



July 10, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We are writing to provide an update on our planning process to reopen schools in the fall. It is difficult to believe that just a few weeks ago, we wrapped up what will surely be regarded as the most challenging and memorable school year ever. We went from learning together in our brick and mortar buildings, engaging freely in routine activities, to learning remotely in the span of a few days. Together, we were able to keep learning alive during the COVID-19 school closure. We are immensely proud of the efforts made by our students, parents, and educators as they successfully navigated this new environment.

With the start of school just a few weeks away, we have now shifted our attention to welcoming our students and staff back to the classrooms in September. Thanks to the nearly 700 responses we received on an enrollment-related survey, we were able to gain insight into the community's hopes and desires for educating students as safe as possible during the 2020-2021 academic year.

Reopening Partnerships and Taskforce

The IMS network has formed a School Reopening Taskforce and a Stakeholder Advisory Group, each comprised of various individuals from our 15 schools. The people on the Taskforce and Advisory Group bring specific expertise and represent the teachers, parents, and community members from our diverse school communities. The State of Pennsylvania School Reopening Guidance and recommendations from the Philadelphia County Health Department informs every discussion and decision point.

IMS is also collaborating with a team of industry leaders to help us project manage and explore every possible alternative to determine the safest and most effective way to educate our students in the fall. From facilities and transportation challenges, instruction and technology adjustments, our Taskforce and partners will explore ways to meet our 15 communities' expectations while adhering to the guidelines put forward by the government and health agencies. This work is no small task and will require patience, grace, and compromise.

Reopening Schools Survey Results

The majority of our parents and guardians expressed, overwhelmingly, an interest in returning to their IMS school building in some capacity. Parents and guardians are mostly eager to have students return to a traditional learning environment in 2020-2021 and also want to ensure the appropriate safeguards are in place. Also, survey respondents recognized the value in wearing masks, following social distancing guidelines, and enforcing healthy-hygiene practices, but they expressed understandable concern about the potential challenges of safely abiding by these guidelines for an entire school day. With regard to virtual learning during the third Trimester of 2019-2020, some families reported difficulties, while others felt it exceeded their expectations. Similarly, some students struggled in the remote environment, while others thrived.

[Holy Cross](#)
144 E. Mt Airy Avenue

[Our Mother of Sorrows/
St. Ignatius of Loyola](#)
617 N. 43rd Street

[St. Barnabas](#)
6334 Buist Avenue

[St. Cyril of Alexandria](#)
716 Emerson Avenue

[St. Frances Cabrini](#)
405 N. 65th Street

[St. Gabriel](#)
2917 Dickinson Street

[St. Helena-Incarnation](#)
6101 N. 5th Street

[St. Malachy](#)
1012 W. Thompson Street

[St. Martin de Porres](#)
2300 W. Lehigh Avenue

[St. Martin of Tours](#)
5701 Loretto Avenue

[St. Raymond of Penafort](#)
7940 Williams Road

[St. Rose of Lima](#)
1522 N. Wanamaker Street

[St. Thomas Aquinas](#)
1631 S. 18th Street

[St. Veronica](#)
3521 N. 6th Street

[The DePaul Catholic School](#)
44 W. Logan Street

Another common theme that we heard through the survey was that families feel it would be appropriate to reduce tuition because of the remote instruction. We recognize that the pandemic and resulting stay-at-home measures have created burdens for our families and made learning more challenging for many. As we prepare to welcome our students back this fall, the reality is that providing the equipment and structures needed to keep everyone safe and healthy is also costly. While nominal tuition is going up at IMS schools, we are committed to ensuring that costs to our returning families do not change. We cannot, unfortunately, safely afford to reduce tuition, however.

In addition to the expected family payment not increasing, we are working to continue to provide further tuition support through various relief fund efforts. If you have not already filled out your financial aid forms for the upcoming school year, please do so as soon as possible.

Using this feedback and the safety and health guidelines, our Taskforce and partners will weigh all of the concerns and suggestions in our reopening plans. As a Network, we remain committed to providing high-quality in-person and distance-learning instruction. We are aiming for consistency for all, with room for flexibility to meet everyone's diverse needs.

Next Steps

The IMS network is actively developing a reopening plan to be presented to our schools and Board in late July or/early August. As soon as an instructional plan is created that we are confident we can execute effectively and safely on, we will be sending details of that plan to you.

Recommendations and guidelines continue to evolve as health agencies learn more about the virus and its transmission. As more information emerges and we move toward decision-making, we will keep you informed of our direction. Later in the summer, we will be contacting you with a more specific and targeted survey for areas requiring further input.

Thank you for your commitment to being a part of this mission.

Sincerely,

Bruce Robinson
President & CEO
Independence Mission Schools