



*St. Thomas the Apostle
School:
Reopening FAQ for Families*

Dear Families of St. Thomas the Apostle School,

Our continued hopes and prayers are with everyone. I know that you have many questions about the start of the school year. If you have been a member of our St. Thomas the Apostle family you know I pride myself on transparency and making decisions with input from all our stakeholders to do what is best for our school community. This has been one of the most challenging years of my career as an educator as we continue to deal with and adapt to the new realities of trying to reopen school during the Covid-19 Pandemic. We have been working diligently all summer with the Archdiocese, local and state health officials, and a task force of teachers and parents to navigate this new normal. Our Faculty has been meeting on Zoom calls discussing a numerous number of variables of what we are anticipating in the Fall. We have outlined many of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) below to provide you with some important details regarding our plans for reopening in September. Specific policies will be sent out later this month, as always, any plans are subject to change and must remain dynamic to account for any updates coming from state, local, or archdiocesan authorities.

We are proud of the work we have done and know you count on us to continue to provide the best educational services for your child in a safe and nurturing environment. We appreciate your support and confidence as we will continue to work together to do what is best for all our students, faculty, and staff.

Continued prayers and well wishes for you and your families,

God Bless,

Mr. Michael Petrillo M.Ed.

Fundamental Principles of our Reopening Plan

BUILDING LAYOUT

TEMPERATURE CHECKS

INFECTION PROTOCOLS

REMOTE LEARNING OPTION

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Parents/ Guardians Regarding the Reopening of Schools

We know that parents have many questions about the start of the school year. In this document, we have outlined many of the frequently asked questions (FAQ) from parents about our reopening plan. These questions are divided up into four sections, each addressing a separate aspect of the reopening process. The categories are:

1. **Health and Safety:** General health and safety questions, such as social distancing, masks, and facility cleaning.
2. **Academics and Programming:** Questions related to how classes will be taught. This section also includes information on school events (such as masses or assemblies) and extracurricular activities.
3. **Infection Protocols:** How we will handle instances where students or employees become ill.
***We have written this plan but are awaiting Archdiocesan approval before its publishing. It will be out to families as soon as possible**
4. **Tuition:** Questions about tuition payments during the upcoming school year.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Q: What does “reopening our school” really mean?

A: Gathering as a school community is an integral part of what makes St. Thomas the Apostle School so special. Our plan is to reopen our school with the normal model of full five day classes this fall. This means that all students are welcome to return to classes for face-to-face instruction. We will also be allowing for the option for families to keep their children remote and work from home.

Q: What will the in-person school day look like?

A: Arrival and dismissal procedures will be adapted to use multiple entrance and exit doors by specific grade levels. Arrival time will be extended from 7:50 until 8:20 am with set windows for grade levels to limit students congregating in larger numbers. Classes will now end at 2:30PM as we will stagger dismissal times from 2:30-3pm through the same designated doorways. More detailed policies and plans will be provided as we get closer to the start of school.

Q: Who decides when a school has met the requirements to reopen? When will this happen?

A: Our plan for reopening has been submitted to the Archdiocese for review and approval. Mr. Michael Petrillo was appointed as a member of the Archdiocesan Reopening Committee and has been in regular contact with leadership about how to safely reopen schools. We are also following all federal, state, and local health guidelines to ensure any reopening is safe for our school community.

Q: Will students need to wear masks at school?

A: All individuals will be required to wear a mask when entering and exiting the building. Teachers, students, and staff will wear masks at all times. This is not only a school level decision, this was made by the Archdiocese of Newark and the Governor's Office.

Q: Do I need to purchase masks for my child?

A: Yes. While we will have an inventory on hand at school, we are asking all parents to purchase masks for their child. Parents may opt to buy disposable or reusable masks. For disposable masks, each mask must be thrown away at the end of the school day and parents should send plenty of extra masks to school with their child. For reusable masks, masks should be cleaned after every use and students should send at least one extra reusable mask at school.

Q: Can face shields be used instead of masks?

A: No. Face shields cannot be used instead of masks but may be worn in addition to. Teachers may use only face shields during times when they are both socially distanced from students and it is necessary for instruction.

