



**The Diocese of Youngstown Catholic Schools are dedicated to providing students and families with an educational experience that nurtures faith, inspires learning, fosters service, and builds leadership.**

August, 2022

Dear Parents and Guardians:

As your family is enjoying the last days of summer break, we are looking forward to the start of the 2022-2023 school year. Our schools are dedicated to providing an excellent Catholic education for your children. In order for our children to learn, worship, and pray together, providing a safe environment is a top priority of our schools.

There are many facets that work together to provide a safe school environment. As the school year begins, we would like to highlight a few.

### **Ohio Substitute House Bill 99**

As you may know, Governor Mike DeWine recently signed into law Ohio Substitute House Bill 99, which permits armed teachers and other adults to be inside Ohio schools with reduced training. After careful consideration, the Diocese of Youngstown is not changing its policy on the possession of firearms in our schools. Our teachers will NOT be armed with weapons. (Please see the policy below from the Diocese of Youngstown.)

### **Security Measures in Our Schools**

Extensive security measures in our schools are not new. Schools continually assess and add to these protocols.

- In coordination with local law enforcement, each school is required to review, complete and submit a safety plan that must be approved annually by the Ohio Department of Education. All schools K-12 in Ohio use this required framework. The Diocese engages the services of a former Homeland Security employee to assist the schools in this process.
- Required safety drills are conducted annually.
- All schools have formed strong relationships with their local police departments and local school resource officers.
- Regular, annual safety professional development for the adults in the school building are conducted.
- Schools are conducting vulnerability assessments in order to prioritize continued needs.
- While there are common situations that all schools face, your school principal can address the specific measures in place at your child's school.

We are exploring grant opportunities through the State of Ohio and other sources that could provide funding for additional security to enhance what is already in place, such as trained security professionals as specified in our policy, security cameras, outdoor lighting, fortified school entrances, keyless entry systems, etc. We will also explore upcoming grant opportunities through the state of Ohio to increase mental health resources for our schools. Mental health resources are needed to support the spiritual and emotional climate of our schools.

## **School Environment**

Creating a safe spiritual and emotional environment for our students is a key component of a comprehensive security plan. Building positive relationships with teachers and students with an emphasis on how we treat one another allows for openness and trust. All schools encourage their students, faculty, and parents that if they see something, say something. Often, it is these concerns when reported to administration that can avert a would-be situation.

## **Physical Health**

As we know, when a child is not feeling well, they are not at their best.

COVID-19 is still among us. It is a communicable disease, and our schools will treat it as such.

Our schools will do the following:

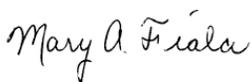
- Continue strong cleaning and sanitizing procedures.
- Encourage frequent hand-washing and other safe hygiene practices.
- Allow voluntary masking for any health reason.
- Communicate with parents when they observe that a child is not feeling well.
- Utilize the advice and counsel of health professionals such as a school nurse or health aid or the resources from the local health department. Schools have regular reporting requirements to the local health departments regarding communicable disease cases. This reporting does not include individual student or staff names or other identifying information. The schools do follow the health department's guidelines on how to handle outbreaks of communicable diseases.

We ask parents to support schools in the following ways:

- Keep your child home when he or she is sick and the symptoms have subsided for at least 24-48 hours.
- If your child is diagnosed with COVID, please follow the directions of your doctor as to when it is safe to return to school and under what protocols.
- Know that while masks are voluntary, they are accepted and encouraged if it benefits your child and/or students he/she comes in contact with. Please let your child know that while your family may not choose to use masks as a health precaution for yourselves and others, there are some families that want and may need to use that protection, and respect for all choices needs to be shown.
- Discuss COVID-19 vaccinations and other safety protocols with your child's pediatrician. Covid-19 Vaccinations remain voluntary in our schools.
- Keep current with all of the required health vaccinations for your children.

The safety of our students, teachers, and staff is our number one priority. We will continue to work to provide a safe educational environment for all. Thank you for entrusting your children to our care and for choosing Catholic education.

Sincerely in Christ,



Mary Fiala  
Superintendent of Schools

## SH-12 Weapons Policy

### I. Policy

- A.** Catholic schools are meant to be places where students and staff can safely gather to pray, worship, and learn.
- B.** The Diocese of Youngstown Schools are committed to providing a safe environment for its students and staff.
- C.** Ohio law prohibits the possession of a deadly weapon or dangerous ordinance in a school safety zone (R.C. 2923.122). On June 13, 2022, Ohio adopted HB 99, which allows school boards to authorize individuals, including teachers and staff, to have a deadly weapon or dangerous ordinance in a school safety zone if they have had certain, minimum instruction and training. The Diocese of Youngstown is not authorizing such individuals to carry weapons on school premises.
- D.** All schools and other church property are under the administrative control of the Bishop. Notwithstanding HB 99, except for the specific conditions described in the Procedures/Guidelines below, no person entering upon a Diocesan school property may have a deadly weapon or dangerous ordinance, regardless of whether such person holds a permit or is otherwise authorized to carry a concealed weapon. Allowing individuals without substantial training and experience to have weapons in our schools could create a dangerous situation that threatens the safety of students and staff. This includes school employees (other than resource/ security officers), volunteers, students, contractors, vendors, customers, or other members of the public.

### II. Procedures/Guidelines

- A.** Deadly weapons and dangerous ordinance under this policy include, without limitation, firearms, including concealed handguns, firearm replicas, objects indistinguishable from firearms, ammunition, ammunition look-alikes (dummies or duds), tasers, explosives, night sticks, brass knuckles, knives with blades over 3 inches, ballistic knives, spring loaded or gravity knives, zip-guns, incendiary devices, and other objects designed to intimidate or injure people or adapted for use as a weapon.
- B.** A school safety zone includes a school, school building, school premises, school activities, athletic facilities, school buses, and everything within the property boundary. No person shall possess a deadly weapon or dangerous ordinance, as defined in II A above, in a school safety zone.
- C.** Nothing in this policy prohibits an employee or other person who possesses a valid license that permits the carrying of a concealed weapon from transporting or storing a firearm and ammunition in his or her personal vehicle on Diocesan school property where the vehicle is permitted to be, such as a parking lot. If the employee or other person is outside of the vehicle, the firearm and ammunition must be locked in a trunk, glove box, or other enclosed compartment within the vehicle.

**D.** This policy shall not prohibit the following persons from carrying a firearm or weapon on Diocesan school property or premises/school safety zone provided the person possesses valid photographic identification:

1. Law enforcement officers
2. Security personnel employed by or contracted by the school who have:
  - a. Have either received a certificate of having satisfactorily completed an approved basic peace officer training program or have completed twenty years of active duty as a peace officer; and
  - b. Have been granted written permission by a school management official (principal, president, pastor) to carry a firearm while on duty. The school is required to send a copy of that written permission to the Office of Catholic Schools.

### III. Links and Supporting Documents

**A. Related DOY Policies:** SH-3 Crisis Management and Safety Plans, SH-10 Safety Drills, SH-11 Safety Regulations and Instruction

**B. Ohio HB 99:** <https://ohiohouse.gov/legislation/134/hb99>

**Initial Adoption:** August 8, 2022

**Effective Date:** August 8, 2022

**Elementary**

**Revision Date(s):**

**X**      **Preschool**

**X**

**X**      **High School**