

Parent Q & A

REMOTE LEARNING

Governor Murphy of NJ recently announced NJ schools will reopen in September and students will be attending classes. Can you please clarify if students at St. Thomas have an option between home school or in class attendance?

- All students can choose between remote learning or in-person learning.

What if my child starts the year in person and then we change our mind and want to change to remote?

- You need to fill out the Remote Learning Opt-In Form (which was emailed to you and can also be found on the front page of the website) and submit it to the school.

If my child is sick (a cold, etc) and I choose to keep them home because I am being extra-cautious, can we do remote learning for the day?

- No. If your child is absent from school they will be marked absent. The only way they can do remote is if they have a confirmed case of Covid, or have had documented exposure to Covid, and a doctor provides a note that they must quarantine for 2 weeks.
- The link to the live streamed classes will only be given to students who are enrolled in the remote learning option.

If the school closes for snow or inclement weather, can the students do remote learning that day?

- No. If the school is closed for inclement weather, there will be no classes taking place that day.

How do we opt back in to in-person learning? How long will remote learning last?

- If you choose remote learning, you must stay remote for a full marking period. Just before the end of the first marking period, you will be given the option to return to in-person learning. If you choose to stay remote, you will remain remote until the end of the second marking period, etc.
- At the end of each marking period we will send another notice to parents asking their intentions.

Do the remote learning students need to wear uniforms?

- Uniforms are not required for remote learning students. All students are expected to dress appropriately for school. If this becomes a problem, remote learning students will be required to wear their school uniform.

When/How will the students get their schedules and teacher assignments?

- The students who are in the remote learning program will be contacted by their teacher prior to the start of classes regarding their schedules and class expectations. There will be a Zoom meeting for all remote students with their respective teachers on Tuesday, September 1. Times to be determined.
- The teachers will have the information about how to access their Google Classroom posted on their class websites. They will also be able to contact the students through their school email accounts. New students will receive their emails and access information by the end of next week.

How will the students retrieve their books/computers/supplies for remote learning?

- There will be pick-up times scheduled for all students to get what they need from the school. As soon as the pick-up schedule is finalized we will be sharing it with the parents.

How will a remote learning day look?

- All grades from Pre-8 through 8th will have live zoom classes in real time according to the school schedule.
- Our early childhood teachers have been working very hard to create engaging, hands-on learning lessons for all of their students, both in class and remote.
- The teacher will send all remote learning students the link to access their class through Zoom. The students will follow their regular class schedule as if they were in the building.
- During breaks (lunch, naptime, etc) the students at home will have a break as well. The teachers will give the students the schedule for the day so they know when they will need to be back online for the restart of class. The same applies for gym class.
- For the privacy of the students in the classroom, the Zoom will simply be a live stream of the teacher conducting his/her classes. Your child will not be able to have questions answered in real time, however they may submit questions in the Zoom chat box or Google Classroom, and the teacher will respond as soon as they are able.
- If you feel your child is struggling, please feel reach out to the teacher with your concerns and the teacher will address them.
- The teacher may also choose to have a live, small group Zoom meeting with the remote students at some point in the day if needed. Please note that this may occur after regular school hours, but before 3:30pm.
- Remote students will be graded based on their being logged into their classes, not on their physical participation. Students must be logged in for all of their classes to be marked as present for the day, beginning with morning prayers at 7:55 am.
- The teachers will be wearing personal amplification devices so that the students learning remotely, as well as the students in class, can hear the teachers easily. They will hopefully be able to hear their fellow students and classroom discussions, however they may not be as easy to hear as the teacher who is wearing the microphone.
- In the event of technical difficulties (on the part of St. Thomas) the students will not be penalized for the day.

How will the students turn in work?

- The majority of assignments will be completed online through Google Classroom. If there happens to be an assignment that has to be physically turned in to the teacher, it will be the parent's responsibility to get it into the school, however the teachers will do their best to keep all assignments online so this will not be necessary.
- There will be a drop-off box located outside the main entrance to the school if anything needs to be brought in to allow for a contactless experience.
- If there are ever any reasons for the teachers to send home physical work/worksheets/packets to the students, the parents will be responsible for picking them up. The teachers will have more specific instructions if the need arises.

