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MARIA R. BASTONE

SCHOOL DAY BEGINS—Chelsea Thompson kisses her son, first-grader Chase Torres, before she drops him off at Our Lady of Grace School in the Bronx on the morning of Sept. 22. Our Lady of Grace and other Catholic schools throughout the archdiocese have opened for the 2020-2021 school year.

Educators Went ‘Above and Beyond’ to Reopen Elementary Schools, Superintendent Says

By CHRISTIE L. CHICOINE and DAN PIETRAFESA

As Catholic elementary school students buckled down at their desks their first full week of classes Sept. 14-18, the superintendent of schools for the archdiocese buckled up in his car for a field trip to visit them—96 schools in five days.

“The reason that I physically went was because there was no letter, no note, no email that was adequate in expressing my profound gratitude to our pastors, our principals and our teachers for this remarkable reopening,” Michael Deegan told CNY in a phone interview Sept. 21.

“I had to look each principal in the eye and just simply express my gratitude for everything that they did, and everything that their teachers did, to have such a successful reopening.”

“I would characterize our reopening as outstanding,” Deegan said, “because of the amount of detailed planning of the Catholic School Reopening Advisory Council and the remarkable work of our pastors, our principals and our teachers.”

“They were able to follow rigorously the guidelines and the mandates that we set forward.”

The pastors “have been exceedingly gracious and supportive,” the superintendent said, “in our efforts to get our school buildings up and ready.” They have also shared additional parish space to accommodate.

“It’s all hands on deck and everybody contributed,” Deegan said. “This awful experience has brought out the very, very best in all of our Catholic educators. They’ve gone above and beyond.”

Schools across the archdiocese closed in-person instruction on campuses March 16 at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The back-to-school report card for the 2020-2021 academic year is already yielding high marks: “We could not be happier than we are about the reopening from a safety and health protocol perspective—everything went perfectly as planned,” Deegan said. Students have the option of remote learning, as they did toward the end of this past school year.

The superintendent’s recent visit to parish, private and regional elementary schools began at 7 a.m. that Monday and concluded at 4:45 p.m. this past Friday: Staten Island on Monday, Manhattan on Tuesday, the Bronx on Wednesday, the Upper Counties on Thursday and Westchester on Friday.

The visit did not include early childhood programs, special education or high schools.

During a visit to Immaculate Conception School on East Gun

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