



March 19, 2020

Dear Catholic School Families,

May the Peace of Christ be with you. As we face the unknown and the rapid advancement of the COVID-19 virus, know that the Diocese of Orlando Office of Catholic Schools is working to assure that our children have continuity of instruction.

At this time, we are following guidelines set by Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida Department of Education and are closing all high school and elementary school campuses until April 15. However, as originally noted in prior communications, all Catholic schools in the diocese will begin distance learning on March 30. Your principal and teachers will work directly with you. This will be the first system-wide transition to distance learning so there may be some glitches initially. However, the principals will work swiftly to resolve them to maintain the continuum of learning.

Because academic excellence is a priority, my office is providing guidance and support to all schools based on the best research on distance learning. Many of our school communities were already engaging in these best practices for electronic learning but will now employ them through the curriculum. In keeping with our Catholic teachings and traditions, the hallmark of our very being, religious and faith elements will continue to be infused throughout our rigorous curriculum.

You also play an important role in the success of your child(ren)'s education. In an effort to provide structure and consistency and in accordance with state law, attendance will be taken daily, plus homework and lessons are expected to be completed and turned in on time. Teachers will be available daily during preset times for phone and/or video conferences with you and the students to support their ongoing learning. Our goal is to make this like a normal instructional day as much as possible for you and your family. I know this is a major disruption in your normal routine, and we will do everything possible to ensure that our teachers are present to teach and support you through this new process. If you have limited access to devices or internet service, please alert your principal immediately.

In his public statewide address on March 17, 2020, Governor Ron DeSantis said testing in public schools will be suspended this year. In addition, he said, "Parents may, at their discretion, choose to keep their child in the same grade for the 2021 school year. K-12 grades will not be calculated for 2019-2020."

We hold our schools to a very high standard. As of last week, our national testing for high schools and elementary schools has been completed. We will use these scores, as we have in past years, to improve academic success and in moving our students forward to the next grade level. For those families participating in state scholarship programs, Step Up, Gardiner and McKay will continue to be fully funded. Scholarship checks will be mailed to schools in the normal time frame. Your principal will instruct you on steps for endorsing checks. For those families who may find themselves in need of financial assistance through these programs, please speak with your principal immediately. It is our goal to keep our Catholic education family together in this time of challenge.

As we know from our faith, we are united as the Body of Christ regardless of distance or circumstance. We will continue to fulfill our mission to provide faith-filled education and to pray as one Body of Christ through these uncertain and challenging times.

In Christ,

Henry Fortier

*Secretary for Education/ Superintendent of Catholic Schools*