catholic Schools looks forward to continuing to collaborate with them, as well as supporting our students and families, throughout the 2021-22 academic year.

Respectfully,

Cormac Lynn

Superintendent of Schools

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