



**DIOCESE of ERIE**  
*Sharing the Catholic faith in northwest Pennsylvania*

6.9.2020

## *An update from the Superintendent*

Dear Parents and Guardians:

I would like to start by thanking all of you for the amazing support and commitment to Catholic education that you have demonstrated over the past couple of months. In my experience, it is clear the family-school partnership is more vital than ever. We did our best to continue providing education when others just stopped, and you stayed with us in spite of difficult circumstances and uncertainty. I want to acknowledge the significant sacrifices you made as we all wrestled with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I am so grateful for your patience and flexibility as we quickly adapted to remote learning from home.

I want to provide a few important updates on initiatives we are implementing in the Catholic Schools Office (CSO) to support all of the schools and administrators in the Diocese of Erie as they continue to navigate the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we are still waiting on more specific guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, we are proactively making plans for the fall. Here are a few key points that will be helpful for you to know:

1. Dr. Sam Signorino, assistant superintendent, and I meet weekly with representatives from the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference (PCC) and the superintendents from the other seven dioceses in Pennsylvania to discuss educational needs.

This network has allowed us to remain well-informed about key developments such as the CARES Act, the Paycheck Protection loans and other issues directly impacting our schools' response to the pandemic. It has given us an important opportunity to share concerns, discuss legal opinions and successfully advocate for political action.

2. The CSO holds frequent (usually, once a week) sessions for all Catholic school administrators in the diocese. Topics include updates from the PCC meetings along with guidance on the latest developments. Recent discussions have focused on final grades and conducting graduation ceremonies while following social distancing guidelines. The meetings also include networking time for administrators as well as a question and answer period. Administrators frequently propose topics for discussion.
3. The CSO has just released a comprehensive "Return to School" planning guide for schools and systems to use as thoughts turn to the fall. This planning guide asks administrators to develop a Core Planning Team to address how the pandemic will

impact all aspects of the school community. Key areas include: governance, health/wellness, facilities, school operations, instruction, technology, Catholic identity, fundraising/advancement/enrollment and finance.

4. I am pleased to report that the CSO is providing professional development support and resources to school leaders that address the mental health and wellness of students and staff — an aspect that needs and deserves our attention. Topics will include social-emotional learning, dealing with anxiety and providing self-care as they deal with the disruptions and stresses caused by the pandemic.
5. Over the past two years, the CSO has been working with a committee of representatives from the schools to develop a unified assessment plan. Although our roll-out has been interrupted, I am excited to report that we are still able to move forward with interim assessments in the fall. These short, content-specific assessments that provide immediate feedback are needed more than ever. This resource will allow our teachers to quickly assess student progress and identify gaps that may have occurred due to the disruption to the school year. Teachers can use that information to specifically tailor learning experiences based on the needs identified in their classrooms.
6. Although we are planning for face-to-face learning in the fall, we also are assisting school leaders in identifying technology solutions and providing teacher training to increase their readiness for a blended model of learning if the need arises.

I want you to know it has been an honor and a privilege to work with your school leaders and teachers to support your school communities during this time. I have been so impressed and edified by the creativity, perseverance and commitment they have displayed during one of the most difficult experiences I have ever encountered as an educator. Please know we will continue to do our best to support them and you, both now and as we proceed into the fall.

Thank you for your continued commitment and prayers as we use this opportunity to find innovative and meaningful ways to live out our mission of providing a faith-filled Catholic education for your children. You play a critical role in sustaining our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jim Gallagher".

Jim Gallagher  
Superintendent of Schools