How will usual testing and MAP testing be handled?

- MAP testing is scheduled to begin on Sept. 21. There will be a remote MAP test for those students working from home. As we get more information regarding testing, we will pass it along.
- Remote students could possibly take their tests during specials (if the teachers feel it is necessary) so that the teacher can monitor them more closely. This may not be possible for all grade levels/teachers.
- All students and parents will be expected to be on the "honor system" in regards to testing. Students must do their own work without outside help. This is very important so that the teachers have an accurate understanding of how the student is performing, especially when they return to the classroom - we don't want them to be behind!

If virtual is our option do we HAVE to attend Pre-K/K orientation with children on the 2nd?

- No, but the teachers will be having a Zoom meeting with all of their remote students on Sept. 1. The time is still to be determined.

Will there be a new student orientation for students entering 1-7th grade?

- Unfortunately, at this time we can not have parents in the building so we are unable to do an orientation for our older students.

Will the children be allowed to wear headphones during instruction time so they can remain focused virtually?

- If they would like to wear headphones while virtual learning at home that is fine.

Will parent/teacher conferences be held virtually (As there are still parents who practice social distancing for safety purposes)?

- When we get closer to parent/teacher conference time (mid-October) a plan will be made based on the current state of the health emergency. We will do our best to accommodate everyone as needed.

What are the triggers to determine if the school goes all remote?

- The Diocese of Metuchen will be monitoring the state and CDC guidelines and making an informed decision for all Diocesan schools. At this time we are remaining open unless Governor Murphy closes all schools in the state.

What's the percentage for each grade level currently enrolled for virtual learning?

- Approximately 7-10 percent of each grade level is opting for virtual at this time (as of 8/19/20).

Tuition and Fees

- Tuition is expected to be paid on time as long as the students are enrolled at St. Thomas. All families are receiving a 20% discount until December 31, 2020. If you have any questions regarding tuition, please email Ms. Fritzen.
- Class fees only need to be paid if the children are in the building for in-person learning. If/When the child returns to in-person learning, we will adjust the class fee accordingly, based on any activities that have taken place.
- The \$50 technology fee must be paid by all students in grades 1-8. ALL students in grades 1-8 will be using a school-issued laptop or chromebook. All students must use the device provided by the school as it will have the programs needed for MAP testing and other classroom assignments. We also have the ability to access each laptop remotely if trouble-shooting is needed.

Has the school made any improvements to their technology?

- Yes! We have hired a brand new company that has spent the summer strengthening our infrastructure and internet.
- We have purchased enough laptop computers for every student in grades 1-8 to have their own device. They have not all arrived yet, but they are on the way! They will be distributed as soon as they arrive and have been set up.

CLASSES / CLASS SIZE / TEACHERS / CURRICULUM / TESTING

How many children are in one classroom at the same time.

- We are capping grades 1-8 at 40 students per grade level/20 students per classroom. Any of our existing classes that are over 20 students in a room will have plexiglass partitions on the student desks.
- Kindergarten has been capped at 36, meaning that there will be no more than 18 students in a class.
- Pre-K classes will have no more than 13 students in a classroom (10 for Pre-K 3).

I have a question about the gym uniform, as long there are no gym classes. Do we still need to buy gym uniforms?! Will the kids still have some form of physical education? If not how will they get to release energy or stretch? What will gym class look like in future? How will art and music change?

- While there will not be an actual gym class, the students will be allowed to wear their gym uniforms once a week, so yes, they should be purchased.
- Weather permitting, the students will be brought outside during their gym class time. If not, they will have a break from class work in their classroom during their gym time.

- Art/Music, Spanish, and DT will take place in the classrooms. Students will not share supplies for art or DT. Ms. Frank will be starting the year with art, not music at this time.

