



Directive and Guidance
for Catholic School Administrators

2021-2022 School year



DIOCESE *of* LACROSSE

Guidelines for Schools 2021 – 2022

On behalf of Bishop William Patrick Callahan, the Diocese of La Crosse, provides the following guidance for our schools in their efforts to safely begin the 2021-2022 school year, while the Delta Variant of COVID-19 continues to spread, creating ever changing needs.

With the roll out of the various vaccines last Spring, we believed that we would have been further removed from the cloud of COVID-19 protocols, however, community spread over the majority of the country, including the counties within the La Crosse Diocese, requires that the guidelines provided prior to the 2020 – 2021 school year remain relevant.

All administrations, teachers and staff are commended for the extraordinary efforts that were made last year. Our parents, and parish communities are grateful for your continued efforts to support, guide and educate our students safely.

All guidelines presented here, are subject to change. We shall communicate openly with all schools within the Diocese of La Crosse, including maintaining / regularly updating the Diocese's Website.

We shall also support each school / system in answering questions and providing guidance and resources based upon local infection rate status, to ensure compliance with State, County and Municipality regulations and recommendations vs. mandates which may be issued from time to time.

Most importantly, it is our goal to support the spiritual, mental, and physical health of our staff and students.

2021 – 2022 School year:

A growing body of research confirms that the very best atmosphere for our students is to be in the classroom. It is our core belief that our children need to be connected to teachers, support staff, coaches, and their parish community.

The guidelines provided here are subject to change depending on school and local conditions, with ongoing review by the Diocese of La Crosse COVID-19 Committee, which will continue to meet on a regular basis.

All schools will offer five (5) day / week, face-to-face instruction during the 2021-2022 school year. The plan is to provide a quality Catholic Liberal Arts Education in the safest and most appropriate manner.

Primary prevention strategies: (1) Providing Vaccine information; (2) Hand washing & respiratory etiquette; (3) Continued focus on providing clean/healthy spaces; (4) Emphasize with staff and families / students to stay at home when sick; (5) Emphasize the importance of testing when COVID-19 symptoms appear.

Secondary prevention strategies: (1) Class/cohort grouping (primarily in grades K-5); (2) Physical distancing as much as possible (primarily in grades K-5); (3) Contact tracing (as required by public health); (4) Wearing masks is optional, but **strongly** recommended for unvaccinated individuals.

All guidelines presented are subject to change, based upon the local conditions/community spread and hospitalizations associated with the COVID-19 virus. At any time during the school year, if the State of Wisconsin, and / or the appropriate County or Municipal government issues a regulatory order or mandate that requires additional steps/precautions must be taken, our schools shall abide by such legal requirement.

Example: Buffalo County issues a mandate that every person or a specific section of the population (i.e.: unvaccinated, under the age of 12 etc.) shall be REQUIRED to wear a mask in any indoor setting.

All schools in Buffalo County SHALL enforce the proper wearing of masks for all teachers and students during the entire time the County Mandate remains in effect.

2021-2022 Vaccines and Masks:

The Diocese of La Crosse encourages vaccination, as the Church has opined the COVID-19 vaccine is morally acceptable. As of August 18, 2021, The Diocese will:

- 1). Not require our employees, families, and eligible students to be vaccinated in order to enroll/attend our schools. The decision whether or not to vaccinate remains a personal decision.
- 2). Staff and students, including our student athletes, will not be required to wear masks in our buildings, practice facilities or on playgrounds.
 - Face coverings/masks are optional, but highly encouraged. We encourage families to be aware of CDC and public health recommendations and plan accordingly.
 - All students, staff, and visitors should have a clean mask readily available (e.g. in their locker, backpack, or desk) just in case it would be needed. For example, field trip venues or public school busses may require masks, or if a student becomes ill, they may be asked to wear a mask until they are picked up.

Continuing Guidelines

1. Ensure adequate staffing to clean the building
2. All employees should be minimally washing their hands throughout the day, and using hand sanitizer when soap and water are not readily accessible. Hands should be scrubbed with soap for twenty or more seconds.
3. Hand sanitizers and wipes should be readily available.
 - a. Adults must make certain younger students are using these properly.
 - i. The high alcohol content of hand sanitizers means younger students cannot be licking or chewing on their hands.
 - b. If a student, teacher, or aide leaves a classroom, he or she should sanitize his or her hands when reentering the classroom.
4. All areas of the school will be cleaned on a daily basis.
5. Each school building should be deep cleaned once a week. Schools may consider using a fog chemical that is safe for schools to accomplish this deep clean.
6. Employees should try to limit physical contact with students and other staff. (no handshakes, high fives, fist bumps, etc.).
7. Students need to be instructed that they should do their best to always cough or sneeze into a tissue (discarded) or their elbow. At all times, this needs to be modeled well by school employees.
8. After blowing their noses, students should discard the used tissue and wash or sanitize their hands. Again, adults working in the school should model this practice.
9. Administrators and faculty should discreetly correct students who do not have good hygiene practices.

