



## Department of Catholic Schools

Archdiocese of San Antonio  
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What a year 2020 has been! I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to our school faculty and staff, as well as parents and students for persevering through the challenges the pandemic posed. We are proud of the swift pivot to distance learning our schools made, and the continued learning and high level of student engagement that continued. We learned a lot from our experience with distance learning and it has paved the path for planning for the future.

According to information provided to the Department of Catholic Schools from 20 schools, the student engagement rate was an incredible 96 percent during this time of online learning! Stories that have been reported recently in local media giving figures of some public school districts that were coping with student engagement rates of 50 percent or so. Due to this excellent student engagement rate maintained by Catholic schools, administrators will begin instruction this fall at standard grade-level with remediation work only as needed. Additionally, in some subjects such as math, data collected indicates a continued upward trend indicating continued progression.

### **How we are preparing**

Catholic schools follow the guidelines of the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops (TCCB), which works closely with the office of Governor Greg Abbott and public health authorities. We are monitoring and following public health ordinances and civic direction. As the pandemic is an evolving situation, we are preparing for the potential of multiple scenarios:

1. Full return to campus

We welcome the opportunity to be in community in-person with our students. This scenario will include entrance protocols, cleaning protocols, social distancing, high-quality instruction, providing social emotional support for students, and engaging the faith community.

2. Hybrid

If returning to campus is permitted with requirements of limited numbers due to social distancing requirements, those schools that are unable to accommodate the entire student body at one time will be planning scheduling for cycling different groups on campus to limit the total number on campus. This scenario will include entrance protocols, cleaning directives, social distancing, high-quality instruction for both in-person and online, providing social emotional support for students, and continuing to engage in the faith community.

3. Distance learning

If local authorities restrict schools from gathering in-person, we will resume distance learning. This scenario includes delivering high-quality instruction online, and continuing to provide social emotional support to students and maintaining the faith community.

Some parents have expressed a concern for vulnerable members of their family, prompting the request for the option of distance learning rather than a requirement for in-person attendance. Understanding the validity of this concern, we are working to provide this opportunity to parents.

Our schools will maintain a traditional calendar with the first day of school scheduled for August 17, 2020. We have every intention of beginning the school year with faculty and students fully on campus. In our summer planning, schools will take measures to allow for a seamless transition in and out of distance learning if required to meet the health concerns of the pandemic.

### **Financial considerations**

We know there are many who are concerned that the pandemic will return and the scenario may be a full return to distance learning. Governor Abbott's recent update has included an acknowledgement that private schools fall under their accrediting body for direction in planning for the 2020-2021 academic year. This provides us with significant flexibility to meet the needs of our various communities in meaningful ways while adhering to accreditation standards of the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops.

Some have expressed a concern about students not being able to attend in-person and raised the question of a reduced tuition rate. Catholic schools are non-profits, and as such budgets are positioned as break-even. Ministry agreements with teachers are signed for a year at a time, and whether through an in-person or online platform, teachers deliver quality instruction and facilitate student learning. We cannot continue to provide academic growth and student success without them.

The average budget of Catholic schools is 80 percent personnel cost. The remaining 20 percent supports fixed operational costs. While we understand the request for a reduced rate this is not operationally viable. We will continue to work with individual families financially impacted by COVID-19 and are grateful for the many generous families within our community that have come forward to assist in meeting this need.

### **Continued Commitment**

Partnering with parents is a foundational belief within our Catholic schools. During this time of uncertainty, we must rely on our partnership more than ever. In our continued commitment to provide a quality Catholic education to the students within our community, we ask that each family re-enroll for the next school year as soon as possible. We encourage you to reach out to your principal or school leadership if you have any concerns about re-enrolling.

While the circumstances of COVID-19 have presented challenges, witnessing the amazing work within schools has filled us with hope for the coming school year. Taking the lessons we have learned, we are committed to shaping the future of Catholic education honoring our rich legacy of excellence. We are grateful for the opportunity to continue as a community, *Encountering Christ, United as Church*.

Sincerely,



Marti West  
Superintendent of Catholic Schools  
Archdiocese of San Antonio