Q: Should I take my child's temperature every day before school?

A: Yes. A high fever is a key symptom of COVID-19. Parents should take their child's temperature every day before their child is taken to school. If your child has a fever of over 100°F, your child should be kept home from school. Any child who arrives at school and registers a temperature over 100°F will not be allowed into the school building. You should contact your child's doctor and the school's main office. Similarly, you should ask your child if he/she has any of the other symptoms of COVID-19, such as a sore throat, coughing, or nausea. If your child complains of these symptoms, you should keep him/her home and contact your doctor and the main office.

For more information about how to handle the potential illness of your child, please see the Infection Protocol section.

Q: How will drop off and pick-up be handled?

A: We are adjusting our regular arrival and dismissal procedures to use various entrances and exits to minimize contact between student cohorts. Parents will be asked not to congregate near school doors. We will communicate specific drop off and pick up procedures to you ahead of the start of school.

In addition, when students enter school every day, they will be asked to participate in four tasks. These are:

1. All students must be wearing a face covering and line up following all social distance indicators at their assigned entrance.
2. Students will be asked if they are feeling well.
3. A temperature check, administered by a school employee (please note that parents should also take temperatures every day, as noted above).
4. Once admitted to the school building, students must use the hands-free sanitizer station at each entrance.

If a student has a temperature above 100°F or complains of other COVID-19 symptoms, he/she will not be admitted into the school building and will await further instructions from the nurse while remaining outside in a safe area.. Parents will be contacted and asked to pick up the child (see Infection Protocol section for more information)

Q: What does the plan say about safety and cleanliness requirements for school buildings?

A: Our plan includes very specific requirements for the ongoing cleaning and sanitizing of our school building. Generally speaking, buildings will be cleaned very frequently, with a particular focus on high-traffic areas and common surfaces. Windows and/or vents should be opened to maximize air flow. We have prioritized securing additional cleaning supplies and sanitizing products in our budget. Barriers will be installed in main office areas and on tables shared by any students. The school has contracted with York Cleaning Services to clean the building from top to bottom nightly throughout the school year.

Q. What is the nurse schedule?

A. The nurses are provided to the school via the Essex County Educational Services Commission and the Bloomfield Board of Health. The school only employs one nurse on its staff. The rest are garnered through Essex County Educational Services and the Bloomfield BOH. Their schedules are created through their providers.

Lunch and Recess:

Q. Will there be assigned seating?

A. Yes students will be seated in groups of 4 at a table. We have plexi-glass dividers for the tables

Q How many students per table?

A.4

Q. Will outside vendors provide lunch?

A. No, students will be required to bring their own lunch, until it is deemed safe for outside vendors to supply lunch to the students. If a student forgets his/her lunch a family member/guardian should drop it off in the front entrance of the school between the green and glass doors. It will be brought to the student at lunch.

Q. Where will lunchboxes be kept if not in a lunch crate this year?

A. Students will be required to keep their lunch at their desk/under their desk

Q. Who will be responsible for cleaning each table and all public areas, such as bathrooms, in between staggered lunches? A.The school custodial staff has revamped equipment including EPA friendly sprayers to sanitize large areas in minutes. The school has also hired York Cleaning services to clean the building from top to bottom nightly

throughout the school year. This allows for proper sanitizing and cleaning to take place for the following day.

Q. Will there be enough hand sanitizers in the lunchroom to avoid crowding and lines at the hand sanitizer dispenser?

A. We have purchased 10 contactless sanitizing stations for the school building two will be generated for the cafeteria only. Please note that only 3 classes at a time will be in the cafeteria for lunch. For example grade 6,7 & 8.

Q. Will there be recess? If so, what is the protocol? Masks? Distancing?

A. Yes recess can take place, according to the Archdiocese if social distancing is able to be maintained outdoor play doesn't require mask wearing. The classes will be assigned three different areas of play. For example on a Monday Grade 6 (Parking Lot), Grade 7 (Basketball Court), Grade 8 (Playground). On Tuesday the students will rotate to a different station, this keeps cohorts together.

Q: Can I still volunteer at school?