Be aware: Some parents and employees will be very sensitive to cleanliness. Anything that even looks disorganized or dirty will translate to unclean in their minds, so everyone's classrooms and work areas should be tidy and spotless. Plus, all employees should be conscious of their personal appearance; an employee who appears messy risk being judged as unhealthy.

Teacher Distance Learning Plans

1. Every teacher should have a documented plan on how he or she will quickly move to distance learning or blended learning as may be necessitated by increased illness or county health orders.
 - a. The plan should document necessary student and teacher materials.
 - i. What will the students and teachers need in their homes?
 - b. This plan should be on file with the principal.

COVID-19 Case Procedure

1. A student or employee who is diagnosed with COVID-19 must follow the County Health /CDC guidelines for returning to school after all symptoms have cleared.
 - a. Administration and faculty should make adjustments to work with students and employees who are unable to come to the school building.

- b. If a classroom(s) is impacted by a student or employee diagnosed with COVID-19, the room should be deep cleaned before students/staff return to that classroom/area.
2. A student or employee who is directly exposed to a person who is carrying COVID-19 should quarantine as recommended by your county health department.
 - a. Schools should prepare for an entire class needing to engage in distance learning during a required / extended quarantine.

Social Distancing

1. With the continued spread of the Delta variant of Covid-19, it is important that social distancing is practiced by adults and should be encouraged among students. The recommendation is that this not be made into a rule with consequences.
 - a. Discuss with students the ideal of personal space, each person's circle of grace.
 - b. When possible, classrooms should be arranged to allow students to socially distance themselves.
 - c. When it is not possible to arrange a classroom so students can socially distance or in situations that need cooperative learning like science labs, students and teachers are highly encouraged to wear masks or clear shields.
2. It is recommended that schools develop procedures to limit the amount of students passing in a hallway.
 - a. For some smaller schools this may be an unnecessary recommendation.
 - b. Possibilities:
 - i. Have different start and end times for multiple classes
 - ii. Students stay in a classroom for most of the day. Teachers switch classrooms.
 - c. An alternative may be dividing the hallway in half and having students move in one direction on one side of the hall and the other direction on the other side of the hall.
 - d. Students are highly encouraged to wear masks in hallways.
3. Smaller rooms (bathrooms, offices, maintenance work areas, etc.) Efforts must be taken to ensure that no rooms have more people enter, than are able to maintain proper social distancing.
 - a. Review meeting size, and utilize larger conference rooms
 - b. Allow scheduled bathroom breaks to ensure no overcrowding

Visitors

1. People visiting a school should visit for essential education experiences or vital business.
 - a. A national speaker to present to the students on a matter of faith will be considered essential.
 - b. A charitable family friend who wants to help stuff classroom folders is nice, but is not an essential visit.

Drinking Fountains

1. It is recommended that drinking fountains be turned off. Students should be instructed to bring their own water bottles.

Shared Materials

1. Students should not share books, materials, or equipment. For example, a student in the band's percussion section should not share drum mallets with another student.

Physical Education

1. To limit physical contact and the need to share equipment, Physical Education classes should focus on individual skill development.
 - a. If a team competition is used, students should sanitize their hands before and after the competition.
 - b. If team competitions are used, equipment should be sanitized before and after use.
2. Locker rooms should not be used. Students should participate in P.E. in their dress code clothing.

Library (suggestions from DPI's *Education Forward*)

1. Use online catalog to place holds on materials and have library staff retrieve items and check them out to students and staff.
2. Pull small selections of books from shelves, set out on display, and allow youngest students to select from them.
3. Limit student browsing directly from shelves by having them select options in catalog before retrieving items.
4. Provide hand sanitizer near shelves.
5. If students are selecting books for check-out in physical space, limit contact during process.
6. Have library staff operate computer with students scanning their book choices.
7. Older students can do self-check-out by scanning ID barcode and book choices.

Lunch

1. Students should sanitize their hands before going to lunch and when returning from lunch.
2. Students should be socially distanced in the line.
3. Lunch must be served. People should not serve themselves lunch.
 - a. One or two designated people need to serve the lunch.
4. If possible, students should sit with one seat in between the next student and not across from another student (*zig-zag*).
5. There should not be shared salt and pepper shakers, water pitchers, condiments, etc.
6. All dishes, utensils, etc. must be thoroughly cleaned after each use.
7. Kitchen staff must wear masks at all times while working in the Kitchen and serving lunch.

