

# **Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops Education Department (TCCB ED)**

## **Interim Fall Guidance for Reopening and Remote Synchronous and Asynchronous Instruction**

July 7, 2020



*"Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet, our faith is weak and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: Do not be afraid" Mt 28:5). And we, together with Peter, "cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us" (1 Pet 5:7).*

*-Pope Francis  
Strong in the Face of Tribulation:  
A Sure Support in Time of Trial*

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**Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops Education Department (TCCB ED)**  
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**Instruction**

(Adapted from TEA SY 20-21 Public Health Planning Guidance)  
JULY 7, 2020

**Purpose**

*This guidance document is intended to assist Catholic Schools in Texas who choose to reopen, in full or in part, during the 2020-2021 academic school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The document was prepared using the Texas Education Agency (TEA) materials, including the agency document on "[SY 20-21 Public Health Planning Guidance](#)," and adapted for use in Catholic schools.*

*This guidance should be reviewed with your (Arch)diocese officials, superintendent, legal counsel, educational, health, or parish staff, and other relevant persons for implementation in conjunction with or, when necessary, in replacement of pre-existing diocesan policies and procedures.*

*Additionally, this guidance document is being provided based on the public health situation as we understand it today and is intended to support Catholic schools in planning for school year 2020-2021 activities and instruction beginning in Fall 2020. Changes to the public health situation over the course of the year may necessitate changes to this guidance, including additional restrictions to school operations.*

*Finally, please note this guidance cannot anticipate every unique situation. Catholic schools should stay informed and take actions based on common sense and wise judgment that will protect health and further their educational mission. In this respect, Catholic schools should be mindful of applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, workplace safety standards, and health standards, including the latest [CDC Guidance for Schools](#), to address the needs of both students and employees during the pandemic period.*

**Public Health Considerations**

The virus that causes COVID-19 can infect people of all ages, and Catholic school administrators, teachers, and staff should do everything feasible to keep students safe. That said, research from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), among others, has found that while children do get infected by COVID-19 and some severe outcomes have been reported in children, relatively few children with COVID-19 are hospitalized or have severe symptoms.

Nevertheless, a child with a mild or even asymptomatic case of COVID-19 can spread the infection to others. The same is true for adults. Even if an infected person is only mildly ill, the people they spread it to may become seriously ill or even die, especially if that person is 65 or older with preexisting health conditions that place them at higher risk.

While it is not possible to eliminate all risk of furthering the spread of COVID-19, the current science suggests there are many steps schools can take to reduce the risks to students, teachers, staff, and their families significantly. This guidance document contains information on four sets

of practices that minimize the likelihood of viral spread, some of which are requirements for all schools and others that are recommendations. The practices are:

- **PROVIDE NOTICE:** Requirements for parental and public notices
- **PREVENT:** Recommended practices to prevent the virus from entering the school
- **RESPOND:** Required practices to respond to a lab-confirmed case in the school; and
- **MITIGATE:** Recommended practices to mitigate likelihood of spread inside the school

The prevention and mitigation practices recommended in this document are designed to significantly reduce the likelihood that a coronavirus outbreak occurs on campus. Catholic schools should take their local public health context into account throughout the year as they determine which of the prevention and mitigation recommendations they implement. Catholic schools operating in regions with higher rates of COVID-19 spread should apply recommendations more stringently than those with very few or no cases in their regions. Additionally, Catholic schools should consider stringently applying prevention and mitigation recommendations to adults on campuses, even when it might not be feasible to do so for students. Consistently implementing recommendations to the extent feasible is the best way to reduce the potential negative impact of infection on students' educational experiences.

There will almost certainly be situations that necessitate temporary school closure due to positive COVID-19 cases in schools. Parents, educators, and school administrators should be prepared for this in the event that it occurs, while actively working to prevent it through prevention and mitigation practices.

