



*This message is for all pastors, principals, parish operations directors/business managers and vicariate support teams in the Archdiocese.*

We are grateful for your ongoing support for our parishes and schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. We want to inform you of the general status of parishes and schools, the results of recent stakeholder surveys, and implications for our schools during the month of December.

#### SUMMARY STATUS

Despite rising cases of COVID-19 in the communities around us, we continue to experience very little evidence of any secondary spread of infections in our churches and schools. We believe this is the result of:

- **Strong implementation of health and safety protocols.** Our ongoing field audits of schools, for example, continue to confirm that most of our schools meet our prescribed safety requirements with some opportunities for modest improvements in a minority of schools.
- **Fast turnaround on quarantines.** When we learn of an infection or exposure, we move quickly to quarantine parish offices, school cohorts or entire schools based on the level and nature of exposure.

While people do come into our facilities with infections from outside our environment, leading to quarantines, the large majority of our worship spaces and schools are open at any given time.

This is an incredible achievement due to the dedication and commitment of so many pastors, principals, teachers, parish and school staff, Pastoral Center team members and parent volunteers. This has required very long workdays for all, and everyone should be proud of all that has been accomplished during these difficult times.

#### SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

Thank you for the quick response to the surveys conducted from November 16-18, 2020. We received responses from most pastors and principals, 3800+ teachers, and more than 22,500 families.

The key findings of the survey are as follows:

- There is **strong comfort with the implementation of safe operating practices** in our facilities.
- **Burnout / pace of work is a significant issue** for many, particularly among many members of our school staff. In particular, teachers experience significant workload and stress from managing both their in-person and remote learners.
- The **large majority of pastors agree with not placing further restrictions on worship guidelines**.
- The **large majority of school parents continue to feel comfortable with in-person learning**, likely reflecting the important and significant academic and social-emotional benefits to children from in-person learning.
- The majority of pastors and principals support continuing with in-person learning until Christmas break, and a near-majority of teachers are also supportive.

- **Perspectives do vary across communities** based on a combination of factors unique to local situations (e.g., infections experience, staffing availability, workload issues).

## **IMPLICATIONS**

There are 3 primary implications for us going forward based on our review of community infections experience, survey results and operational factors:

- Affirming the recent communication from our Vicar General, we will **continue to stay the course on the current guidelines on Masses and sacramental celebrations.**
- Given the criticality of in-person learning to student growth and development, the **majority of schools will maintain in-person learning until Christmas break.** However, there are **some schools that will be allowed to transition temporarily to some form of an adjusted schedule or remote learning leading up to the Christmas break.** In most cases, these are schools in which the staff and families are aligned about transitioning because of shared concern around high infection rates in their communities and/or because of unique operational challenges at the school. We will contact these schools on a case-by-case basis in the next 24 hours to discuss options and next steps.
- We know that virtual learning has been a significant source of stress in some schools. We will be working with designated schools to explore alternative options when warranted.

Next week, we will share overall survey results summaries. The OCS will also share with school families a message of gratitude for their commitment to Catholic education and for their continued diligence in working with principals and teachers to make this year as successful as possible.

We know these are difficult and stressful times for all, and that our clergy and staff across the Archdiocese have been working very long hours. We are grateful for your incredible commitment to the essential mission serving the people of God and the children and families of our Archdiocese.

Yours in Christ,

Betsy Bohlen and Dr. Jim Rigg