Extracurricular Activities, Field Trips

1. Extracurricular activities will return as normal with the option for individuals to wear masks.
 - a. There will not be screening, and physical distancing will not be required. (This is subject to change dependent on health department recommendations, WIAA/conference/league requirements, or venue rules.)
 - b. **EXCEPTION:** All Schools shall abide by the requirements enforced at each location. Venue Rules may require that Masks be worn during athletic events, by coaches, attendees and players, or the Venue may prohibit attendance by anyone who is not a member of the team. All such requirements dictated by either the Host team, or the County in which the extracurricular activity is taking place, shall be followed by our coaches, athletes/participants and parents.
2. The WIAA strongly encourages all eligible high school student-athletes to be vaccinated to avoid missing practice and competition due to illness or quarantine. This is a recommendation, but will remain a parental decision.
3. At this time, facilities and extracurricular activities will be open to visitors and spectators as normal at 100% capacity; however, please note that attendance is at your own risk and disease transmission is possible. Additionally, at any time, the local Health Department, and or the WIAA may implement changes to the current advisory. All schools will follow any and all Federal, State, County or Municipal regulation that may be issued / put in place during the course of the school year.
4. Field trips will generally be permitted but may be limited at the discretion of the individual or system administration, taking into account current public health recommendations. Rules and restrictions of field trip venues will be respected.

Illness and Absenteeism

Screening

1. Catholic Schools will not screen (take temperatures or ask health related questions) students as they enter the school building.
 - a. It is the responsibility of the parent (guardian) to make certain a child is healthy and able to attend school.
 - b. If, during the school day, a student appears to have an illness, the school will help the student and also proceed with a standard medical response like taking the student's temperature. (and isolate)
 - i. We need to be vigilant and not ignore possible symptoms of an illness.
2. Catholic Schools will cooperate with county or municipal health departments if a student or employee is diagnosed with a COVID-19 or another serious illness.
 - a. You need to document well.

Quarantine Guidelines

1. When the School has received notification that a student or staff member has received a positive Covid-19 diagnosis the following procedures will be followed:
 - a. Contact Tracing will be conducted pursuant to local health department guidelines
 - b. Those fully vaccinated will monitor for symptoms
 - c. Unvaccinated individuals / vaccinated who develop symptoms must quarantine pursuant to CDC and/or local guidelines
2. Remote learning shall be available to any quarantined student
3. When a teacher must quarantine, an in person substitute or classroom proctor if the individual teacher is able to provide online instruction.

Physical Health

1. Make certain all student and employee health files are complete and up-to-date.
2. Be prepared and know local health clinic and hospital information.
3. Continue utilization of an “isolation room” for ill students. Sick students should wait in an isolation room until a parent arrives to take them home.
4. Continue using/making available contactless thermometers.
 - a. Students who have a temperature over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit will need to be sent home with a guardian immediately.
 - b. Employees with temperatures over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit need to be sent home.

Emotional Health

1. Use the power of prayer to work through difficult situations and problems.
2. All proper crisis plans should be up-to-date, and employees trained according to the plans.
 - a. Communicate with other local schools and county or municipal services to make sure support is readily available if needed.
3. Without violating HIPAA laws, make chaplains, counselors, and social workers aware of families in need or at risk.
4. Prepare surveys or assessments to determine students’ emotional health individually and as a student body. This should help guide beginning of the school year activities.
5. If a student, parent, or employee is particularly anxious, consider having another individual be his or her “buddy.”
6. Monitor the emotional health of the faculty and staff. Offer retreats and in-services that help employees stay strong spiritually, mentally, and physically.

Student Absent

1. We must work with parents to promote healthy practices within each school and family.
2. Guardians should keep a child home when the child has obvious symptoms of being ill (fever, stomach ailments, severe running nose, a bad cough, difficulty breathing, headaches, sore throat, etc.).

3. Teachers need to prepare for prolonged student absents. Every teacher needs a plan to work with individual students who miss many days of school in a row; simply having the student “catch-up” is not an option.
4. Administrators and administrative assistants need to monitor student absenteeism closely. Administrators must communicate well with families who are dealing with prolonged illnesses.

School closure due to absenteeism

In the case of a widespread illness in the state, county, or community, the school could close for an extended time period, out of concern for the health students, staff, and community.

If there is potential for seasonal or pandemic illness affecting your school:

1. Monitor daily attendance and reasons for absences.
2. If student absences reach a level beyond 20%, alert the county or municipal health department.
3. If absences go beyond 20% of the student body, consider closing the school.
 - a. The decision to close school due to high absenteeism is serious; you must have the permission of your pastor or dean to close the school.
4. Administration will need to locally decide what the threshold is for staff absenteeism to consider school closure.

If the local public-school closes for reasons of wide-spread illness and your Catholic school relies on them for bus service, your Catholic school may have to close as well, if unable to provide distance learning for the students in need of bussing. If the Catholic school administration feels it is prudent to close school while the public school remains open, with pastor or dean permission the Catholic School administrator may do so.

Staff Absent

1. Each teacher and administrator must have a documented plan for working from home.
 2. Employees who are obviously ill should not come to work.
 3. The school will need a plan to minimally supervise an absent teacher’s classroom.
 - a. If the teacher is quarantining but is strong enough to teach virtually from home, this option should be explored. (Thus, a responsible adult could monitor the absent teacher’s classroom.)
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