



August 7, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Nearly two weeks ago, I wrote to provide you with information on our plans for the 2020-2021 academic year. Since the public health news and guidance around COVID-19 has been changing regularly, we re-surveyed you and our staff to understand our community's preferences regarding our reopening plans. The feedback we got from you and our staff have been essential in helping us balance health and safety concerns and our broader mission to educate our students.

We also reviewed the public-health data and statements by officials to inform our planning. We are keeping a close eye on the neighborhoods where our schools are located. Regarding school reopening in any county, the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia recommends the following guidelines:

- More than 9% COVID-19 positive cases: Consider only a virtual school model
- Between 5-9% positive cases: Evaluate the data and consider recommendations from local health experts
- Fewer than 5% positive cases *and* sustained evidence of declining case counts: Schools may consider reopening for in-person instruction.

At this time and based on the current data, we have been advised by medical and public health experts that schools consider reopening under a fully virtual model for the time being. Experts also recommend we continue to monitor public health data, in order to consider returning to in-person instruction under conditions that present lower risk for transmission.

To this end, we have made two important decisions for the start of the 2020-2021 academic year:

- We will open our schools in a fully-virtual model through September
- Instruction will begin for students on **Tuesday, September 8, 2020**

We know that a high-quality education for your child is your top priority. We are committed to providing a rigorous virtual instruction model and we will concentrate on meaningful teacher interaction and greater daily consistency than what was experienced in the spring. Our virtual program this fall will be modeled on a regular school day. See below for more information.

Returning to In-Person Instruction

We will closely monitor local health trends, continue to consult with local health officials, and evaluate the effectiveness of school re-openings throughout the region and country. When the data clearly tell us that schools can be opened safely, we will consider transitioning to a hybrid model – a mixture of virtual and in-person instruction – but only after September. A fully virtual model will continue to be an option for our students when we return to a hybrid model of schooling. Please keep in mind how often the situation is changing, and that we have to continue to adjust to it. We are committed to communicating any changes in our model at least two weeks before transitioning to a hybrid model with any kind of in-person instruction.

Financial Concerns

Given the economic impact of the pandemic, we understand that your 2019 tax return might not reflect your ability to pay your portion of tuition today. If you believe this is the case, please reach out to your school's Enrollment and

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

Tuition Manager. Our team is committed to working with you to make sure that you are not asked to pay more than you can afford.

In addition, for those who need it, we have extended the deadline for the first tuition payment to August 28, 2020; late fees to this date will not be charged. We also have many families who have not completed their financial aid forms. ***If we do not yet have the information we need from you, we cannot calculate the appropriate amount to charge.*** If you need any help with returning this paperwork, please contact your school's Enrollment and Tuition Manager.

Next Steps

In the coming days, we will share more details about key aspects of our planning, including detailed guidance on our instructional model, as well as information on Chromebook distribution and technology supports (see below), meal distribution for students, and facilities improvements. Additionally, a Frequently Asked Questions ([FAQ](#)) section will be added to our Back-to-School website, which will be updated often.

On **Tuesday, August 18th from 6:30-8:00PM**, I will convene a Town Hall on Zoom, in partnership with our Executive Team. You may ask questions by using the chat box, and a moderator will share these with panel members for their responses. If there is not sufficient time to answer everyone's questions, we will add responses to the most-common questions on our [FAQ](#) page. Instructions for joining the virtual meeting will be emailed on Monday, August 17th.

Thank you for your continued partnership as we advance a reopening plan that maximizes learning for our students, protects the health and well-being of our staff and students, and ensures everyone's safety.

Sincerely,

Bruce Robinson
President & CEO
Independence Mission School

Additional Notes on Our Virtual Model

Instruction was originally scheduled to start on Monday, August 31, 2020. However, delaying the start of the year by one week gives our teachers extra time to prepare. We believe that this additional planning will significantly improve the quality of instruction that we can offer on the first day of school. **Students will not lose instructional time due to this delayed start date. We have found additional time for preparation without sacrificing instructional time.**

We are proud of our community's response to the pandemic this past spring. We managed to continue instruction for all students, despite the rapidly changing circumstances and confusion during that time. This involved partnering closely with you. We also know that with more preparation and additional resources we can do better, and we are deeply committed to doing so.

Our students, Pre-K through Grade 8, will engage in virtual learning for five days per week. Our virtual model for this new school year will include significant changes from the distance learning program implemented this past spring. We believe our students and families will find that this experience reflects the high-quality education at IMS that is so valued throughout our community.

All instruction will follow specific expectations under our rigorous curriculum programs, and lessons will be taught by our outstanding teachers. We are committing resources so that teachers will have more frequent opportunities to engage with, and learn best practices from, our leaders and one another.

While in virtual learning, students will follow a daily schedule, similar to their regular, in-person school day. Attendance will be tracked. This schedule will incorporate "core" classes in reading/literacy, mathematics, and religion, as well as grade-appropriate instruction in specials (art, music, technology, PE), social studies, and science.

Students will see each of their teachers for real-time (or live) learning five days per week for reading/literacy. They will also see their teachers for four days per week in mathematics and several days per week in other subjects. Just as with in-person learning, students will also be directed to complete independent and small-group work. These activities will occur via a blend of live instruction and private think-time.

We want students to engage with their teachers regularly, but we also want them to have healthy opportunities to unplug and work on their own. Therefore, the amount of live instruction will vary, depending on the grade-level of the student, lesson objectives, and students' needs.

During the independent think-time periods, the teacher will assign work or activities for students to complete, that they will later review and discuss with classmates in grade-appropriate ways. Teachers may also work with students individually during think-time periods, or within small groups, as the situation warrants.

We are investing in cutting-edge software and additional training for teachers to make these learning experiences as interactive as possible. This will include streamlining the number of accounts and passwords needed.

Again, we do not want, nor would it be healthy for, any student to sit at a computer screen all day long. That said, we also recognize that younger students may need more direct support from teachers or other school support staff, because they are not yet able to work as independently as their older peers. For these students, additional time with their teacher or a learning-support staff member is warranted.

Educational Technology Updates

This summer, we have been working hard to acquire enough Chromebook computers for every student who has not had access to one. On our recent survey, some families have informed us a personal computer is already available for students to use at home. Great!

But for any student who needs one, we will be distributing Chromebooks, as loaned devices for the 2020-2021 academic year. This will occur at or near the beginning of the virtual-schooling period. We have also been working with the City

of Philadelphia, to ensure all families have sufficient internet access. You may have seen the announcement by our partners on August 6th, and will share more information about this opportunity soon.

Additional Services for Students and Families

We will continue to offer a wide range of support services to students and families. To this end, we have increased the number of Family Connections staff in our schools as an additional resource. We will also continue to offer socioemotional learning lessons and small group counseling through our partnership with Elwyn. Reading intervention services will also be available to students who qualify; each school has a reading intervention teacher. We continue to explore additional services that we can offer, so that the learning needs of all students are met.