A: To mitigate risk, access to the school building from any visitors will be strictly limited so volunteering in any capacity is on hold.

Q: Will before care and after care be available this year?

A: Yes. Before care and after care will still be available to those who require these services. Necessary modifications will be put in place to ensure social distancing and minimize the mixing of cohorts. A Google Form has been created and will be dispersed closer to the start of school.

Q: My child and/or another member of my household is in an at-risk group for COVID-19. Should I send my child to school?

A: Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has defined conditions in which certain people may be more at risk for severe illness through COVID-19. If your child or another member of your household is in an at-risk group, we encourage you to speak to your doctor. Ultimately you should decide whether it is safe for your child to attend school. A remote learning option is available for families that do not wish to return (see next question).

Q: What do I do if I do not feel safe sending my child back to school?

A: We have taken every step to ensure the safety of students at St. Thomas the Apostle School this fall. However, we understand that some families still may not wish to return. Some families may include individuals in at-risk groups for COVID-19, while others may feel general anxiety. As such, we have developed a remote learning option that will be available to any family that does not wish to return in the new year. Families will be given the choice to opt-in for distance learning only model at some time in August via a Google Form. You will remain responsible for your tuition contract. We are actively working to ensure that our remote learning model provides the high-quality education you expect from St. Thomas the Apostle School. If a family chooses remote the child will remain remote learning for the duration of at least one month.

Q: Is it okay for my family to travel out of state during the COVID-19 pandemic?

A: If travel is necessary, we encourage you to become familiar with the New Jersey's Department of Health Travel Guidelines. If you or a member of your household travels to another country or to a state that has a travel advisory for COVID-19, your child will be required to isolate from the school building for 14 days. Remote instruction will be provided during any isolation period

Q: What happens if there is a COVID-19 surge in New Jersey and the state imposes more restrictions on schools?

A: If a COVID-19 surge occurs, we will work closely with state officials to determine whether we can continue face-to-face instruction (even on an alternate schedule). If necessary, we will return to at-home remote instruction.

Q: Is there a separate room for suspected COVID cases?

A. Yes all schools are required to have at least one “isolation” room other than the Nurse’s office.

Fire Drills:

Q: How will fire drills be conducted? Will there be masks and social distancing?

A. The department of emergency management along with the state department of education are working collectively to form smooth processes. Currently the school is preparing to make use of all exits, and fire escapes for classes and students.

ACADEMICS AND PROGRAMMING

Q: Will my child's curriculum be changed this year?

A: St. Thomas the Apostle School will still deliver high-quality instruction in core subjects (religion, language arts, math, science and social studies). Special requirements will be in place for departmentalized classes and special area subjects (see sections below). The implementation of safety and health requirements (outlined earlier in this FAQ) will create new complexities in instruction, but our commitment remains to provide your child the best possible faith-based education.

Q: Will my child's classroom look different?

A: We have adjusted the layout of desks and tables in classrooms to meet social distancing guidelines. In order to maximize floor space, we've asked teachers to remove non-essential furniture, rugs, and other items. We have also asked that desks and tables be arranged so that they face the front of the room.

Q: Will students share school supplies?

A: No. Students will not share school supplies (e.g., books, crayons, technology, etc.), including for such subjects as art and music. Supply lists sent home will reflect these changes. Exceptions may be made for activities outdoors (such as outdoor physical education classes).

Q: I have a child in preschool or kindergarten. Is high-quality learning possible?

A: Yes. We are working very closely with our early education team to continue the best possible quality of instruction in preschool and kindergarten. While health and safety requirements are in place, our teachers will continue to work hard in the coming year to ensure your child grows intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

Q: Will students still change classes?

A: No. In order to protect classes in cohorts, students will not move to different classrooms in departmentalized settings. Instead, the teacher will go to the students' homeroom and teach them there. The non-homeroom teacher should always remain at least six feet apart from students .

Q: Will school still offer classes in special subject areas (e.g., art, music, PE, etc.)?

A: Yes. As with departmentalization (see last question), special subject area teachers will travel to each class' homeroom for instruction whenever possible. This will be particularly likely for such subjects as computers, library, art, music, physical education and Spanish.

