



The Archdiocese of Chicago School Reopening Plan is focused on safe, in-person instruction as the best approach complimented by a quality, robust virtual option.

“The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly advocates that all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school.”

American Academy of Pediatrics – June 2020

Based on the guidance of child healthcare experts, as well as the best models for academic instruction and learning development, the Archdiocese firmly believes that our students, and our families, are best served through full-week, in-person learning. Students thrive academically, socially, emotionally and spiritually when physically present in school with their educators, classmates and friends. Studies have shown that American students sustained significant learning loss during the COVID-19 shutdown. While educators did a tremendous job of quickly adjusting their lesson plans to e-Learning, we collectively recognize that online learning is not a substitute for in-class learning and that it has proven to be challenging for elementary and secondary students, particularly in low-income communities. Our children deserve the best we can provide, which comes with the structure and consistency of daily, full-week, face-to-face instruction and the opportunity to learn and grow with their peers. To this end, we have developed a safe and comprehensive reopening plan, which provides for a five-day school week of in-person instruction using a cohort model that keeps children in consistent groups (cohorts) throughout their day.

Input into the Plan

The School Reopening Plan was developed over the course of several months with the guidance of a diversified team of contributors and various expert inputs including:

- An expansive sampling of 900 parents across the Archdiocese
- A cross section of thoughtful principals from Cook and Lake Counties, inner-city and suburban schools
- Archdiocese School Board members
- A panel of distinguished medical experts to review the plan and provide feedback based on their firsthand knowledge of our current medical environment.

We aligned our plan with the recently published guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), *COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Reentry*, and made it consistent with guidance from the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Chicago Department of Public Health.

Features of the Archdiocese plan include:

- Cohort classes to minimize crossover among children and adults within the school
- Mandatory face masks
- Social distancing of desks as close to 6' apart when possible (*the AAP recommends 3' to 6' apart, when feasible*)
- Increased hygiene and disinfecting practices
- Increased ventilation
- Daily temperature checks
- Liberal use of outdoor spaces where available
- Quarantine protocols, if necessary

Our plan emphasizes the irreplaceable value of full-week, in-person instruction

School districts across the country are adopting various approaches – some moving forward with full-week, in-person instruction, others going strictly virtual, while others are opting for a hybrid of the two. While some are pursuing hybrid schedules in attempts to achieve greater classroom distancing, based on the expert evidence available we believe there is very little incremental benefit to a possible additional foot in social distancing over the multi-layer precautions inherent in our plan. In addition to the negative academic impact on students, hybrid schedules create more student downtime on their virtual days leading to increased socializing and activities, thus potentially broadening students' exposure to germs. Conversely, a cohort model in which students are consistently with the same 15-30 classmates allows us to limit the potential of any cross contamination and exposure throughout the entire school.

Our plan includes a quality virtual learning option

Our plan strives to balance the needs of all Archdiocesan families with dual options – both an in-person learning experience and a virtual program for families not yet comfortable with in-person learning. Additional virtual learning plans will be in-place to address the short-term needs of students, if they are required to be temporarily out of the classroom for any reason.

Safety is – and will remain – our top priority

Central to our program is safety – it is our top priority and has informed every single conversation and element of our plan. Each of our school teams and all of our educators and staff are completing extensive training and preparation to safely deliver face-to-face instruction without compromising on academic excellence.

We are confident our plan provides the necessary platform to deliver superior, faith-based education in a safe manner. As we navigate this uncharted territory, we are committed to continuing our dialogue with our school families and leaders, governmental and civic authorities and our medical experts. We acknowledge the situation is fluid. Communication will be key. Should conditions change significantly, we will be in touch communicating any necessary modifications to the plan.

Additional Reading Source

AAP (Academy of American Pediatrics)

COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry ([Link](#))

McKinsey

COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime ([Link](#))

The Wall Street Journal

The Case for Reopening Schools ([Link](#))

The New York Times

Citing Educational Risks, Scientific Panel Urges That Schools Reopen

Younger children in particular are ill-served by remote learning, according to a report issued by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine ([Link](#))