Will there be recess?

- Weather permitting, we hope to get each class outside at least once per day. It may not be at lunchtime, but we will do our best to get everyone outside in small groups, one or two classes at a time.
- Unfortunately, the students will not be able to use any playground equipment or toys at this time.

What about the middle school - will they be changing classes?

- All students will stay in the same classroom for the duration of the school day. The teachers will be doing the moving.

Our child will be attending Kindergarten and we are wondering how will the school handle toy-sharing during the school day? For middle school, will there be any hands-on science experiments that need to be eliminated due to social distance?

- There will be no sharing of toys. The students in the younger grades will be asked to bring a few toys from home that they will keep separate from everyone else.
- There will be no sharing of supplies at all. The students were asked to purchase most of their own supplies so there will be no cross contamination. The supply lists for all grades (Pre-K - 8) are on the school website in the "Summer Assignments" tab.
- Any manipulatives or lab materials used by the teachers in the classroom will be assigned to each student, and cleaned regularly.

Is it possible to let the students know who their homeroom teacher is before the first day of school?

- PowerSchool will reopen to parents on September 1. You will be able to see your child's teacher when your access is reestablished.
- There will be no student transfers between homerooms permitted.

Will there be advanced math for 7th and 8th grade?

- There will be advanced math for 8th grade only. They will be in their math group for homeroom and the entire day.

Could we get a virtual tour of the classrooms prior to day 1?

- Once classrooms are set up we will post some photos on the school website.

Will any classes be held outdoors while the weather is nice?

- We do not have the ability to accommodate classes being held outside.

Will the school consider an A/B rotation schedule to minimize the number of students in the building at one time?

- The Diocese has not approved this type of schedule for us.

SCHEDULING

Would the school consider alternating schedules to have less children in the building at one time for in person instruction? Or shortened days where lunch is not served and the children are in masks for a shorter amount of time?

- The Diocese has not approved this type of schedule for us.

What will the school hours be ? Same or shortened day?

- The school hours will not be changing at this time. The only early dismissals/shortened days are the ones that have already been scheduled. The tentative calendar which is posted on the website has not changed,

Due to the amount of preparation required to reopen - Do you think school will start on time 9/2? Any chance it will move to after Labor Day.?

- At this time we are hoping and praying to open as scheduled on September 2, however if we find that we are not ready to open we may need to push our first day until the following week. We will let you know as soon as possible if a change needs to be made.

How is lunchtime being handled for Kindergarten?

- All students will be eating in their classrooms. No classes will eat in the cafeteria.

Will the students bring their backpacks and books to school and home every day, or will these items stay in the classroom at all times?

- Student backpacks will be kept at their desks. Each desk will have a hook for their backpack and they will keep their coats on the back of their chairs. They will only bring home supplies needed for homework on that given day.

MASKS

Will children be expected to wear masks all day?

- Yes. The students and all staff must wear a mask at all times in the building. This is mandated by the Governor and the State of NJ.
- Students may remove their masks to eat.

How will non compliance for mask wearing and other social distance violations be handled?

How will the teachers police the wearing of the masks at all times for the Kindergarten class?

- Non compliance creates a health risk for the entire class and staff. Therefore, if non-compliance becomes an issue in grades 4-8, the student will be required to transition to remote learning. Mask wearing will be enforced by the teacher of our younger students as well. If there is an issue with mask wearing for a student in grades Pre-K through 3, the parent will be notified and asked to address the situation at home. If it continues to be a problem, that child will be asked to go remote as well.

- In Pre-K and K, we will have a full time aide in the classroom to help enforce mask wearing.

Are students required to wear masks during outdoor recess?

- As long as the 6 foot distance requirement can be maintained, the students will be allowed to take off their masks while they are outside. If they can't remain 6 ft apart they will be asked to put their masks back on.

Should students bring a pouch or some form of personal bag to keep their mask when not in use? (lunch)

- That is up to you. If you would like them to put them in a pouch or use a mask lanyard, that is fine.

