



MEMO

Date: March 9, 2020

TO: School Administrators

FROM: Bruce Varick

RE: CoVID-19 Update

I would like to take this opportunity to provide an update on the planning efforts of the Office for Schools regarding CoVID-19. I would like to recognize and acknowledge the efforts of the central office staff of Seton Catholic Schools for their work on this as well. They have done a tremendous amount of work and I am grateful to them for their willingness to share information. I know others are devoting time and effort to planning as well. I thank anyone who has shared info with our office.

We are planning for the most-disruptive occurrence for our schools – the mandated shutdown of all school sites for an extended period of time. We recognize this could happen on a small scale – one or two schools in a given community, likely order by the school's local health department. Or it could happen for all 102 schools of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. A decision of this magnitude – closing all schools – would originate at the state government level. It is our sincerest hope that this is a planning exercise, and not an action plan that is needed to be implemented. As we plan for the worst, know that we will be providing the most pertinent, useful information that we can give you. Due to the complexity and fluidity of the situation, we will not share the whole plan until necessary. We do not have all of the answers – we do not even know all of the questions – so we will do our best to avoid any unnecessary stress and angst for you.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the risk to the American Public for those not exposed to CoVID-19 is low. However, the situation is rapidly evolving and we will do our best to keep you apprised. The CDC and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services are providing daily updates on their websites:

- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- WI DHS: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/outbreaks/index.htm>

We also recommend reminding the entire school community – students, parents, faculty, staff, and parish staff – that every individual has the right to the privacy of their personal information. As such, some information will not be able to be shared by the school.

Symptoms:

Symptoms of CoVID-19 are similar to the seasonal flu, and include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

OFFICE FOR SCHOOLS

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It may be a good idea to remind parents of your school policy regarding illness and the guidelines for when a child should be kept at home and for how long the child needs to stay home after being fever-free. This is usually 24 hours. Students who are sick are a risk to all students and staff and should stay home. Should a student become ill during the school day, it may be helpful to have an area where the student could be isolated, but still directly supervised, to minimize exposure to others in the school. We know that there are times parents are not able to immediately come and pick up their child.

We also know that a student has the greatest opportunity to learn when he or she is present in school. Attendance is a major point of emphasis in some schools. We need to make sure that students and parents understand it is acceptable, actually preferable, that they stay home when sick. Health trumps attendance.

Likewise, faculty and staff should stay home when sick. We understand the difficulty most schools have in finding substitute teachers, but a sick staff member is a threat to spread his / her illness. I would question the effectiveness of a sick teacher as well. This may necessitate other faculty and staff taking on extra duties, and it may necessitate the combining of classes. We know these are not ideal alternatives, but for short periods of time, it is what must be done. I would encourage you as the school leader to intentionally express thanks and appreciation for your entire staff – do not forget custodial and kitchen staff – during times of need and duress.

Student / Faculty Attendance Rate:

There may come a point where a school needs to close due to a large portion of students and / or faculty out with illness. There is no specific number or percentage at which this decision is made. It is a local decision, and we strongly urge consultation with your local health department and local public school district in this situation.

We do ask, however, that you make the Office for Schools, through Bruce Varick, aware of times when you have a high number of student absences that could potentially trigger a closure. We will support a local decision to close, and the best way we can help is to know before it occurs.

School Closure:

The goal is prevent a closure, and effective cleaning strategies are necessary to reach this goal.

Prevention strategies for students and parents:

- Practice good hand washing, wash hands in warm water for at least 20 seconds while scrubbing with soap.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
- Use a tissue when coughing or sneezing and properly dispose of it or cough into your elbow/sleeve if a tissue is not available.
- Do not touch your mouth, nose or eyes. If you do, wash your hands immediately.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces in your home including doorknobs, light switches, computer keyboards, laptops, and cell phones.

Prevention strategies for Teachers:

- Use disinfecting wipes on all classroom desks and chairs at the end of each school day. Students can help with this procedure. Please allow desks and chairs to air dry for maximum disinfection effectiveness.

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- Wipe down all Chromebooks / computers with disinfecting wipes both on the surface and the keyboard after use.
- Review proper handwashing techniques with students.
- Review proper sneeze and cough etiquette with students.
- Remind students to throw used tissues into the trash immediately rather than leaving them on desktops.

Prevention strategies for Custodians:

- Thoroughly wipe all high-contact surfaces in the building including doorknobs, light switches, office counters and bubblers with a cleaner followed by disinfectant. This should be done daily effective immediately.
- Follow the CDC Guidelines for How to Clean and Disinfect to Help Slow the Spread of the Flu.
- <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm>
- During Easter / spring break, conduct a thorough cleaning and disinfection of the entire building.

Students or Staff / Faculty Traveling during Spring / Easter Break:

We know that many families plan vacations during breaks from school. While it would not be appropriate for our schools to encourage anyone to change travel plans, we do encourage you to plan ahead in the event an individual member or members of your school community face quarantine:

- ***Academic expectations for students:*** should a student experience the need to be absent from school for an extended period of time due to a quarantine, what will the expectations be for that student to account for material presented during that time period? We encourage the school to be reasonable, and flexible, in working with the student and family. It is quite possible that this will look different for different students within your school.
- ***Staff / Faculty:*** It is reasonable to ask staff / faculty if they have any plans to travel where their risk of exposure could be greater. This should be done for planning purposes, as their responsibilities would need to be covered during their absence. It may also be helpful to know where they are so that any necessary communication from the school can reach them.

Hours / Days of Instruction:

The required number of hours of direct pupil instruction is set by state statute. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee follows this statute. Therefore, only the legislature and the governor, through legislative action and signed into law by the governor, can change that. We also require 177 student contact days, though this is not established by statute. It is our policy.

For the sake of planning, our guidance to you is to plan for the necessity of getting all of the required hours of direct pupil instruction in and this instruction will need to be delivered face-to-face. Our current policy does not allow for virtual or online learning on a school-wide basis.

Should it become necessary to close schools for an extended period of time, we will consider on an appropriate level guidance that may come from DPI regarding the make-up of lost instructional time.

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