

RETURN-TO-SCHOOL PLAN-2021-2022

IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19



*St. Thomas the Apostle School
Old Bridge, NJ*

School Reopening Taskforce

Reverend Jerome Johnson, Pastor	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. Annette Pioppo, Principal	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. Diane Zarate, Vice Principal	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. Colleen Fritzen, Business Manager	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. Marissa Cunningham, Nurse	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. MaryAnn Adami, Administrative Assistant	St. Thomas the Apostle
Mr. Scott Titmas, Building and Grounds Supervisor	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. Debbie Yesis, Director of Religious Education.	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. Annemarie Dennis, Teacher Grade 1	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. Mary Conaghan, Middle School Teacher/HSA	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. Sandra DaSilva, Technology	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. Betsey Conway, Parent	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. Erica Colangelo, Parent	St. Thomas the Apostle
Ms. Geri Coccoziello, School Advisory Committee	St. Thomas the Apostle

Thank you to the taskforce members in the creation of this document. Their expertise and commitment to Catholic education is commendable.

INTRODUCTION

We have created this plan to aid in navigating the reestablishment of our school where employees, students, and families feel safe and to reduce the impact of COVID-19 conditions upon returning to the school. The guidelines referenced in this plan are based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), and the State of New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) *The Road Back*. Regular updates will be made to this plan based on information provided by the CDC, WHO, and applicable federal, state and local agencies.

SOURCES

Center for Disease Control:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html#anchor_1589931942037

New Jersey Department of Education:

<https://www.nj.gov/education/broadcasts/2021/aug/22/NJDepartmentofEducationandNJDepartmentofHealthUpdateSY2021-2022HealthandSafetyGuidance.pdf>

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In order to ensure the continued well-being of our employees and students the following guiding principles have been put in place:

1. EMPLOYEE AND STUDENT SAFETY MEASURES
2. HEALTH GUIDELINES

PHASES AND TIMELINES

Information and direction about the phases and timeline will be sent to all employees and parents before implementation. Please see below for a summary of the phases and timelines.

Phase	Timing	Items
Planning	July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplies, equipment • Prepare detailed work schedule for phases • Prepare building and transportation for reopen with thorough cleaning
Phase 1	August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement social distancing protocol and open facilities with limited access/use
Phase 2	August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand use of school based on recommendations and data from CDC, NJDOH, New Jersey Governor, and applicable state and local agencies
Phase 3	September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open school • Expand full operation based on recommendations and data from CDC, NJDOH, New Jersey Governor, and applicable local and state agencies • Determine what restrictions/guidelines stay in place

HEALTH PROTOCOL AND SCREENINGS (EMPLOYEE AND STUDENT)

All students and employees will be visually screened upon arrival for symptoms and history of exposure. In addition, the screening should be completed by the child's parent/guardian prior to arriving at school each day.

St. Thomas the Apostle's policies for screening will include the following:

Staff will visually check students for symptoms upon arrival every day.
COVID-19 symptoms include:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste or smell
- Diarrhea
- Feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit
- Known close contact with a person who is lab confirmed to have COVID-19

Employees:

All school staff are required to wear face coverings regardless of vaccination status. As per Governor Murphy, all school employees must be vaccinated or undergo weekly COVID-19 testing.

- If an employee becomes ill at work or if another person is exhibiting symptoms of COVID19 at work, they will be asked to leave work and go home or to the nearest health center.
- If an employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19, the school, Office of Schools, and local health department must be contacted. The health department will determine the next steps.

Students:

- Parents are encouraged to be on the alert for signs of illness in their children and to keep them home when they are sick.
- Students must wear face coverings regardless of vaccination status.
- Student health checks will be conducted safely and respectfully, and in accordance with any applicable privacy laws and regulations.
- Results must be documented when signs/symptoms of COVID-19 are observed.
- Any screening policy must take into account students with disabilities and accommodations that may be needed in the screening process for those students.

Protocol for Symptomatic Staff and Students

St. Thomas the Apostle's procedures are as follows:

- Students and staff with symptoms related to COVID-19 will be safely and respectfully isolated from others. Any student or staff member that presents with a fever will be isolated.

- Students will remain in isolation with continued supervision and care until picked up by an authorized adult. Parents or designated emergency contacts are expected to pick up the student promptly.
- We will follow current State of New Jersey Communicable Disease Service guidance for illness reporting - <https://www.nj.gov/health/>
- If the school becomes aware that an individual who has spent time in the school tests positive for COVID-19, school officials must immediately notify local health officials, staff, and families of a confirmed case while maintaining confidentiality.
- Adequate amount of personal protective equipment (PPE) available, accessible, and provided for use.

If an employee or student becomes ill on campus, he/she will immediately report to the **nurse's office** and the case form will be completed.

