

## Students flock to NYC Catholic schools as public schools lag behind

By Georgett Roberts and Laura Italiano  
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Catholic schools across the five boroughs opened on Wednesday — with the COVID-19-fighting regimens of temperature-taking and stair-rail sanitizing mixing with the age-old traditions of crisp new uniforms and first-day jitters.

City public schools are still getting their act together, but at Immaculate Conception School in The Bronx, more than 150 pre-K, elementary and middle school students showed up.

“I’m so happy because it was a success this morning,” principal Amy Rodriguez told The Post.



*Children return to school at the Immaculate Conception School in the Bronx with COVID-19 safety measures in place.*

“Parents that I thought would be coming with reservations were excited to see all of the procedures and protocols that we had in place — temperature screening, hand sanitizers as soon as they walked in.”

“We are so excited to reopen,” said Archdiocese of New York schools superintendent Michael Deegan, who visited the school.

Everyone entering the school wore a mask and had a quick temperature check, windows were open for ventilation, and one industrious maintenance man continually roamed the three-story building with disinfectant.

“My job is to make sure everything is sterilized – doors, doorknobs, walls, the hallway, the front areas, especially areas where there are more activities,” said worker Ricardio Guido.

“Everything that will keep the school clean and the children safe from COVID ... I do this eight hours a day until they leave.

“I take like a 15-minute break, get me a coffee and I start all over again. I do that all day — up and down the steps, the stairs where the kids put their hands, everything the kids touch has to be sterilized.”

Under a last-minute schedule change, public schools are open this week for teacher and staff only, with online learning beginning Sept. 16 and classrooms not reopening to students until Sept. 21.

But all schools within the 60,000-student Archdiocese of New York — in Manhattan, Staten Island, The Bronx and parts of Westchester — and in the separate, 22,000-student system covering Brooklyn and Queens, stuck to their post-Labor Day schedules this year.

“As a result of the combined tireless efforts of the Catholic Schools Reopening Advisory Council and our dedicated pastors, principals and teachers, we are prepared to welcome all of our students into our buildings safely as scheduled,” the Archdiocese of New York announced last week.

“We want to assure you that our Catholic Academies and Parish Schools will NOT be affected by this decision,” the Brooklyn and Queens system announced after Mayor Bill de Blasio’s schedule change.

“At first, I wasn’t going to send her,” mom Melocia Lynch, 44, told The Post after dropping off daughter Amelia, 4, at Immaculate Conception for her first day of school.

“But I’m comfortable that it’s safe,” said the mom, who works for the Postal Service.

Still, should there be a COVID-19 outbreak, “I would pull her right away,” the mom assured. “Trust me.”