Can my child wear a face shield instead of a mask?

- Students must wear masks. If they would like to wear a face shield, it must be worn in addition to the mask, not instead of.
- Gaiters are not permitted.

What if a younger student is not happy wearing a mask all day and gets upset. What can the teacher do to help the situation since everyone needs to be 6 feet apart?

- All parents should be getting their students used to wearing masks before the start of school. Please have your children wear a mask every day, increasing the time each day so they are used to it. The teachers will do their best to comfort the students.

Will there be "mask breaks" during the day?

- The only time the students will be able to take off their masks will be when they eat or if they go outside.

LUNCH/SNACK

Where are the children eating lunch?

- All students are eating in their classrooms.

Is there hot lunch or only from home?

- Harmony Foods will be doing pre-ordered lunches, no a la carte items or snacks. Students must pre-order their lunch or bring lunch from home
- All snacks must be brought from home.

Will Harmony Food Services enter the classrooms to deliver lunches to each class? Will Harmony Food wear proper PPE (masks and gloves) to prepare and deliver the lunches.

- Harmony Foods will be taking all precautionary measures necessary. All lunches will be pre-packaged and delivered to the classrooms.
- The lunch personnel will leave lunches outside each classroom; they will not enter the classrooms or student areas.
- If you have any questions regarding the lunch service, please contact Harmony Foods directly.

Will there be a lunch menu provided?

- Menus will be sent home during the first week of school. Lunch delivery will begin on Tuesday, September 8.

Do we order lunch in advance?

- All lunches must be pre-ordered. There will be no a la carte or snack items available.
- Students will NOT have access to vending machines or water fountains so all drinks must be brought from home.

How do you foresee all students in their classroom eating lunch at one time (especially since indoor dining isn't allowed in NJ)

- According to the governor, schools are exempt from that rule.

SOCIAL DISTANCING ENFORCEMENT / CLEANING PROCEDURES

Are there dividers on desks? The 8 grade has consistently been over 55 students- the largest of all classes. How are you able to accommodate appropriate social distance for these kids?

Please confirm that plexiglass dividers will be used for only those classes that exceed the 20 students, as mentioned in the re-opening document since a class size greater than 20 students is unable to properly maintain a six-foot social distancing.

- Any class that has more than 20 students, or any room that can not space the student 6 feet apart will have plexiglass dividers on the student desks.
- Students and faculty will wear masks at all times.

First, are you going to leave the windows open for better ventilation (specially during the months of sept-nov. when it is not yet cold)?

- Yes, windows will be kept open whenever possible. Students should be sure to have a fleece on days when it is cooler outside so teachers can keep windows open as much as possible.

Has the school considered indoor/outdoor shoes to mitigate germs, especially on carpeting. In the same vein, will younger children be sitting on the floors at all?

- The use of indoor outdoor shoes is not feasible in a school setting due to time constraints.
- All carpets have been removed from the classrooms.
- In Pre-K and K if the students are seated on the floor, they will each have their own vinyl cushion that they will be seated on. These cushions will be sanitized daily, and will not be shared between students.

Is there any possibility to show the class room floor map, so parents can have an idea how social distancing will be managed? Can you please provide a picture of a class room completely set up with the max number of students with all the PPE?

- All classrooms have been emptied of any unnecessary items/furniture. Desks are spaced 6 feet apart. For larger classes (5th & 8th) that can not have desks 6 ft apart, they will have plexiglass barriers on student desks,
- Pictures of classrooms will be put on the website when the classrooms are completely set up.

Did you hire additional custodial staff?

- Our existing staff will be working extended hours to clean and sanitize the building. This is to minimize the total number of staff with access to the building.

How often will the bathrooms be cleaned throughout the course of the day.

- They will be deep cleaned each evening, and sprayed with our electrostatic sprayer several times throughout the day.
- Bathrooms will be monitored by a staff member at all times. There will be no more than two students permitted in the bathrooms at one time.
- The teacher who is monitoring the restroom (not the students) will be signing the students in and out so that we have a record of who was together in the event we need to do any contact tracing.