- The nurse must call the local health authority and seek advice regarding transportation and location.
- The nurse and others attending the suspected infected person, will also wear a protective mask and gloves while working with the suspected infected person. If a mask is not tolerated by the child, staff should use a face covering and follow social distancing guidelines (**3 ft. away**). Anyone who has been in close contact with a suspected positive case within **3ft.** for more than 10 minutes must be closely monitored for symptoms. The nurse will direct the ill employee to leave work or call the parent of the student to be picked up and go home.
- The nurse and principal will identify persons who may have come in contact with the suspected infected person. *Unless required by the local health authority, the name of the employee will not be provided.*
- Advise employees that they may have been in contact with a suspected employee and to carry out self-screening every morning, and based on the results, contact administration.
- The nurse's office and suspected employee's or student's work area/classroom will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, in addition to all other common surfaces recently touched by the employee or student.

When an individual tests positive for COVID-19, the facility will immediately notify local health officials, staff and families of a possible or confirmed case while maintaining confidentiality.

We will be prepared to provide the following information when consulting public health:

- The identity of the person with COVID-19 or probable COVID-19 (i.e. staff, child in care, household contact).
- The date the person with COVID-19 or probable COVID-19 was last in the building
- The date the person developed symptoms.
- Types of interactions the person may have had with other persons in the building or in other locations.
- How long their interactions were with other persons in the building.
- If other persons in the childcare program have developed any symptoms; and
- Any other information to assist with the determination of next steps.

Re-admittance Procedures After Recovery From COVID:

Students and employees will be required to quarantine for a minimum of 10 days. Students and employees must be symptom and fever free for a minimum of 24 hours without the use of a fever reducing medication.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

- St. Thomas the Apostle will allow for social distancing within the classroom to the maximum extent practicable. This can be achieved by ensuring students are seated at least **3 feet apart** and considering the flow of student traffic around the room.
- If we are not able to maintain this physical distance, additional modifications will be in place. These include using physical barriers between desks and turning desks to face the same direction (rather than facing each other) or having students sit on only one side of the table, spaced apart.
- Traffic Flow – Taped arrows on the floor will mark the walking direction throughout the halls in order to maintain the social distancing requirement of **3 feet**.
- When weather allows, windows will be opened to allow for greater air circulation. Indoor environments with recirculated air are the riskiest of environments for COVID-19 spread.
- Ad-hoc Interactions/Gatherings – Non-essential/informal meetings and visiting should be minimized.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

In order to minimize exposure to COVID-19, PPE may be needed to prevent certain exposures. PPE can include:

Masks: Face masks are an important part of employee protection, as well as personal hygiene, social distancing, and frequent cleaning efforts.

School staff are required to wear face coverings regardless of vaccination status. Students must wear face coverings.

Please note that social distancing should still be practiced even with the use of masks.

In addition to using PPE, please remember to:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow

CLASSROOM AND COMMON SPACES

St. Thomas the Apostle staff will use the signage provided to indicate the room for sanitizing and disinfecting. Employees are encouraged to disinfect their own personal workspace (teacher desk, phone, etc.) throughout the day, giving special attention to commonly touched surfaces.

Classrooms:

- There will be a 3-foot separation of desks and children. If we are not able to maintain this physical distance, additional modifications will be in place. These include using physical barriers between desks and turning desks to face the same direction (rather than facing each other) or having students sit on only one side of the table spaced apart.
- **Students will change classes.** For all grade levels: Students will be directed under the supervision of the teacher to clean their personal space (including desks, cubby and/or lockers). This includes students using approved cleaning products to wipe down desks when leaving the classroom and arriving in the classroom.
- Hand sanitizer will be provided in every classroom, in accordance with CDC guidelines.

School Entrances, hallways, and common spaces:

- Masks or face coverings are required for anyone entering the building. Physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to help ensure that staff and students remain at least 3 feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g. guides for creating "one-way routes" in hallways) will be provided.
- Interaction of students between drop-off and entrance to school facilities will be minimized.
- Three separate entrances and exits will be utilized for arrival and dismissal.
- Create "one-way routes" in hallways. Designate staircases as up or down. Each classroom will have a designated "in" and "out" door.
- Social distancing in hallways and common areas will be maintained.
- The number of non-essential interactions between students and staff throughout the school day will be minimized.
- We have created a system that allows for physical distancing.
- Hand sanitizer at school entrances will be provided.
- Put signage around school buildings to provide hygiene advice and reminders (CDC offers printable resources and handwashing posters).
- Frequency of cleaning all surfaces, including walls (to the appropriate height based on age of students) will be increased.
- Limit the number of students in the hallway at the same time by staggering release from classrooms at dismissal.
- Physical barriers, such as sneeze guards and partitions, particularly in areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain at least 3 feet apart (e.g., reception desks) have been installed.