### **PROVIDE NOTICE: Parental and Public Notices**

#### **Developing a Plan for On-Campus Activities and Instruction**

Catholic schools must post for parents and families of students, one week prior to the start of on campus activities and instruction, a summary of the plan they will follow to mitigate COVID-19 spread in their schools based on the requirements and recommendations outlined here. This summary document can follow any format the Catholic school deems appropriate to communicate the information, should broadly address the major points in this guidance, and must be posted on the school homepage or another easily found area on the website. Neither this summary document nor any Catholic school's reopening plans are subject to approval by any government entity. However, each school accredited by the TCCB ED must submit their plan to their diocesan superintendent and TCCB ED no later than October 1, 2020. It is recommended that, within this summary, schools designate a staff person or group that is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns and clearly communicate for all school staff and families who this person or group is and how to contact them.

## **PREVENT: Practices to Prevent the Virus from Entering the School**

### *Screening Questions for COVID-19 Before Campus Access*

1. Catholic schools should require all school personnel to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms before coming onto campus each day including taking their own temperature. Symptoms are listed at the end of this document. School personnel would report to the Catholic school if: (a) they have come into close contact with an individual who is lab-confirmed with COVID-19; or (b) they themselves have COVID-19 symptoms.
2. Catholic schools should develop a plan for screening students to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to determine if: (a) they have the COVID-19 symptoms listed in this document; or (b) they have had close contact with an individual who is lab-confirmed with COVID-19. Regularly performing a forehead temperature check of otherwise asymptomatic students in school is not recommended, but the practice is also not prohibited by this guidance.
3. Excluding parental drop-off and pick-up as discussed above, before visitors are allowed onto campuses, Catholic schools should screen all visitors to determine if: (a) they have COVID-19 symptoms listed in this document; or (b) they have had close contact with an individual who is lab-confirmed with COVID-19. When practical, screening questions could be supplemented with temperature checks of adults.
4. Catholic schools are permitted to prevent any individual who fails the screening criteria from being admitted to the campus or a bus until they meet any of the criteria for re-entry to the campus, as described below.

### *Individuals Confirmed, Suspected, or Exposed to COVID-19*

1. Any individuals—including teachers, staff, students, volunteers or other campus visitors—who themselves either: (a) are lab-confirmed to have COVID-19; or (b) experience the symptoms of COVID-19 (listed below) must stay at home throughout the infection period, and cannot return to campus until the Catholic school screens the individual to determine any of the below conditions for campus re-entry have been met:
  - In the case of an individual who was diagnosed with COVID-19, the individual may return to school when all three of the following criteria are met:
    - at least three days (72 hours) have passed since recovery (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications)
    - the individual has improvement in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and
    - at least ten days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
  - In the case of an individual who has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and who is not evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19, such individual is assumed to have COVID-19, and the individual may not return to the campus until the individual has completed the same three-step set of criteria listed above.
  - If the individual has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to school before completing the above stay at home period, the individual must either (a) obtain a medical doctor –licensed in the state of Texas, note clearing the



individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis or (b) receive two separate confirmations at least 24 hours apart that they are free of COVID-19 via acute infection tests at an approved COVID-19 testing location found at <https://tdem.texas.gov/covid-19/>.

2. Individuals—including students, teachers, staff, volunteers or other campus visitors—who have had close contact with someone who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19, as narrowly defined in this document and as determined by the appropriate public health agency, should stay at home through the 14-day incubation period, and should not be allowed on campus.
  - Catholic schools should screen individuals after the incubation period has concluded, and if the individual did not experience COVID-19 symptoms during that period, the individual can be allowed back on campus. If the individual experienced symptoms, they must stay at home until the conditions outlined above have been met.

#### *Identifying Possible COVID-19 Cases on Campus*

1. Schools must immediately separate any student who shows COVID-19 symptoms while at school until the student can be picked up by a parent or guardian and immediately notify the (arch) diocesan superintendent. Schools must clean the areas used by the individual who shows COVID-19 symptoms while at school (student, teacher, or staff) as soon as is feasible.
2. Students who report feeling feverish should be given an immediate temperature check to determine if they are symptomatic for COVID-19.

### **RESPOND: Practices to Respond to a Lab-Confirmed Case in the School**

#### *Required Actions if Individuals with Lab-Confirmed Cases Have Been in a School*

1. If an individual who has been in a school is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19, the school must notify their (arch) diocesan superintendent and its local health department, in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations.
2. Schools must close off areas that are heavily used by the individual with the lab-confirmed case (student, teacher, or staff) until the non-porous surfaces in those areas can be disinfected, unless more than 3 days have already passed since that person was on campus.
3. Consistent with (arch)diocesan and school notification requirements for other communicable diseases, and consistent with legal confidentiality requirements, schools must notify all teachers, staff, and families of all students in a school if a lab-confirmed COVID-19 case is identified among students, teachers or staff who participate on any on campus activities.

