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Continuity of Learning: Guidance for Families

In the event of a long-term shut down of school campuses, the Catholic Schools Office of the Diocese of Springfield offers the following guidance and expectations. While we constructed this plan to anticipate the potential closure of schools because of our current situation, it may be used to help in cases where individual school campuses or the system may be shut down in the future. We have used the term "remote learning" at this time because what we are providing for our families is not strictly digital learning, rather, a blended experience tailored to the needs of our individual families that incorporates technology, foundational resources, and family support.

Purpose

The Catholic schools of the Diocese of Springfield assist and support parents as the primary educators of their children. Our purpose is to continue academic and spiritual support for our families effectively in a remote, home-based, environment. In a remote environment, our schools continue to engage students with experiences that advance the two-fold mission of our schools; namely, academic excellence and solid faith formation. Learning experiences provided by our schools offer concept, skill, and knowledge development that is authentic and age-appropriate. These opportunities also provide a functional community where families are engaged in the learning process and have support from the Catholic Schools Office, principals, teachers, and one another in advancing the mission of the school. Learning opportunities should be interactive, inspire creativity, and balance on-screen and off-screen learning connected to the curriculum.

The following general considerations are anchors for this plan. The Catholic Schools Office is providing support for our school so that they can:

- Continue advancing the mission of Catholic education and the unique mission of each school, remembering the importance of integrating the Catholic faith into the educational process
- Focus on essential learning for all students – quality over quantity
- Provide flexible educational support to each family based on the materials and technology they have available to them
- Support a faith community through direct contact and resources for families
- Encourage the use of materials, resources, and platforms that best support learning
- Provide training to support new resources and platforms
- Balance a blended learning delivery that includes technology, traditional materials, face-to-face interaction, and virtual platforms
- Continue to assess learning in a meaningful manner assuring mastery of material and growth
- Establish consistent communications which clarify expectations and encourage community input and support
- Pray for and support families, continuously providing them witness to God who walks with us during this trying time
- Encourage creativity and centralize resources to maximize best practices and limit extraneous work and planning

Some General Subject Recommendations

Religion and Theology: In order to support the schools and provide family support to teaching the faith at home, the Catholic Schools Office will upload content each day via YouTube and/or shared on the Diocese of Springfield Catholic School's page. This family catechesis in conjunction with the regular school prayers and school supported service projects is sufficient for Religion instruction. If schools or individual teachers would like to add more, they are free to do so, remembering that Religion instruction is included in the general time guidelines for each grade.

Reading, Literature, and Language Arts: Schools have been encouraged to implement when possible and grade-appropriate a greater emphasis on reading literature and recommend dedicated reading time each day, providing structure to the families who are at home.

Science: Schools have been encouraged to incorporate experiment and project based learning at the intermediate and junior high level, helping students apply what they are learning in a meaningful manner. Little ones should be encouraged to observe, draw, and catalogue what they see in the natural world.

Math: Application of skills is definitely still important; however, at this time, we have recommended schools to help students practice and master their fundamentals.

Social Studies and History: Schools have been encouraged to support research history on a broader scale and utilize the many non-traditional resources available to learn about history. Schools should provide the opportunity to connect Social Studies and History instruction with other subjects including religion by having students learn about the lives of the Saints.

Arts and Supplements: At this time, there are many live performances of operas, musicals, Shakespeare readings, virtual zoo visits, and virtual National Parks visits. Taking advantage of these by inviting our students to experience the arts, nature, and the world in these ways will help provide a wonderful balance to their overall instructional experience at home.

