



September 1, 2020

Dear Families of the Archdiocese of San Francisco,

Welcome to the 2020/2021 school year! While the beginning of this year is certainly unique, all 48 of our Archdiocesan elementary schools begin this year, as every year, with a commitment to providing your children with a strong education that is grounded in the Catholic faith and academically excellent. In June and July, it had been my sincere hope that we would have been able to open this school year with in-person learning; however with the surge in COVID-19 cases in the state of California and our three counties, this was not possible. Once again our schools did an excellent job of quickly pivoting from their very well thought-out plans for in-person and hybrid learning, to focus on providing a high-quality, Catholic distance learning program. Utilizing the experience they had in the spring, and the additional skills they learned over the summer, our teachers are beginning this year with more confidence and expertise in utilizing virtual teaching tools to create engaging and creative lessons.

It is still my hope that we will be able to return safely to in-person or hybrid learning soon through one of two ways: a change in our counties COVID-19 classification, or through an optional health waiver. On Friday, Gov. Newsom announced that California is moving away from the “watch list” system of tracking coronavirus trends and instead, moving to a four-tier, color-coded classification system that will determine which counties can move forward with reopening businesses and schools. With the approval of the county health department, it is possible that schools may be able to return to in-person instruction once a county is placed below the “purple” tier for more than two weeks.

The waiver option is another possible way that some of our schools may be able to reopen to in-person instruction. Each of our three counties has provided different timelines and criteria for health waivers, and require several data points that will be carefully taken into consideration. The decision to apply for a waiver is a joint decision between myself, the pastor, and the principal of each of our schools. Our approach for all of our Catholic schools in response to this pandemic must be guided by our reverence for human life. With that in mind, the physical gathering of students, teachers, and school staff together on campus may pose too great a threat to a particular school community for the waiver to be a viable option at this time. For other school communities, a waiver to return to in-person instruction as soon as possible is appropriate. This is definitely a case where one size does not fit all.

Even with the two possible pathways to reopening to in-person or hybrid instruction, there is no feasible way for any of our schools to resume instruction in our school buildings within the next three weeks. We will therefore be extending our Distance Learning program in all of our schools through September 18, 2020. At that time we hope to have more information about when a return to in-person or hybrid learning might be an option. While I am disappointed that we have to continually push out the reopening of schools, I could not be more proud of the hard work and dedication of our school leaders and faculty during this pandemic. They have poured an incredible amount of time, resources, and energy into mitigation and distance learning plans for the fall. Their commitment to you, our families, is a true testament of the strength of the Catholic school community.

Words cannot express my appreciation for your support and patience throughout the last six months. There is so much about COVID-19 that we cannot control, which makes long-term planning such a



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challenge. It is times like this that we must place our full trust in God that we will get through this together, and come out stronger and wiser than before.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Lyons'.

Pamela Lyons  
Superintendent of Schools