## **MITIGATE: Practices to Mitigate the Likelihood of COVID-19 Spread Inside the School**

### *General Health and Hygiene Practices*

1. Schools should have hand sanitizer and/or hand washing stations with soap and water at each entrance. They should provide hand sanitizer and/or hand washing stations with soap and water in every classroom.
2. Students, teachers, staff, and campus visitors should be encouraged to sanitize and/or wash hands frequently.
  - Catholic schools are encouraged to have students engage in supervised handwashing for at least 20 seconds at least two times each day, in addition to being encouraged to wash hands after using the restroom and before eating.
  - Catholic schools are encouraged to teach students good handwashing techniques.
  - Students, teachers, staff, and campus visitors should be encouraged to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and if not available, covered in their elbows. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash, hands should be washed immediately with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or hand sanitizer should be used.
3. Campuses should institute more frequent cleaning practices, including additional cleaning by janitorial staff, as well as provide the opportunity for children to clean their own spaces before and after they are used, in ways that are safe and developmentally appropriate.
  - Schools should arrange for additional cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces that are touched in common throughout the day. This would include objects such as door handles, common tables/desks, shared supplies such as art supplies, and high touch devices such as shared laptops or tablets.
  - Schools should arrange for cleaning of commonly touched surfaces in classrooms between different class groups, if the same room will be used by multiple class groups.
  - The [CDC has provided guidance on cleaning](#) community buildings to prevent COVID-19 spread.
  - Schools should ensure all cleaning products are stored safely, including storing harmful products where children cannot access them, and ensuring that harmful cleaning products are not used near children.
4. Whenever possible, schools should open windows or otherwise work to improve air flow by allowing outside air to circulate in the building.
5. If a building has remained dormant for an extended period, we recommend you review CDC guidance on maintaining water system safety when buildings are unused for extended periods of time and apply this guidance as appropriate.
6. The CDC provides a range of printed resources such as posters that promote protective measures and can serve as helpful reminders of best practices. Schools may use these or may create their own reminders.
7. On the first day of school, Catholic schools must provide instruction to students on appropriate hygiene practices consistent with the mitigation practices adopted by the Catholic school. This instruction should be reinforced and repeated throughout the pandemic.

### *Masks and Face Shields*

1. For the purposes of this document, masks include non-medical grade disposable face masks, cloth face coverings (over the nose and mouth), or full-face shields to protect eyes, nose, and mouth. Face shields may be superior to cloth face coverings in many circumstances, given improved ability to see mouth movements and improved air circulation.
2. Schools must follow diocesan, state and/or local face covering requirements. Consistent with the actions taken by many organizations across the state, consider having all employees and visitors wear masks or face shields. This could be especially important where staff congregate in relatively close settings, for example, during staff meetings or in employee break rooms, or where visitors may congregate.
3. Similarly, consider having students for whom it is developmentally appropriate wear masks or face shields at times when they will be in close proximity to other students for an extended period (i.e., when they would otherwise meet the definition of a close contact).
4. Young children and persons who are unable to adjust or remove masks should not be regarded as suitable candidates for wearing masks or face shields.
  - It is not developmentally appropriate for students in kindergarten and below to wear masks.
  - It may not be developmentally appropriate for some other students, including some students with disabilities, to wear masks.
  - For students in first grade and above, the determination of whether wearing a mask is developmentally appropriate is up to the school administration in consultation with the student's parent or guardian.

### *Student-Teacher Groupings*

Where feasible without disrupting the educational experience, encourage students to practice social distancing.

1. In classroom spaces that allow it, consider placing student desks a minimum of six feet apart when possible.
2. In classrooms where students are regularly within six feet of one another, schools should plan for more frequent hand washing and/or hand sanitizing and should consider whether increased airflow from the outdoors is possible.

