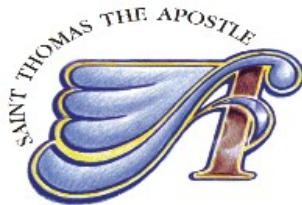


# **RETURN-TO-SCHOOL PLAN**

*IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19*



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

## School Reopening Task Force

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Thank you to the members of the task force for their input in the creation of this document. Their expertise and commitment to Catholic education, and to the St. Thomas the Apostle School community 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](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/community/schools-childcare/schools.html#anchor_1589931942037)

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

## HEALTH PROTOCOL AND SCREENINGS (EMPLOYEE AND STUDENT)

All students and employees will be 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. A parent waiver will be provided to each family

requiring them to check their child for symptoms and temperature daily prior to going to school.

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

Staff will visually check students for symptoms upon arrival every day and/or confirm with families that students are free of COVID-19 symptoms (via waiver). **All families and staff must have a signed waiver on file.**

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

All Students and staff will be required to have a temperature check before entering the building. Anyone with a temperature of 100 Degrees F or higher will not be admitted and should follow up with a physician. In order to return to school, the student/employee must be fever and symptom free for a **minimum** of 24 hours.

**Employees:**

School staff are required to wear face coverings.

- 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.
- Employees returning to work from an approved medical leave should contact HR. You will be asked to submit a healthcare provider's note before returning to work.
- If an employee has been diagnosed with COVID19, 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 and are required to do so unless doing so would inhibit the student's health.
- 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 isolation room** and the case form will be completed.

Once the employee or student arrives at the isolation room, they will immediately be provided with a mask and gloves. Explain that this is to help protect other employees and students and prevent the spread of the potential virus.

- 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 (6 ft. away). Anyone who has been in close contact with a suspected positive case within 6ft. 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 the HR department.
- The isolation area 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:**

Negative results of an FDA Emergency Use Authorized molecular assay for COVID-19 from at least two consecutive respiratory specimens collected < 24 hours apart (total of two negative specimens) AND resolution of fever, without use of fever reducing medication AND improvement in respiratory symptoms.

## **SOCIAL DISTANCING**

Social distancing is an effective way to prevent potential infection. St. Thomas the Apostle employees, students, and parents will practice staying approximately 6 feet away from others and eliminating contact with others.

- 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 6 feet apart and considering the flow of student traffic around the room. Social distancing guidance will support a 3-foot radius around each student desk (from the center), resulting in a 6-foot total distance between any two students.
- 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 lines on the floor will mark the walking direction throughout the halls in order to maintain the social distancing requirement of 6 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 will be avoided.

## **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 unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health. Students must wear face coverings and are required to do so when social distancing cannot be maintained, unless doing so would inhibit the student's health.

**Gloves:** Touching your face with contaminated hands, whether gloved or not, poses a significant risk of infection. Wearing gloves does not diminish the need to wash your hands. Please remember to wash your hands properly as it is the number-one defense against any virus. Additionally, the proper removal of gloves reduces the risk of being exposed to contamination.

*Please note that social distancing should still be practiced even with the use of gloves and 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. All teachers and students are asked not to visit another classroom outside of their team or grade level. 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 6-foot separation of desks and children. If the 6-foot separation is not feasible (considering the size of the room and number of students per class), students will be required to wear masks. Turn desks to face in the same direction (rather than facing each other) or have students sit on only one side of tables, spaced apart. For furniture that is intended to accommodate more than one student the school will explore bringing in furniture to replace the multi-student furniture or consider some type of partitioning system.

- **Students will not change classes or leave their rooms.** Classes will be kept together to include the same group of children each day (cohorts). **Teachers will change classrooms, with students staying in the same classroom.** 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 6 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.
- 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.
- Commingling between classes or other groups of students will be restricted.
- There will be no large group gatherings.
- 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 6 feet apart (e.g., reception desks) will be 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, books, and other games or learning aids.
- Each child's belongings will be kept separated from others' and in individually labeled containers, cubbies, or areas.
- Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example, by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or



health risk (e.g., risk of falling, triggering asthma symptoms) to children using the facility.

- 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**

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

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 lunchrooms and toilets.
- 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 six feet apart during nap time (will have mats that will be oriented head to foot), when eating, and doing other activities.
- Restrict 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. All restrooms will be monitored at all times. Staff will keep a daily log of student usage in order to facilitate contact tracing if necessary.

**RECESS, PHYSICAL EDUCATION, LOCKERS AND LOCKER ROOMS**

Weather permitting, each individual class will be provided an opportunity for outside recess. Only one class will be allowed in any designated recess area.

- 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**

Until further notice there will be no visitors allowed on campus or in the school building. 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. 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. Personal deliveries such as packages may not be delivered to the school.

## **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

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. Google Classroom Grades Pre-K-8
5. PowerSchool Student Information System
6. School Messenger Alert System

## **ACADEMICS AND HOME-BASED LEARNING**

There are three considerations (Traditional, Hybrid, and Remote) for returning to school, depending upon state and local health guidelines. Presently, the State of New Jersey is returning to a traditional face to face classroom instruction in September 2020. We must be prepared to provide other models of instruction, as can be seen in a hybrid or remote school setting.

Some families may not feel comfortable having their child return to school for instruction. In addition, some students may be medically fragile and their physician does not recommend returning to school. In either case, provisions will be made to provide these students with instruction. The school will provide instruction to these students via live streaming of classes as well as the Google platform. Students will be expected to attend their regularly scheduled classes via live streaming. Parents who choose the online option will be expected to continue with the online platform on a daily basis until such time as the school approves the change from online to in-person classes so that population and spacing may be monitored.

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 face-to-face and 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 2020-2021, we will follow the guidelines below for receiving and returning student work.

St. Thomas the Apostle 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.

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**

- 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**

- St. Thomas the Apostle will refrain from 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.
  
- **Please note that the Pastor and the Principal have the right to amend this document as needed. This plan may change if we receive additional guidelines from the New Jersey Department of Education and or the CDC.**