



November 12, 2020

Dear Holy Ghost Lutheran School Families:

Holy Ghost is dedicated to continue serving our students with the same in-person instruction model that we have facilitated so far this school year. With this stated, the guidelines for schools, that have been established by the state, are threatening our school operating status. To date, our school has not received a positive Covid test from a student, faculty, or staff member - 0%! However, the rate of COVID-19 infection is increasing in Western New York, and the rate in Niagara County was 4.7% on November 10. Governor Cuomo has instituted a new strategy of monitoring and responding to outbreaks of new cases within a limited and definable geographic area, which are called micro-clusters.

Our students, faculty and staff have diligently followed our health and safety protocols to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Despite everyone's best efforts, the rising community spread of the virus could impact our 5 day in-person instructional model.

The Governor's micro-cluster strategy uses multiple data points (positivity rate, hospitalizations, population density, contact tracing, etc.) to identify a geographic area by region, county, zip code, or a more granular location. Holy Ghost Lutheran School is part of the 14304 zip code. Once an area has been identified, the local Department of Health engages in calibrated and focused containment efforts. The containment efforts include designating the micro-cluster zone with a color to indicate the severity of the outbreak.

The possible color-coded micro-cluster zones are as follows:

- "Yellow Zone": Seven day rolling positive test rate average above 3% and 12 or more new cases per 100,000 residents for ten consecutive days.
- "Orange Zone": Seven day rolling positive test rate average above 4% and 12 or more new cases per 100,000 residents for ten consecutive days.
- "Red Zone": Seven day rolling positive test rate average above 5% and 12 or more new cases per 100,000 residents for ten consecutive days.

If a school building is designated to be in a yellow zone micro-cluster, the school can potentially remain open to in-person instruction, however, it would need to test 20% of its students and staff each week until the data points drop below the yellow zone levels. If the school cannot meet these testing parameters, it must transition to fully remote instruction. At the present time the Niagara County Department of Health (NCDoH) is unable to assist school districts with the random testing requirements. I would look to partner with parents to solve this problem if and when this situation should occur. The cooperation of families to help our school meet this requirement will be imperative to continue to operate an in-person school model of education.

Should our school building be placed within an identified orange or red zone, the school will be required to transition temporarily to fully remote instruction for at least two weeks. Before reopening for in-person instruction, all students, faculty, and staff must have a negative COVID-19 test result before returning to in-person schooling. The school must also be able to test 20% of students and staff each week.

The Governor's office identified some micro-clusters within Western New York this week. Holy Ghost families need to be prepared to transition temporarily to remote instruction, and create plans for child-care and distance learning, if our school is identified as being within a micro-cluster.

Please know it is our goal to maintain in-person instruction as long as cases remain low in our county. We will continue to work closely with the Niagara County Department of Health, and make decisions based on local, regional and state data.

As always, we will keep you informed as circumstances change, and ask for your prayerful and supportive partnering presence.

I have come back to these truths in Scripture so often. I know that God is present and He is working. I pray that you will find comfort in knowing the same.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.” Proverbs 3:5

The talented teachers of Holy Ghost are prepared to lead students through this challenge. We will partner with our school families to assure a quality education whether in-person or distance learning. IF we move into distance learning each teacher will formalize his/her schedule and communicate expectations with students and families. In this case, communication will be very important, please check email regularly and be responsive to partnering requests.

I am praying for you, our staff, our school, our region, and our country.  
May God provide healing and peace in these challenging days.

In Christ,

Kevin Gundell  
Principal  
Holy Ghost Lutheran School