### *Use of Non-Classroom Spaces*

1. When feasible and appropriate (for example, in physical education classes as weather permits), it is preferable for students to gather outside, rather than inside, because of likely reduced risk of virus spread outdoors.
2. Catholic schools with policies that allow it may open facilities to the public. Operation of the facilities should be done consistent with governor's executive orders for similar activities.
3. Campuses should plan for entry, exit, and transition procedures that reduce large group gatherings (of students and/or adults) in close proximity. Consider staggering school start



and end times, assigning students to entries to ensure even distribution of students entering/exiting at each door, providing guidance to students to enter one at a time and wait six feet apart outside the entrance, and, where appropriate, encouraging parents to remain outside during drop-off and pick-up.

4. Catholic schools should consider practices that reduce the likelihood that students meet the close contact definition (defined below) at lunch. This could include having students eat lunch at their desks. It could include the use of seats that are spaced at least 6 feet apart. It could include the use of dividers on cafeteria tables if they can serve the purpose of shielding the students from respiratory droplets with which they might otherwise come into contact. For meal service itself, consider individually plated meals with disposable food service items for students who do not bring their own lunch.

#### *Transportation Recommendations*

1. For those Catholic schools offering transportation, they should consider requiring students and staff to use hand sanitizer upon boarding the bus.
2. For bus routes where students need to sit in close proximity within the bus, consider having all students for whom it is developmentally appropriate wear masks or face shields while on a bus.
3. When possible, schools should open windows to allow outside air to circulate in the bus.
4. Catholic schools should encourage families to drop students off, carpool, or walk with their student to school to reduce possible virus exposure on buses.
5. Buses should be thoroughly cleaned after each bus trip, focusing on high-touch surfaces such as bus seats, steering wheels, knobs, and door handles. During cleaning, open windows to allow for additional ventilation and air flow.

#### *Visits to Schools*

1. Parents and other adults may visit schools, as permitted by Catholic school policies. During these visits, parents and other visitors must follow virus prevention and mitigation requirements of the school.
2. Catholic schools should restrict visits in schools to only those essential to school operations.

#### *Staffing*

1. Employees of Catholic schools, like employees of any organization, must continue to meet the work expectations set by their employers, subject to any applicable employment contract terms.
2. School teachers and staff should be trained specifically on the protocols outlined in this document and the practices adopted by the Catholic school. Additionally, while not developed with this exact guidance in mind, Texas Agri-Life Extension offers a free online course on [Special Considerations for Infection Control During COVID-19](#) (2hrs). This course is intended for frontline childcare workers, but the principles of the course apply equally to those working in school settings.

3. Catholic schools should attempt to reduce in-person staff meetings or other opportunities for adults to congregate in close settings. When those meetings are necessary, consider the use of masks or dividers, and schools should also consider whether increased airflow from the outdoors is possible in those settings.

### **COVID-19 Symptoms**

In evaluating whether an individual has symptoms consistent with COVID-19, consider the following questions:

Have they recently begun experiencing any of the following in a way that is not normal for them?

- Feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit
- Loss of taste or smell
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Chills
- Sore throat
- Shaking or exaggerated shivering
- Significant muscle pain or ache
- Diarrhea

### **Close Contact**

This document refers to “close contact” with an individual who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19.

Close contact is determined by an appropriate public health agency.

For clarity, close contact is defined as:

- a. being directly exposed to infectious secretions (e.g., being coughed on while not wearing a mask or face shield); or
- b. being within 6 feet for a cumulative duration of 15 minutes, while not wearing a mask or face shield; if either occurred at any time in the last 14 days at the same time the infected individual was infectious.

Individuals are presumed infectious at least two days prior to symptom onset or, in the case of asymptomatic individuals who are lab-confirmed with COVID-19, two days prior to the confirming lab test.

### ***Screening Questionnaire Information***

1. When asking individuals if they have symptoms for COVID-19, Catholic schools must only require the individual to provide a “Yes” or “No” to the overall statement that they

are symptomatic for COVID-19, as opposed to asking the individual for specific symptom confirmation. Catholic schools are not entitled to collect information during screening on the specific health information of an individual beyond that they are symptomatic.

