

April 24, 2020

Dear Parents,

We teach a lot of things in our Catholic schools. We have data to show how well our students perform amongst their peers at the state and national level, student data to evidence strong graduation rates, and how they go on to be academically successful in some of the best colleges and universities. We also live in a society where school success is too often defined solely by the metrics of academic outcomes. Yet, what we often do best in our Catholic schools is something not so easily measured by bubble tests. This pandemic has provided us with an opportunity to draw notice to how differently our metrics are on measuring success.

Over the past six weeks we have witnessed our school and parish communities showing us that difference. We have watched the power of our Catholic communities unfold before our eyes by thinking outside the box on how we can continue to reach the mind, body and spirit of all that we serve within the Diocese of Des Moines. We have witnessed Bishop Joensen, pastors, administrators, teachers and students reaching out virtually through prayer, Mass, and tremendous words of wisdom to remind the entire community that we need to rely on our faith during this difficult time.

We have heard stories of parents and parish friends reaching out to pastors and school administrators to lift one another up and assists in any way possible. The character of this Catholic community is alive and present. This character, this devotion to a faith-filled life, this desire to put our community ahead of our own needs has been visible since COVID-19 blindsided our state, our nation. These attributes taught in our schools, reinforced by our parents, and guided by faith, are what makes Catholic schools so successful...it's not the number of students on the honor roll or the strong ACT scores that we are to hang our hats on – it's the reality that our Catholic communities attend to the heart and soul first that pay dividends that last a lifetime!

My thanks go out to Bishop Joensen, our pastors, administrators and our entire faculty and staff for the tremendous job they have done and continue to do during this unprecedented time. Despite their own personal struggles this virus has caused, they continue to tend to the needs of our 6,200 students. We are so fortunate of the administrative leadership that we have in our sixteen schools that are navigating this new educational journey.

With the number of school updates that continue to be released I wanted to provide the decisions that our diocesan administrators have made in regards to our last day of school and the first day for the 2020-21 school year. Efforts with continuous learning have not stopped with the initial closure of our school buildings. Our plans are to continue to instruct and provide lessons through May 22nd. This will provide ample time during the following week for our faculty to collect all assignments and complete report cards. Our 'Return to Learn' plan is to remain with the school calendars that were provided during registration.

I ask that you keep the mind-body and spirit of all members of our school and parish communities in your thoughts and prayers as we continue to show one another how different Catholic education truly is. Together, with Christ, we've got this!

God bless,

***Donna Bishop***

Superintendent of Schools  
Diocese of Des Moines