Catholic Schools Office Expectations

- Provide a daily resource geared toward families regarding the Catholic faith recorded on a digital platform which can be shared on Diocesan and school communication platforms
- Support principals and teachers in their instructional roles through regular meetings and centralization of professional development opportunities for remote learning
- Support principals as they monitor remote learning
- Host regular virtual PLC (Professional Learning Community) meetings for teachers (subject specific and by grade-level) to share what is working and encourage cross-collaboration and innovative teaching methods
- Compile and maintain a list of helpful resources sorted by subject areas to support remote learning
- Set-up web-based professional development that teachers can participate in remotely
- Continue to offer prayers and support to individual schools, teachers, and families drawing on the Lord's grace to help us manage the stress of remote learning
- Set-up constructs and platforms that will enhance the learning experience of all schools once the school building or buildings are reopened to students

School-based Leadership Expectations

- Establish a communication process for community needs that includes a weekly communique to families
- Establish a process to inventory resources teachers have at their disposal at home and families have at their disposal to support remote learning
- Monitor teacher lesson plans, virtual instruction time, and assessment to ensure continuation of learning
- Ensure attendance is taken in some way
- Host a virtual faculty meeting at least weekly
- Provide weekly updates to the Catholic Schools Office on teaching and learning process, school management, and other pertinent information
- Actively consult with colleagues and research best practices that support remote learning
- Plan for coverage of classes in the event of staff absences
- Provide spiritual leadership by praying with and for the school community and making regular contact with teachers and families directly

Teacher Expectations

- Follow the principal's guidelines for the creation and posting of lesson plans
- Begin live classes and meetings with prayer and serve as spiritual leaders for the students
- Provide, as much as possible, the opportunity for students to interact with their peers and individual teachers online.
- Provide students with age-appropriate writing/journal opportunities that connect to service in the household or other experiences in their life that promote growth in their life skills and contribute to the well-being of the family and family relationships
- Continue to integrate the Catholic faith into lessons
- Create cross-curricular work when possible to maximize efficiency
- Incorporate activities that do not involve screen time into your classes remote learning process
- Create and communicate alternate learning plans for families who cannot access technology efficiently
- Host virtual office hours for students and families to ask questions and receive assistance
- Check student work regularly and post grades and daily attendance according to school expectations
- Video conference with students when necessary for accountability and liability (Do not video conference with students on a one to one basis. Either conference with parents, or have another teacher with you during consultations.)
- Communicate with the principal or counselor any concerns about specific students as soon as they arise
- Consult with other teachers and research ways to share best practices and/or strategies for remote learning
- Take advantage of virtual PLC's set up by the Diocese and professional development opportunities for remote learning when offered
- Keep variables in mind when planning lessons considering students may have:
  - Multiple classes
  - Other family responsibilities
  - Personal or family illness
  - Limited access to devices, internet, or basic supplies

● Pray with and for your students to help with their spiritual growth at this time

Grade Level Specific Expectations

The guidelines below are meant for any delivery model or learning activity including homework, and encompassing all subjects. Teachers may find that they have to scale back and adjust as time goes on to meet these time parameters. "Specials" teachers will work with classroom teachers to develop cross-curricular content to meet a variety of standards. Cross-curricular work benefits students and staff, as well as parents, by streamlining continuous learning (exempt high school). Specials teachers have a unique opportunity to engage students in creative ways at home.

The Diocese of Springfield recommended guidelines for student commitment each day are as follows:

● Pre-K: 60 minutes/day
● Grades K-1: 90 minutes/day
● Grades 2-3: 120 minutes/day
● Grades 4-5: 150 minutes/day
● Grades 6-8: 180 minutes/day
● Grades 9-12: 220 minutes/day with a minimum of 120 minutes contact time per subject per week