Physical Education classes will be held outdoors when possible and when not possible, a health course will be provided.

Q: Will tests still be given this year?

A: Yes. It is important that we continue to gauge student academic growth throughout the school year. As such, you should anticipate tests to be administered in your child's class. These tests will include the Map Growth testing we implemented last year and is administered three times a year.

Q: Will students participate in field trips?

A: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we will not be scheduling in-person field trips at this time. Virtual field trips are being scheduled and will be conducted.

Q: My child has a service plan because of an identified learning, behavioral or physical need. Can the needs of my child still be met this year?

A: We are working closely with Essex County Special Services Commission to make sure all students with service plans have their needs met. If you have urgent questions, you should not hesitate to contact Essex County Special Services directly.

Q: I need to meet with a teacher or my school principal. Can these meetings occur?

A: Yes. These meetings can take place virtually via phone or video chat.

Q: How have teachers been prepared for when the students move back to all remote learning? Was there training during the summer to adapt to new technologies & learning apps to enhance interactive instruction online?

A. We have enhanced our program by adding Web Cams in each classroom which will be zoomed onto the front of each classroom. The teachers will be wearing microphones so that students who opt for remote learning are fully engaged with the rest of the classroom. Students who are home will be connected via Google Meet to connect into the Web Cam. The teachers will be trained in full utilization of the Web Cams and Google Integration on September 1st. The teachers have been notified of multiple workshops being offered by the NEA, NWEA, NCEA, and Educational sites such as Sadlier, McGraw Hill, etc. to enhance their methods. The teachers have been meeting regularly via zoom discussing new practices to utilize in Remote Learning.

Q: What is the time frame to change over if a student wants to change from in-person over to remote learning ?

A. One month. Students who opt for remote learning will do so on a month to month basis via a Google Form.

Q: Can my child use their own personal device in school?

A. The school is permitting the use of personal devices to mitigate the proponent of sharing. Students/Families will need to fill out a liability form which takes responsibility away from the school on the personal device. Chrome Books which belong to the school will still be available to students. The Class of 2021 will receive their own Chrome Book from the school as has been proper procedure.

Q: Can we still have meetings of stakeholder groups, such as the School Board, Home School Association?

A: Such meetings should take place virtually and in accordance with any local and state health guidelines as they change.

Q: What about school fundraisers and other gatherings?

A: At this point any event should be done virtually when possible, socially distanced will take place in accordance with local and state guidelines.

Q: Will school masses still take place?

A: The Archdiocese has defined a specific plan for parishes that allows for the celebration of mass virtually. We will be asked to follow this plan, in close coordination with the local pastor and parish, in determining how/whether masses may be celebrated.

Q: Will First Communion, Reconciliation, and Confirmation take place this year?

A: Parents are encouraged to contact their parish directly for any information regarding sacraments.

Q: How will extracurricular activities be impacted this year?

A: We are working in accordance with all health guidelines and the Archdiocese to make decisions about all extracurricular activities. Highlights of this guidance include (by activity):

- **Athletics:** We are awaiting further information from the state and Archdiocese regarding athletics. More information will be provided to parents as it is known.
- **Chess, Drama/School Play, Robotics, etc.:** Due to ongoing health concerns, such programs will be conducted virtually or canceled for the coming school year.
- **Other Activities:** For other clubs these activities should be conducted virtually when possible.

TUITION AND FEES

Q: Will school still collect tuition this year?

A: Yes. While this school year may look different, St. Thomas the Apostle School will continue to provide a rigorous academic experience while supporting the moral and spiritual development of each student. Our school depends upon tuition revenue to pay our employees who do this work and support other school-related expenses.

Q: I am having difficulty paying tuition, as my own workplace has been impacted by COVID-19. What do I do?

A: We know that some families may have difficulties paying tuition due to the loss of pay during workplace closures and will do our best to support those in need of assistance. If this is happening to you, please contact Mr. Michael Petrillo directly.

INFECTION PROTOCOLS

***We have written out this plan but are awaiting final approval from the Archdiocese before publishing. It will be available to parents as soon as possible. ***