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**DIOCESE OF PALM BEACH
OFFICE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS UPDATE
July 23, 2020**

As we continue to monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it is having on our community, we understand that our school families, employees and community have many questions and opinions about the start of the 2020-21 school year. To more clearly understand these concerns and to obtain new data, we provided another survey last week to learn if we needed to recalibrate our Re-Entry Plan.

I am grateful to the school parents, guardians, teachers, staff, administrators and pastors who responded to the survey, which asked for insights as to when school should re-open, how they should re-open and what concerns you had. More than 3,200 parents/guardians and 571 employees responded to the survey. This week, school pastors, presidents, and principals met to review the survey results, as well as the overall work of the diocesan re-entry task force. The survey results revealed that the number of parents who want face-to-face classroom instruction for their child dropped from 74% in our June survey to about 50% in this most recent survey. For that reason, we will offer families two options:

1. Face-to-face instruction, and
2. At-home learning/virtual instruction

Before the start of the school year, your principal will provide you with an opportunity to indicate your preference for your child for the first quarter of the school year. Tuition for either option will be the same.

The survey responses as to when we should return to school were also divided – with roughly 50% wanting to start on August 10th and 50% indicating our schools should start after that date. In order to provide our teachers with ample time to prepare for the new challenges presented for the coming school year, **students will start the school year on August 24th**. There will still be 180 student school days in the calendar and the school year for students will end on June 9, 2021. The updated diocesan calendar is attached. Please note that your school calendar may vary slightly from the diocesan calendar.

As principals continue to review the need for training and preparation, they have requested that additional teacher workdays be added to our calendar in August, before students return to school. Therefore, teachers will return to school on August 10th and have two weeks of professional development to prepare for the new changes. This will provide ample time for teachers and staff to be trained on sanitation and safety procedures already implemented at each school, along with the myriad of other orientation topics that are addressed at the beginning of an academic year – curricular, instructional, safety and the like. To provide for the additional workdays in August, two diocesan professional days during the school year were used as well as 3 teacher workdays from June. The teachers will have fewer workdays in June than we normally schedule. The number of teacher days for the school year does not change despite the re-arranged calendar.

One of the most frequently asked questions so far has been related to facial coverings. Because we cannot always maintain six feet of social distancing within most of our classrooms, facial coverings will be required for all students, teachers, and staff. Principals within our five-county diocese will monitor local ordinances for appropriate ages for facial coverings.

The research is clear that our best protection during this pandemic is to maintain social distance, wear facial coverings and wash hands regularly with soap and water (or use sanitizer). We believe that these precautions protect not only ourselves, but our household members, friends, and other community members from the COVID-19 virus.

Our prayers continue for all members of our Catholic school communities, as well as all those impacted by the pandemic. May our faith strengthen us as we face the many challenges in our world today. It is our goal to continue to provide you with timely updates, clear communication, and transparent data regarding our schools. You can find these updates on our website, www.DiocesePBSchools.org.

Yours in Christ,

Gary Gelo

Gary Gelo
Superintendent of Schools

Diocesan Prayer for God's Protection in the face of the Coronavirus Pandemic

Loving and gracious God, as in all times, we turn to You and implore Your protection and healing as we face a new threat to our health and peaceful well-being in the coronavirus pandemic before us. Help us to be united with each other and with all of our brothers and sisters around the world affected by this illness. We pray for all those in the medical field who are assisting patients and in the field of science who are discerning a cure, as well as for all government leaders. Remember those who, through this virus, have passed from this life as well as their families in their loss.

At this time of fragile uncertainty, we also humbly implore You to grant us prudence, hope, courage and patience. Dispel from us fear, panic and distrust which disrupt us in spirit to the detriment of our well-being.

We make our prayer in the name of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who always cured those who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons. Our Lady, Patroness of our Diocese, Queen of the Apostles and Comforter of the Afflicted, pray for us,

Amen.