Recommendations for Parental Support

● Support the community and prayer life of the school
● Set up a workspace that is conducive for focus and study for your child
● Make sure your child contributes to household work and family life in productive ways
● Make sure your child is attending all live classes. (If for any reason your child cannot attend live classes, communicate in advance with the school to make them aware of your situation.)
● Continue to report absences following your school's policies and directives at this time
● Be aware that the teachers are still maintaining learning spaces even though they may be digital and, therefore, any misconduct or disruptive behavior will be subject to school discipline policy
● Work with your child's teachers to set up a consistent routine (This includes appropriate bedtimes, meal times, and schoolwork times. If this is a challenge because of your situation, contact your school to develop a reasonable schedule that fits your family's needs at this time.)
● Be sure your child is eating a healthy breakfast and lunch each day
● Do not do your child's work as policies for homework and academic integrity still apply
● Presume the best of your teacher and school leaders
● Follow the appropriate chain of command if an issue arises (Please contact your child's teacher if it is a class matter and the school administration if it is another matter)
● Stagger work time, to the best of your ability, for your children if you have more than one in school (Talk with your school to find reasonable alternatives to digital instruction if you do not have the capacity to deliver this consistently at your home.)
● Be sure your child is exercising daily
● Communicate consistently with your child's teachers (Remember that teachers are handling many more communications than normal because of the remote learning environment they are trying to support.)
● Pray with your children and your family. Pray for the teachers, school leaders, and all of those working for your child's education at this time in new circumstances.

Student Expectations (Grades 6-12)

- Adhere to your school's policies regarding remote learning
- Set up a workspace and work time for yourself
- Follow your school's directives for dress code when attending live sessions
- Make sure to attend all live classes and/or sessions (You should communicate with your teachers if you cannot attend a class or have to leave a class early.)
- Follow your class policies for making up work
- Strive for academic excellence at this time, earning grades to successfully complete your current grade level
- Complete and submit your work on time
- Do your own work (School policies for homework and academic integrity still pertain.)
- Make positive contributions to household work and family life
- Communicate with your parents and teachers, not your friends, if you have questions or concerns
- Practice good online etiquette being respectful of others in discussions and not distracting other students during class time
- Continue to follow the school's Acceptable Use Policy
- Take advantage of the opportunity to learn a new skill set in learning from home
- Do not use your cell phone unless it is the only device you have for classroom discussions
- Pray with your family and pray for your teachers, school leaders, and all those who are working to provide you a high quality learning experience in a Catholic school at this time

Guidelines for Online Etiquette:

Communicating in an online setting is much different than communicating face-to-face or in a classroom setting. Without certain body language, it can be difficult to know how what you are saying is being interpreted. Following some common rules for good online etiquette can ensure that the message you intend on conveying is being received correctly.

1. **Be respectful:** It is important to keep in mind the feelings and opinions of others, including students, parents, teachers, and school leaders. If you would not say something to someone's face, you should not say it online.
2. **Limit strong language, all caps, and exclamation points:** It is easy for text to be misread and misunderstood. Being aware of strong language can help identify if something may be misconstrued. Read everything out load before you send it.
3. **Be careful with humor and sarcasm:** Be sure if you are using humor that it is clear you are doing so. Emoticons and smileys can be helpful when conveying humor or sarcasm so that it is read correctly. Avoid using these however in formal communications and academic work.
4. **Grammar and spelling matter:** Your written communication should be professional and reflect proper writing style.
5. **Cite your sources:** If you are sharing an idea that is not your own, give credit by citing the appropriate source. This includes using sources in discussion forums.
6. **Don't post inappropriate material:** Nothing is private. School policies and legal policies can and will be used if necessary for any harassment.
7. **Consider others' privacy:** Ask permission before you forward someone's email messages to third parties.

8. **Think before you hit send:** Think carefully about what you are sending before contributing it. Once you send something, there is no taking it back. Grammar and spelling errors reflect on you.
9. **Be brief:** Be as concise as possible in providing your thoughts and stick to the point.
10. **Frivolous chatter:** Do not forward jokes, chain letters, memes, or unimportant emails to other students without their permission. It fills up their inboxes with clutter and the jokes could be misconstrued.

Some Final Considerations

Most importantly, we are a faith community. We must pray for and with one another. We must pray for and with our teachers. We must pray for and with our families. At this moment of great uncertainty and anxiety, our families look to us to be beacons of hope. If you are getting overwhelmed, reach out to one another and us. Let us place all of our work at the feet of St. Joseph and ask him to help us work quietly and diligently for the glory of God.