

Dear Colleagues,

Last week, the Department of Catholic Schools issued an advisory recommending schools resume instruction in distance learning until Tuesday, January 19th. As a result of the continuing struggle we face with the recent surge in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health has issued a "strong recommendation" to all K-12 schools in LA County to remain in distance learning through Friday, January 29th. Attached please find a memorandum from Dr. Barbara Ferrer, Director of LA County Department of Public Health articulating their recommendation.

After consideration of this recommendation and based on the current positivity rate (currently, 1 in 5 tests are positive in LA County), in consultation with Archbishop Gomez, Fr. Brian Nunes and the leadership of the department, **we are revising our advisory to align with public health's recommendation that all schools in Los Angeles County extend distance learning to Friday, January 29th**. Previously scheduled in-person assessments (i.e. PSAT, HSPT, STAR) and locally determined essential student services (i.e. meal services) can proceed in accordance with public health guidance and protocols. **While transmission rates are lower in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties, schools are advised to exercise vigilance if you plan to return to in-person instruction this month.**

As with our previous advisory, this is a recommendation. We understand that each school community is facing different and unique circumstances; some may feel compelled to reopen. However, the current level of community transmission remains elevated and given the apparent extent of gatherings and travel during and after the break, we continue to see excessive numbers of cases in our region across all demographics. This virus is impacting our archdiocesan ministries and community members in ways we have not seen before. This is not the time to dismiss the real threat the virus poses to every neighborhood, family and loved one. As such, we advise schools to follow this recommendation.

We are currently facing the harshest period of the pandemic, but this surge will pass. Though vaccine distribution has been slow, we are beginning to see an increase in inoculations. This will only increase in the coming weeks. According to the state and local officials, school

personnel in Tier 1B should begin to receive vaccine in February. Modifications and adjustments will still be required to preserve life in the months ahead, but as improvement to distribution improves, so will our ability to restore daily life. Looking ahead, there are a number of matters that we will be communicating with you on, including PPP, revised state guidance for K-12 schools and related matters. We are awaiting further details from various entities regarding these matters. News moves FAST – government moves SLOW. Please remain patient while we learn more and await further information.

God sent his only Son to be the light for the world. His light is far greater than the dark that surrounds us. You are reflecting the light of Christ in a world that so desperately needs it, now more than ever. The patience, resilience and love you're demonstrating for your community during these hard times is a testament to the strength of our collective faith. As people of God and as Americans, it's vital to remember that our Church and nation have faced extraordinary challenges before. Those who came before us, who sacrificed and so we could continue to build the Kingdom of God on Earth as free people, endured many hardships and overcame seemingly impossible odds. This is our moment of great trial and challenge – we will not fail. As they did, we will over this moment, together.

Blessings to you, your family and your ministry.

Yours in Christ,

Paul

Paul M. Escala

Superintendent of Schools

Senior Director