



Elke County Catholic School System

August 23, 2021

To our ECCSS families,

I am reaching out to offer an update on our school reopening plans. For the sake of efficiency I will start with the basic details for how we plan to open schools next week, and follow up with information that will explain our decisions and our process for analyzing the situation moving forward.

1. Masks will be optional in all ECCSS schools when the academic year begins. The CDC and the Diocese of Erie Catholic Schools Office recommend masking, but both understand that these decisions should be made at the local level, in response to local circumstances. ECCSS supports a family's decision to choose masking, and if you choose to have your child wear a mask our school community will respect and support that choice.
2. Our public districts operate and administer school transportation. The federal government has mandated masks on buses transporting children to and from school. It is our understanding that all of the districts in our area will be following this mandate. We will communicate with parents as this situation evolves.
3. We will continue to rely on you as parents to monitor your children's health and keep them home if they are exhibiting signs of illness. You all did a fantastic job of that last year, and we will continue to support your efforts by distributing information and making staff available if needed to help you make decisions about when your child can be in school.
4. We will continue to clean classrooms and high traffic areas daily.
5. We will maintain a social distance of 3-6 feet for students, when practicable.
6. We will continue with our improved ventilation practices from last year.
7. We have transitioned from traditional water fountains to touch-free bottle filling stations in all schools.
8. We will assist in contact tracing to isolate/quarantine students, faculty and staff as cases or close contacts when appropriate.
9. We have instructional technology and processes in place to provide a seamless transition to remote instruction for quarantined and isolated students, and also in the case of government mandated school closures.

Our top priority is providing a high-quality, in-person Catholic education for our students. Our administrative team has been authorized by the ECCSS Board of Directors to continually monitor the situation and adjust our policies accordingly. A link to the high-level, board approved reopening plan is attached to this communication.

Mitigation Rationale Statement:

The ECCSS Board of Directors and administration will analyze data from a wide variety of state, federal and local agencies to determine our mitigation strategies moving forward. These include:

1. County data about cases and hospitalizations. This is provided by the CDC, Pennsylvania Department of Health, and a host of other agencies. The data is not always the same, as the various agencies measure things in different ways, but we strive to collect and review the information in a way that offers us consistent guidance.
2. Local context: In addition to raw numbers, we will assess where cases are happening and how spread is occurring in our community to more fully understand the challenges facing our school community.
3. In-school data. In many ways this is our most important metric. What are we seeing in our schools every day? Are cases coming into the school from the outside, wider community? Do they appear to be spreading within a specific classroom or school building? Different situations merit different mitigation responses, and we will assess them regularly to guide our efforts to maintain safe, in-person instruction.

I am extremely proud of the work our students, faculty, staff and families did last year to provide a high-quality Catholic education in very trying circumstances. We know that we can do it. We are hoping that this year provides us with a school year that is far closer to “normal.” That is our goal.

At the same time, we know that the situation is extremely fluid, and we ask for your patience and understanding as we analyze and react to the situation moving forward.

As always, thank you for all you do to form our students in the image of Christ.

Sam MacDonald¹



President, ECCSS

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The following link includes The ECCSS Board Approved School Reopening Plan for the 2021-22 school year. [W ECCSS 2021 Health and Safety Plan August 2021.docx](#)