Other Considerations:

- Limit use of supplies and equipment to one group of children at a time and clean and disinfect between use.
- Students will provide their own supplies- e.g. pencils, crayons, scissors etc.
- There will be no sharing of electronic devices, toys, and other games or learning aids.
- Each child’s belongings will be kept separated from others’ and in individually labeled containers, cubbies, or areas in grades Pre-k3-3.
- Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows.
- Build in the practice of handwashing and hand sanitizing throughout the day, during transition times.

FACILITIES CLEANING

The safety of our employees and students are our first priority. Upon reopening, our school has been completely cleaned and disinfected and we will continue to adhere to all necessary safety precautions. In addition to the deep clean of the office and school before employees and students return, the cleaning steps outlined below are to be taken to disinfect workplace surfaces, chairs, tables, etc. to protect employees and reduce the risk of spread of infection. We will require employees to maintain this safety standard by continuously cleaning and disinfecting based on the frequency stated below. Deep cleaning is triggered when an active employee or student is identified as positive for COVID -19 based on testing.

GENERAL DISINFECTION MEASURES

Category	Area	Frequency
Workspaces	Classrooms, Offices	At the end of each use/day
Appliances	Refrigerators, Microwaves, Coffee Machines	Daily
Electronic Equipment	Copier machines, Shared computer monitors, TV’s, Telephones, keyboards	At the end of each use/day and/or between use
General Used Objects	Handles, light switches, sinks, restrooms	Several times a day
Buses	Bus seats, handles/railing, belts, window controls	At the end of each use/day
Common Areas	Cafeteria, Library, Conference rooms,	At the end of each day and as needed throughout the day

	Gyms, Common Areas	
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Prepare and maintain hand sanitizing stations with alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol):

- In each classroom (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer).
- At entrances and exits of buildings.
- Near bathrooms
- Children ages 5 and younger will be supervised when using hand sanitizer.
- Students should wash hands for at least 20 seconds at regular intervals, including before eating, after using the bathroom, and after blowing their nose/coughing/sneezing.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) if washing with soap and water is not possible.

For Early Childhood programs, when possible:

- Keep children three feet apart during nap time (will have mats that will be oriented head to foot), when eating, and doing other activities.
- Minimize close group learning activities like reading circles.
- Designate times on the schedule to take students out of the classroom to wash hands with soap and water, including, at a minimum:
 - at the start of the day when children enter the classroom
 - before snacks and lunch
 - after using the toilet or helping a child use a toilet
 - after sneezing, wiping, and blowing noses
 - after snacks and lunch, particularly if hands are sticky, greasy or soiled
 - when students come in from outdoor play or recess

In limited cases, hand hygiene with an alcohol-based sanitizer or alcohol-based wipes, when there is no visible soiling of hands, are alternatives to hand washing with soap and water by children over 24 months of age, under the supervision of the teacher. The CDC recommends an alcohol-based sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol and to rub the product over all surfaces of your hands and fingers until your hands are dry, about 20 seconds, then wash hands with soap and water as soon as possible.

SIGNAGE

Signage will be placed throughout the offices and school.

BUS DRIVERS/BUS PROTOCOLS

Schools will follow the protocols outlined by the local district providing busing.

RESTROOM USAGE DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

St. Thomas the Apostle will post the maximum capacity sign on the door. There will be limited shared use of restrooms. Staff will keep a daily log of student usage in order to facilitate contact tracing if necessary.

RECESS and PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Weather permitting, each class will be provided an opportunity for outside recess.

- Use cones, flags, tape, or other signs to create boundaries between groups.
- Always wash hands immediately after outdoor playtime.
- Students may wear gym/spirit wear on designated days.

VISITORS ON CAMPUS

Visitors will be allowed on campus or in the school building **only by appointment**. Fewer people entering the school building allows for greater implementation of safety measures.

A large box will be placed outside of the main entrance. This will be used for any packages that need to be dropped off during the course of the school day.

CAFETERIA AND MEAL PERIODS

The school will continue to provide students with the opportunity to purchase lunch through Harmony Foods. Students will remain in their classrooms and lunch will be brought to the classrooms. Students may bring their own lunches. Only pre-ordered meals will be provided. There will be no a la carte options available for purchase. Students will not have access to the vending machines or water fountains. Students will not be allowed to visit the nurse's office for water in order to minimize contact with any students that may feel ill. Therefore, all beverages must be brought from home. Our milk program will be available as usual.

