

September 25, 2020



Holy Cross
144 E. Mt Airy Avenue

Our Mother of Sorrows/
St. Ignatius of Loyola
617 N. 43rd Street

St. Barnabas
6334 Buist Avenue

St. Cyril of Alexandria
716 Emerson Avenue

St. Frances Cabrini
405 N. 65th Street

St. Gabriel
2917 Dickinson Street

St. Helena-Incarnation
6101 N. 5th Street

St. Malachy
1012 W. Thompson Street

St. Martin de Porres
2300 W. Lehigh Avenue

St. Martin of Tours
5701 Loretto Avenue

St. Raymond of Penafort
7940 Williams Road

St. Rose of Lima
1522 N. Wanamaker Street

St. Thomas Aquinas
1631 S. 18th Street

St. Veronica
3521 N. 6th Street

Dear IMS Families,

First, I would like to thank you for the incredible support you have given and your partnership as parents, grandparents, and other caregivers with our faculty and leaders. All of your hard work led to a successful beginning of the school year, remotely, even in these challenging times. Our faith, and our deep belief in students' God-given potential, is what drives this work forward and is what encourages us to find whatever ways possible to be in community with one another.

In August, we told you we would operate in a virtual model through September. We committed to keeping a close eye on local health data and positivity rates, the experiences of schools in our communities that chose in-person re-openings, and our ability to ensure our buildings' safety to provide a quality academic experience. We stated that we would not open schools until the data showed that it was safe for teachers and students.

We are pleased to report:

- COVID-19 positivity rates in Philadelphia and surrounding areas have remained **below 3% over** the last few weeks, which is below the 5% rate identified as a threshold based on local health agency recommendations.
- Surrounding schools in our region, where **tens of thousands of students currently attend over 100 institutions**, in both hybrid and full in person models have not experienced widespread COVID-19 outbreaks. The few isolated incidents that have occurred were able to be contained and managed effectively.
- The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) PolicyLab, who we rely on for pandemic-related health data, recently issued public guidance that stated: "The patience to reopen K-12 schools helped with this stabilization and we now have a window of opportunity to return many children and adolescents to the classroom for in-person instruction."

Following this data and guidance, we are actively planning to return to in-person learning at your school. In-person learning is scheduled to begin between October 19, 2020, through the end of November 2020. Your school principal will notify you by October 9, 2020 as to when your school will plan to return. We think this is the right time to begin returning, because of your partnership and our planning that will allow us to do so as safely as possible.

Our goal is for schools to open for all students 5 days per week with an option for students to remain in the current, fully-remote, virtual learning model; however, this will depend on our families' needs. *If the number of students who choose to attend class in person is too high for proper distancing in one school, that school will re-open in a hybrid model until it is safe for all students to be present at one time.*

Next Steps: Please complete one [Instruction Selection Form](https://form.jotform.com/missionschools/reopening) (<https://form.jotform.com/missionschools/reopening>) per student enrolled in an IMS school and select your preferred method of instruction by Wednesday, September 30, at Noon. Your selection must remain in place through at least January 15, 2021 or until we return to regular in-person attendance.

The options are:

1. 100% Virtual, with your student joining live instruction from outside of school
2. In-person, 5 days of instruction per week in school (if necessary for distancing, this could be a hybrid model with 2 days of in-person instruction and 3 days of virtual)

With the information gathered in the selection forms, the date and model for your school's reopening will be communicated to you by your Principal no later than October 9, 2020. We know there will be many questions in the days and weeks ahead, and we plan to keep you informed each step of the way. While this data is gathered, we will also be finalizing our detailed Health & Safety manual and preparing all staff. Safety continues to be our primary focus as we continue to secure adequate personal protection equipment, masks, desk guards for students and teachers, and to ensure sufficient maintenance staffing.

We laid the foundation this summer that would enable a safe and productive reopening on this timeframe. Even though there will be challenges in doing so, we believe strongly that in-person teaching is important to begin as soon as the conditions are safe.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation as we work together to provide a reopening plan that seeks to maximize learning for students and protect the health and well-being of our entire community.

Sincerely,



Bruce Robinson

CEO, Independence Mission Schools

Additional Information

Why are we reopening our school buildings?

Our schools have a long history of developing faith-based community learning environments that have distinguished Catholic schools for years. While we are proud of the excellent work educators and students have done to ensure at-home learning is working, we also know that living and learning our Catholic faith in a community with others, where we can practice, model, and grow in faith together, happens best when we are in person. **While in-person instruction is most effective to develop our faith-based community learning environment, staff and students' safety continues to be the primary factor leading our decisions over the last months.**

What are we doing to ensure the safety of our teachers and students in the classrooms?

First, a detailed health and safety manual, reviewed by numerous health experts, will be implemented. This manual spells out procedures regarding someone testing positive, including who will need to quarantine and for how long. We will contract with a COVID-testing service that can provide test results in 15 minutes to react to a situation more quickly.

Additionally, the following steps are in place to ensure the safety and staff and students:

- Students' desks will have a clear, 3-sided individual desk divider to protect students and teachers and be distanced appropriately.
- Teachers' desks will have a clear shield for further protection.
- All teachers will wear transparent masks and/or face shields that we will provide. All other staff will wear masks at all times.
- Students will wear face masks during class with frequent mask breaks.
- Hand sanitizer stations in multiple locations in the hallways and each classroom.
- Bathrooms will be cleaned and sanitized hourly.
- Buildings will be deep cleaned after each school day.
- Students will remain in their consistent groupings, and only teachers will move from room to room when necessary.