



PITTSBURGH CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Michelle A. Peduto

Director of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Pittsburgh
mpeduto@diopitt.org
Office: (412) 456-3090
Cell: (412) 400-6257

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Dear Catholic School Community,

Since my last letter, we have celebrated Thanksgiving, Christmas, and welcomed in the New Year. Our Catholic school community is navigating these challenging COVID times with extraordinary collaboration and adaptability. There is no doubt that the need for pivoting between instructional models and following the necessary quarantine protocols are challenging, but we are making it work to the benefit of our children. Our hearts, minds, and bodies are weary of this virus and now, more than ever, we want it all to be over. As we continue to monitor the infection rates at the local, state, and national levels, it is clear that we have more to do before life can return to normal.

Our teachers, administrators, and staff members continue to serve our students and families with a level of commitment that honors their vocation within our schools and our Church. There is no way to adequately express in words the gratitude they deserve for their great efforts. I would also like to thank our volunteers! COVID has halted many in-person opportunities for volunteers, but they have found alternative ways to help. Food drives, gift collections, and other expressions of Christian love were not extinguished by COVID-19. In that same spirit, our students continue to find ways to serve their neighbors with the help of our school community!

As I wrote in my previous letter, we will continue to face many challenges in the days ahead as we monitor the COVID infection rate. We remain committed to our goal of keeping our schools open five days a week for in-person instruction. To accomplish this goal, schools will continue to pivot quickly which may require individual schools to go virtual for short periods of time (5 – 14 days) depending on the situation. The infection rate within the school, the ability to staff the school appropriately, and the community spread are factors considered as school administrators make the decisions related to the changing the instructional model. I continue to urge families to develop an emergency childcare plan just in case. As we have learned, changes in school operations can change with very little notice. If you do not feel comfortable with in-person instruction, all of our schools continue to offer a fully virtual option for remote instruction.

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The Schools Office has reevaluated the decision to maintain the close contact 14-day quarantine rather than adopt the less restrictive time frame that was offered by PADOH as an option in mid-December. After reviewing the information, the guidance most in line with our goal of keeping our school buildings open is the 14 day model. This is supported by all agencies in the fine print. Additionally, we will not alter the Diocesan policy that does not permit testing out of quarantine as it pertains to close contacts.

CDC: “CDC currently recommends a quarantine period of days.”

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/scientific-brief-options-to-reduce-quarantine.html>

ACHD: “Quarantining for 14 days after your last possible exposure is the best way to limit the spread of COVID-19.”

[https://www.alleghenycounty.us/uploadedFiles/Allegheny_Home/Health_Department/Resources/COVID-19/Docs/Isolation%20Quarantine%20Basics\(1\).pdf](https://www.alleghenycounty.us/uploadedFiles/Allegheny_Home/Health_Department/Resources/COVID-19/Docs/Isolation%20Quarantine%20Basics(1).pdf)

PA DOH: “The most protective recommended quarantine period remains at 14 days post exposure.” [https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/HAN/2020-PAHAN-538-12-4-](https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/HAN/2020-PAHAN-538-12-4-ALT%20-%20Updated%20Quarantine%20Recommendations%20for%20Persons%20Exposed%20to%20COVID-19.pdf)

[ALT%20-%20Updated%20Quarantine%20Recommendations%20for%20Persons%20Exposed%20to%20COVID-19.pdf](https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/HAN/2020-PAHAN-538-12-4-ALT%20-%20Updated%20Quarantine%20Recommendations%20for%20Persons%20Exposed%20to%20COVID-19.pdf)

We will continue with the 14 day close contact protocol for the near future until the infection rate drops significantly and/ or the vaccine is widely available. Our school employees have a priority status for receiving the vaccine. We are currently working with state agencies to facilitate this process.

The travel guidance put forth the Pennsylvania Department of Health will take effect immediately.

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Diseases%20and%20Conditions/Travel%20Order%20Amendment.pdf>

In November, we delayed the start of K-8 interscholastic winter sports until January. This was done just days before Governor Wolf introduced the state holiday restrictions that impacted all activities from K- 12. Our Diocesan Athletic Director, Gary Roney, has worked tirelessly with school officials to implement a strategy to allow winter sports to resume. The current protocols include the updated mask mandate for our K-12 student athletes. The face covering policy is controversial for some, but we will continue to rely on medical agencies to inform our decision-making process. While the necessary decisions are challenging to accept at times, please know that our focus remains on the health and safety of our students and our staff. Parents and guardians know their children best, and they are your cherished gifts from God. If your child does not have a medical exception for the mask requirement and you do not feel it is possible for your child to play with a mask on during competition, you may want to make the decision to

pull your child from winter sports while these mandates are in place. We will vigilantly monitor our sports programs to ensure no significant impact on in-person instruction and local infection rates. Please continue to follow health and safety protocols at home and in school.

The challenges of the holidays are apparent in the data from mid-November through today. Since November 14th, we had a total of 94 positive cases identified. This is across 32 elementary schools, 7 diocesan high schools, 13,000 students, and 1200 teachers and staff members. The information on the exposures continues to support our previous conclusion that individuals are exposed at events and gatherings outside of school. We continue to pray for the complete recovery of all those with positive test results. The safety protocols that are in place in our schools continue to prevent in-school spread. We will remain vigilant as we address the continuing challenges of the months ahead. Our goal is to keep cases and quarantines at a minimum.

The breakdown of positive cases from November 14 through January 11 is provided below:

- 2 staff members
- 22 elementary teachers
- 4 high school teachers
- 34 elementary students
- 32 high school students

In closing, it is clear that we are running a marathon and not a sprint when it comes to COVID-19. I am grateful to all of you for your incredible patience, collaborative attitude, and kind support. I appreciate the conversations I have had with some of you and your willingness to understand the bigger picture. Please know that we will continue to do all that we can do to care for our precious students. Their spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being drive our decisions and actions every day. Make no mistake, the compassion we show to each other in times of adversity teaches our children that we live our faith. Above all else, our path should lead to the eternal embrace of our Father in Heaven. It is a blessing for me to share this journey with you.

As always, you are welcome to reach out to me by email or phone (see contact information above). God bless you and may our Blessed Mother protect your families under her loving mantle. Please keep our schools in your prayers and know that you are always in mine. I wish you all a very blessed New Year.

Your sister in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle A. Peduto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michelle A. Peduto

