



# PROVIDENCE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

1800 W. Lincoln Highway • New Lenox, Illinois 60451 • (815) 485-2136 • [www.providencecatholic.org](http://www.providencecatholic.org)

**Fr. John Merkelis, OSA, President**  
[jmerkelis@providencecatholic.org](mailto:jmerkelis@providencecatholic.org)

Dear Providence Family,

I pray this message finds you well as we approach Easter Sunday. This Lent has been a season of particularly intense prayer for me and our faculty and staff. I pray for you, and for them, ALWAYS! Contributing to this is the magnitude of the decision that is upon us, like many schools at this time, related to whether to modify our in-person hybrid instruction.

To this end, I thank you for your overwhelming response to our parent survey. This is one of numerous factors upon which we relied to assist us in making the decision to remain hybrid at this time.

I promise you that this decision was made carefully and thoughtfully, using all resources at our disposal. While I understand it is impossible to meet the desires of all of our parents with this decision, I hope you will continue reading as I share with you our rationale for this decision.

Each school is unique and must consider the effects of the new CDC and IDPH guidelines as applied to its own physical logistics. While establishing 3 feet separation as safe, the new guidelines continued to uphold a quarantine distance of 6 feet. After a meeting with our administration, a subcommittee was formed, including myself, Dr. Harper, and representatives of the Dean's Office, the Counseling Office, Food Service and Maintenance. Our focus was to evaluate how to maintain safety within the physical parameters of the school; i.e., locker usage, corridor traffic, lunchroom space, classroom layout and cleaning & disinfecting the school.

We also consulted with multiple stakeholders, including the parents through the parent survey. Moreover, we spoke with the Diocese of Joliet, other Catholic high schools, and our faculty via a survey. We have been following the direction of local physicians, two who specialize in infectious disease and one family doctor, who have provided valuable input in all of our decisions. They based their advice on county and local positivity rates, guidelines from the IDPH and their own practice.

Initially, things looked hopeful for a return. However, conditions changed quickly. By last Friday we learned of 4 new positive student cases within 24 hours. (A fifth was added in the past 2 days). This is the highest single-day

occurrence since the beginning of the school year, and the highest weekly rate all year. Because we are in the hybrid model, the number of students impacted by this was minimal. Had we implemented the 3-foot guideline, anywhere from 24 to 56 students would have been required to quarantine, depending on the day ("A", "B" or "C" schedule). In addition, please note the number of athletic contests that have been cancelled due to a COVID outbreak. We're not out of the woods yet!

As we approach Easter break, we remain steadfast in our goals: to keep as many students learning in person as possible, reduce the need for full remote learning and massive quarantines, and offer extracurricular activities, sports and clubs successfully. I personally believe that the Spirit is speaking powerfully to us at this time, through the intense prayer that I referenced in the opening of this letter.

Finally, with 6 weeks left in the school year, creating that sense of community for our students remains paramount. To that end, we have rallied the collective energy and enthusiasm of the parent boards (both the Women's and Men's Clubs) who have volunteered to assist us in turning our efforts to the students. Together with the Student Council and parent volunteers, we are working to provide *just plain fun* for the students in every grade. You've seen glimpses of this with the Celtic Energy Days, trivia nights, the St. Patrick's Day lunch festivities and the March Madness tournament. We will work diligently to provide experiences that nurture the social, spiritual and emotional growth of all our students. You will be receiving an updated calendar of events for these activities, and you may be approached by one of the parent board members to volunteer your time to assist in these activities.

During our Community Day of Reflection for the faculty and staff last Friday, we met to discuss how we should end the school year. Many and varied opinions were expressed, respectfully shared with the group. At the conclusion, the faculty and staff expressed their support for whatever decision would be made. We remain united in our mission, one mind and one heart, to provide a Catholic education in a safe and healthy environment. I thank you for taking the time to read this rather long explanation, and I ask your support (prayerful and otherwise) to complete the year with a spirit of unity so characteristic of the Providence Family.

My prayers for a Blessed and Joyous Easter!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Meek". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.