



THE DIOCESE OF COLUMBUS

January 25, 2021

Dear Families of the Catholic schools of the Diocese of Columbus,

Our Catholic schools are a partnership between our Church and your family. As such, one of the primary responsibilities of our schools is to ensure the safety and well-being of your children. The Diocese treats these issues and responsibilities very seriously. For many years, the Diocese of Columbus has had a comprehensive safe environment program in place that sets out clear policies, rules, and procedures to protect your children.

With that in mind, we want to review these policies and practices as well as fresh approaches to ensuring that all our adults – employees, volunteers, parents, and guardians – fully understand how we can best protect children and youth in our schools and parishes. Below are summaries of the key policies of our safe environment program. We ask you to please carefully review this document. Should you have any questions, please contact your parish or school safe environment coordinator or the Diocesan Safe Environment Office (614-241-2513).

- **Protecting God’s Children (PGC) training:** Diocesan policy requires that the following people complete PGC training within 60 days of the start of their employment or service:
  - All clergy serving in the Diocese of Columbus; all parish, school, and diocesan employees; and all applicants for priestly or diaconal formation, regardless of their level of contact with minors.
  - All Catholic School Volunteers and Volunteers in Parish Programs/Ministries for Children and Youth, regardless of their level of contact with minors. Duration of service does not mitigate compliance with this policy. Examples: Catholic School volunteers, Parish School of Religion (PSR) volunteers, youth ministry volunteers, field-trip chaperones and drivers, Scout leaders, coaches and other recreation volunteers, Vacation Bible School volunteers, Children’s Liturgy of the Word volunteers, pre-school volunteers, nursery volunteers, and so forth.
  - Volunteers Working with Children and Youth in Other Parish Programs/Ministries who have contact with minors are required to complete a criminal background check and participate in *Protecting God’s Children* training. Examples: Parish festival volunteers working with minors, volunteer choir director if choir includes minors, service coordinators if minors are included.
- **Diocesan Policy also requires the people listed above to have a state level criminal background check** administered by the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCII). If they have lived in Ohio less than five years, they must also have a

background check through the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). School employees and teachers are required to have both BCII and FBI background checks completed in accordance with state law.

- **Diocesan Policy maintains a two-deep policy**, which requires parishes/schools/agencies to follow a practice of “two-deep” ministry with minors, which means at least two (2) adults who are in full compliance with Diocesan safe environment policies are present at all activities and situations. This includes, but is not limited to, transporting minors in motor vehicles for field trips, practices, sporting events, mission trips, and so forth. This does not apply to situations where the driver is the parent or legal guardian of ALL the minors in the motor vehicle.
  - **Priest Allowance:** The confessional or other location in which the Sacrament of Reconciliation is being properly celebrated according to the approved rite is exempt from this provision. Care must also be exercised whenever a minor requests a private, confidential conference. Minors can also be encouraged to seek confession during scheduled times in designated church locations.
  
- **Social media policy:** This governs communication among adult employees and volunteers and minors.
  - One-on-one or private communication between non-related adult employees or volunteers and individual minors is prohibited.
  - If a minor initiates communication, the adult must move the conversation to a public platform and retain a record of the communication.
  - Communication media must allow for accountability and ability to retain records of communications, therefore no “anonymous” apps or platforms and no apps or platforms which automatically delete communications are permitted.
  - Communications between adult employees and volunteers and minors should come via Professional Ministry account/profile, phone (mobile/work), email, or physical address; NEVER via a personal account/profile, phone (mobile/home), email, or physical address. If the employee or volunteer adult is not issued a mobile ministry phone, then communication should be through a public platform.
  - Adult employees and volunteers must not initiate or accept “friend” requests, “follows,” or the like with minors related to personal social media platforms or apps.
  - Parents should not only be invited but strongly encouraged to sign up for parish/school communications.
  - High school-aged minors who serve as employee or volunteer leaders or assistants with minors under the age of 13 must conform to the above policies in all communications pertaining to the ministry. Additionally, minors must abide by policies regarding conduct with peers and those of younger age.
  
- **Diocesan Policy sets out some additional rules for activities with minors**, including:
  - Adult chaperones must be at least 21 years old.
  - For activities away from school or parish property, a ratio of one adult per 10 minors should be followed, with a minimum of two adults. For overnight trips, the ratio is one adult per six minors, with a minimum of two adults. The minors will also need permission slips signed by a parent or guardian.



- **Diocesan Policy states that all drivers transporting minors must be in full compliance with Diocesan Safe Environment policies, these policies include:**
  - No 15-passenger vans.
  - Drivers must be at least 25 years old.
  - Drivers must have a valid driver's license.
  - Vehicles must have a valid, current registration.

**Parents, guardians, and all caring adults working with minors should apply these policies in all activities between the minors in your care and adults. This includes clubs, athletic coaches, music lessons, tutors, etc.**

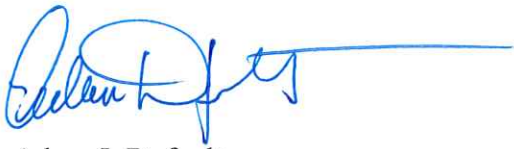
For example, it is no longer a best practice to simply drop your child off at a private residence for tutoring or music lessons. Instead, either stay with the minor during the lesson, or have the lesson take place in a public place. A tutor and student can also meet at the school. It is Diocesan policy that when a teacher is meeting with a student for tutoring, the classroom door must remain open. The teacher should also let the school administration know in advance the student(s) the teacher is helping, the schedule, etc. This is true whether the tutoring occurs before school, during lunch, or after school.

The tutor and student can also meet at a public library where other adults are present or the tutor can come to the student's home while at least one parent or guardian is present.

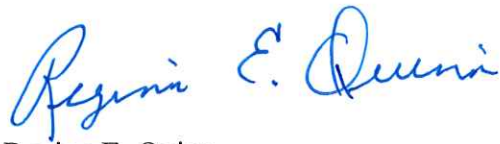
Teachers, coaches, tutors, ministry leaders – all adults – should NEVER put themselves in a position to be alone with minors. This practice protects the adults as well as the minors.

By working together, and applying safe environment policies and principles to all of our interactions with minors, we can help to build a safer environment for all our children and young people.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Adam J. Dufault  
Episcopal Moderator for Education  
Superintendent of Catholic Schools



Regina E. Quinn  
Director  
Safe Environment Office