2. All school personnel would report to the school administrator if:
  - (a) they have come into close contact with an individual who is lab-confirmed with COVID-19; or
  - (b) they themselves have COVID-19 symptoms.
3. Once it is determined that individuals who responded “Yes” to either of these questions have met the criteria for re-entry, Catholic schools must destroy those individuals’ responses.

### **TCCB ED Interim Fall Guidance for Remote Synchronous and Asynchronous Instruction**

#### **Attendance**

1. Per TCCB ED guidelines, students must attend 90% of a course in order to be awarded credit for the course and/or to be promoted to the next grade. Given the public health situation, student attendance may be earned through the delivery of remote instruction.
2. Catholic schools should allow parents to request that their student be offered virtual instruction if the school is able to offer such instruction consistent with these requirements.
3. Catholic schools should notify parents of any changes to the school's policy regarding attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic

**REMOTE SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS INSTRUCTION:** Must address the required curriculum per TCCB ED guidelines.

**Synchronous Instruction** – Defined as two-way, real-time, live instruction between teachers and students, through the computer or other electronic devices or over the phone.

- Teachers must take and post attendance as if the student were physically present in the on-campus classroom
- Students who are not logged in at the teacher’s documented official attendance time should be marked absent
- Teachers should take and post attendance at a specific schedule

**A minimum number of daily instructional minutes are required:** Daily instructional minutes need not be consecutive

- 3rd through 5th grade – 180 instructional minutes
- 6th through 12th grade – 240 instructional minutes
- PK - 2nd grade –asynchronous methods are encouraged.

A program would meet the remote synchronous method requirements if the daily instructional minute minimums above are met, even if part of the day includes asynchronous activities. For example, a high school program that scheduled synchronous instruction for 120 minutes in the

morning, then released students to work independently for several hours before a second scheduled synchronous session totaling 120 minutes in the afternoon would meet the daily instructional minute requirement detailed above.

- For remote synchronous instruction, time spent for in-class breakfast and recess has been excluded from the calculation of daily instructional minutes listed above and should not be included in the instructional minutes
- Time students spend in work-based learning opportunities can be included in the daily instructional minute calculation; these include internships, externships, apprenticeships, and mentorships.

### **Grading**

School grading policies for remote student work should be consistent with those used before COVID-19 for on campus assignments.

### **Teacher Preparation to Deliver Remote Synchronous Instruction**

- Ensure teachers are trained to deliver remote instruction on the Catholic school's chosen platform
- Ensure teachers have practiced delivering a synchronous instruction lesson
- Ensure there is tech support available to troubleshoot student access issues

**Asynchronous Remote Instruction** - Defined as a curricular experience where students engage in the learning materials on their own time, interacting intermittently with the teacher via the computer or other electronic devices or over the phone and involves far more self-guided student instruction. Asynchronous Instruction is available for all grade levels PK-12.

Instruction that does not require having the instructor and student engaged at the same time. In this method, students learn from instruction that is not necessarily being delivered in-person or in real time. This type of instruction may include various forms of digital and online learning, such as prerecorded video lessons or game-based learning tasks that students complete on their own, and pre-assigned work and formative assessments made available to students on paper.

This method allows Catholic schools the flexibility for providing high-quality instructional practices with daily engagement measures. Catholic schools can provide primarily asynchronous instructional methods or through a combination of asynchronous and synchronous instruction together.

- Does not require all participants to be virtually present at the same time
  - Example: Live interactive classes with students & teachers participating real time, teacher supported work time on video conference calls, scheduled and timed online tests



Asynchronous education plans should address four key requirements:

1. **Instructional Schedule:** Expectations for when and in what setting students are learning, loosely equivalent to an on-campus instructional day
2. **Material Design:** Curriculum should be designed for asynchronous student learning
3. **Student Progress:** Daily student progress is defined and measured
4. **Implementation:** The Catholic school must provide educators with support to provide remote instruction
  - Plans should be posted online for parents to see
  - Plans may include differentiation by grade & subject, but only one plan per Catholic school
  - All plans must be reviewed and/or approved by the superintendent

### **Grading**

School grading policies for remote student work must be consistent with those used before COVID for on campus assignments

- Staff should check daily for student “engagement.”
- Students who are not “engaged” that day should be marked absent.