SNACKS AND FOOD DELIVERY

Bringing refreshments to share during school is prohibited in order to limit the risk of contamination. Snack time is permitted, but students must bring their own snack items and drinks to school. The school will not provide snacks to students. We ask that there be no food delivered and that food be kept at assigned spaces.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

School Specific: To stay updated on the most current information:

1. Teachers, students, and parents need to check their email often.
2. Visit the school website
3. Follow our social media platforms
4. PowerSchool Student Information System
5. School Messenger Alert System

ACADEMICS AND HOME-BASED LEARNING

- Presently, the State of New Jersey is returning to a traditional face to face classroom instruction in September 2021. We must be prepared to provide other models of instruction, as can be seen in a hybrid or remote school setting in the event that the school or an entire class needs to be quarantined. Provisions must be made to provide students with instruction. **Currently there is no remote learning option available.**
- **If a student is excluded from school due to a confirmed positive case of COVID, teachers will remain in communication through Google Classroom and email.**
- **There will be a waiting period of 1-2 days to begin live temporary remote learning so that teachers can properly prepare for students to join their classes remotely if it becomes necessary. Live remote learning will only be offered if an entire class needs to quarantine or if the school needs to close due to COVID-19. Temporary live remote learning will not be available for students who are home sick for non- COVID reasons, for students who travel, or for any other reason.**

St. Thomas the Apostle's goal is to design flexible instructional plans that work best in both traditional face to face and remote environments. The following will be considered:

- Creating year-long plans to facilitate more meaningful, interdisciplinary units that can be delivered face to face or remotely.
- Ensuring all instructional experiences include modeling, guided instruction, collaborative work, and independent work rather than over-reliance on independent

work during remote learning. This will require strategic use of synchronous and asynchronous lessons.

- Reviewing and implementing best practices in synchronous and asynchronous instruction to meet student needs and engagement.
- Making adjustments to school-based service plans for students with disabilities to account for accommodations and modifications needed in a remote learning environment.
- Creating an “early warning system” to identify and intervene with students who may be exhibiting academic and/or behavioral concerns.
- Developing a plan for benchmark screening and intervention delivery during in person and potential periods of remote learning.

CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Catholic schools have a two-fold charge: to provide an education that is academically excellent and one that is deeply rooted in Catholic identity. Catholic values will be infused intentionally across all grade levels and all subject matter. Participation in liturgy and prayer will continue to be encouraged for both traditional face to face and remote settings. Service learning opportunities will remain a priority in our school.

GRADING AND ATTENDANCE POLICY

To receive credit for the courses for this school year students are expected to complete the assignments. The grading and attendance policies are located in the school handbook.

REMOTE LEARNING

In the event that the school has to close in 2021-2022, we will follow the guidelines below for receiving and returning student work. Please be aware that families will not be offered a remote learning option.

SCHOOL SPECIFIC: The school will continue to use Google Classroom for grades Pre-K- 8. Google Classroom will be another communication method for parents to be able to contact the classroom teachers.

Strictly sending packets home for students is not permitted. The expectation is that all schools will provide daily online virtual instruction for all students.

ONLINE INSTRUCTION (IF NECESSARY)

- Students in grades Pre-K -8 have STA student usernames and passwords.
- Students will advise their teachers if they require assistance with their username, password, or login.
- Students must be seated at a table or desk to facilitate an optimal school learning environment.

- Electronic devices should not be a distraction and need to be turned off.
- Students will check the teachers' websites and log into Google Classroom for all classes each day.
- Students will continue to communicate with teachers via their STA email or Google Classroom.
- Students will use the online platforms specified by their teachers.
- All assignments must be completed and submitted by the date specified by the teacher.
- Student daily attendance will be taken.
- Students will submit assignments in Google Classroom or as hard copies upon the return to school, depending on situations and assignments.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES/BEFORE AND AFTERCARE PROGRAMS

- Adhere to all applicable social distancing requirements and hygiene protocol during any extracurricular activities.
- Maximize the use of technology and online resources to continue some extra-curricular activities without additional person-to-person contact.
- Minimize use of school facilities to school-sponsored extracurricular activities and groups.
- Cleaning/disinfecting schedule may not allow for in-person gatherings outside school hours.

For the foreseeable future, St. Thomas the Apostle will limit large gatherings for in school extracurricular activities.

Before and aftercare programs will be available. **Please note that drop in service will not be available.** Programs must adhere to social distancing and sanitizing guidelines. Once the building is vacated no one may return until school reopens the following day. During the before and aftercare programs, students will be required to wear masks.

TRAVEL DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR

In the event that families choose to travel outside of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, and Delaware, all unvaccinated individuals will be required to quarantine for 7 days with a negative test result (the test may not be taken **before** day 5 after travel) or a 10-day quarantine if you choose not to have your child/ children tested. Please be aware,

these students **will not** be given a remote learning option. It will be the responsibility of the student to make up all assignments and tests missed during travel as well as during the subsequent quarantine.

NOTE: The Return to School Plan is a fluid document. The pastor and principal reserve the right to amend the document as needed.