

April 8, 2021

Dear Parents,



I wanted to provide everyone with further explanation for the reasoning behind our move to remote learning this week in grades 6 through 12. I know that this change was frustrating to many families. I want to apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused. It was not my intention to throw a curveball into your family schedules a day before we were to start back from Spring Break. This year has had so many starts, stops, U-turns, and detours that require an immense amount of patience and understanding from you and your families. As a Catholic school community, these endless changes and inconsistencies have challenged us all.

Our goal, since the beginning of the school year, has been to keep our students in school for face-to-face instruction. The plan includes many mitigation strategies, direct input from the local Health Department, and the data that we see from our school children and families as the guideposts for our decision-making in regard to COVID-19 issues. This plan served us well from August until this past Monday.

On Monday at midday, I received a call and email to inform me that the Health Department was holding a meeting with area superintendents at 3:30 in the afternoon. At that meeting, the Health Department notified the superintendents that the COVID-19 numbers in Grand Traverse County had climbed significantly over the past week. We had been out of school for ten days, so we had no school data upon which to inform our decision. I was not going to make a decision without any data. I was not comfortable opening school when the only data I had was the Health Department's very concerning data. Given the short notice of the information presented to us, its implications, and the absence of our school information, I was compelled to follow the Health Department's direction and transition us to remote learning for this week.

Moving forward, all decisions about remote or in-person learning will be based on the plan developed in August. In that plan, we said that we would use our school data (COVID-19 cases and close contacts) to determine whether we will keep the school open or revert to remote learning. Also as stated at the beginning of the year, we will continue to rely heavily on the Health Department's recommendations and direction. However, it will also be balanced with our in-school statistics.

Short of a government shutdown, I intend to keep schools open when we have individual school information about COVID-19 that allows us to serve our children safely. If our individual school COVID-19 data trends towards an unsafe level, we will decide to use remote learning. At this time, our Pre-K through Grade 5 data shows nearly no students with the virus, and we know that high school students have consistently contracted the virus in social settings and not in the school setting. Given these facts, and assuming there are no significant changes between now and tomorrow, **we will resume in-person learning for all grade levels next Monday, April 12, regardless of what other schools in the area decide for their population.**

By God's grace, we go!

Know of my prayers,

Michael R. Buell
Superintendent
Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools