



CATHOLIC DIOCESE  
*of*  
**BATON ROUGE**  
Office of the Bishop

02 August 2021

To the Clergy, Catholic School Community, and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge:

Last August, our entire Catholic community was proud of the collective work done to safely open our Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through creative means, principals, teachers, faculty members, and all Catholic school staff contributed in our fight to stay open and to stay safe. As a result, infection rates in our school system were minimal throughout the last school year. These hard-won successes in a particularly turbulent time underscore our local Church's commitment to educational quality and the development of the whole person.

At the conclusion of the last school year and with COVID numbers in Louisiana on the decline, many believed that the beginning of the 2021/2022 school year would be much different. While some degree of normalcy resumed in our lives and even in the Church, the recent spikes in COVID cases in our local communities are particularly alarming. The CDC has once again expanded substantially its guidance to keep communities and schools safe.

Given this new reality, the growing surge of COVID-19 infections, and the new mask mandate issued today by Governor Edwards, I believe the best way for us to begin the 2021-2022 school year is to return to school using similar practices with which we ended the last year that include physical distancing, proper quarantining and the mandatory wearing of masks. There will be no exceptions or exemptions to these practices based on vaccination status. All students, faculty and administrators will follow the same guidelines. Principals, teachers, students, and parents will be familiar with these protocols. I believe these difficult decisions will enable us to safely begin our school year while observing these new realities we are facing as a community. If circumstances change in the future, we will also change our practices based upon medical advice, wisdom, and common sense.

As I wrote to pastors, principals, and parents with children enrolled in Catholic schools just last week, two goals have guided my decision making throughout this pandemic. First, I want to ensure that each day, everyone in our schools (especially children, faculty, and staff) are as safe as possible. Second, I want to keep our elementary and high schools open for in class learning with minimal disruption. Reflecting upon our experience last school year, each of the protocols and procedures used then were implemented to successfully accomplish these goals.

We begin this school year, tired and weary due to this pandemic, but our eyes are fixed on a future filled with hope knowing that our courageous actions now will again yield much success in days to come!

Hope in the Lord,

Most Reverend Michael G. Duca  
Bishop of Baton Rouge