According to scientists, COVID19 is airborne and easily transmitted through groups of people gathering. How will the school keep the air clean?

- Each classroom has its own ventilation system. The filters have all been changed, and will be changed every 30 days, as indicated by the CDC.
- There is NO cross-ventilation between the school and the auditorium/bingo hall.

We see that Clorox wipes are listed on the supply list? What if the students can not bring in their own wipes - how will their desks be cleaned?

- Teachers have a supply to clean desks during the day. Students will be taught how to clean their own space. And classrooms (including student desks) are thoroughly cleaned by maintenance each night.

What about hand sanitizer?

- All classrooms have touchless hand sanitizing stations that will be kept filled.
- Students are asked to have their own pocket-sized sanitizer to have with them when they are outside, or seated at their desks (to cut down on moving through the classroom).
- There will also be hand sanitizing stations in the hallways.

TRANSPORTATION / STUDENT DROP OFF & PICK UP

Busing:

- Busing is determined by your individual school district. If you have specific questions regarding transportation you need to contact your home school district's transportation department.
- Old Bridge says that they will be providing busing regardless of whether they are remote or in person, however we have not been given any information regarding bus routes yet.
- None of the districts have provided transportation information to us. The best advice we can give is to keep calling your home district transportation departments.

We understand that many of you have questions regarding drop off and pick up. We are currently finalizing our plans, and ironing out the problems. We do know that there will be three drop off/pick up locations, and we are working on the possibility of staggering times. As soon as we have a finalized plan we will share it with you.

COVID / CONTACT TRACING / QUARANTINE REQUIREMENTS

If a child becomes COVID positive in a class what is the procedure?

- The nurse and principal will follow state and CDC reporting guidelines. They are mandated to report all positive and/or highly suspicious cases to the board of health.
- The child must be quarantined for a minimum of 10 days, and can not return to school until they have at least 2 physician-confirmed negative test results.

Since individuals/families take varying degrees of precaution outside of school, will the school take any measures if a family travels to a hotspot state and returns? Or if they have relatives visiting from a hotspot state?

- Any student who travels to a state on the NJ restricted list must quarantine at home for 2 weeks before they can return to school. They may participate in remote learning during this time.
- If they have relatives visiting from one of these states, it is strongly suggested that they do not stay in your house or with your family. If they do, then your child(ren) will need to quarantine for a minimum of two weeks from the time the guests arrive.

Please explain how quarantine will work.

- If there is a positive case in a class (student or teacher), the entire class and any staff who has been in contact with that class for longer than 10 minutes must quarantine for a minimum of 10 days. If there are siblings in another class in the building, that class and teacher will need to quarantine as well.
- That being said, please be prepared for the possibility that your child may need to quarantine at home and remote learn at any time with little or no notice if we have a positive case of Covid in the building.

What happens if a student attends an extracurricular activity or sport outside of St. Thomas after school hours and is exposed to a confirmed positive case of COVID?

- The student who was exposed, as well as that student's class at St. Thomas, will need to quarantine for a minimum of 10 days.

Will student temperatures be checked each morning prior to entering school?

- Yes, all students, faculty, and staff will have their temperature checked daily upon arrival.
- If the child is running a fever over 100°F they will not be permitted into the building. Any siblings of this student will be sent home as well.

If the school must close due to positive COVID cases, will the teachers revert back to the type of remote learning that was implemented from March 2020-June 2020 or will the live-stream type of remote learning continue?

- The school will go to all remote learning, using interactive Zoom classes as we did previously in the spring. Teachers will be conducting their classes from their classrooms if possible.

If a child travels outside of New Jersey to a “high risk” state as defined by the New Jersey Department of Health during the school year, will the child be required to quarantine for two weeks pending the results of a covid-19 test?

- The child will need to quarantine for a minimum of 10 days. The child will be able to participate in remote learning during this time.
- The child will need to quarantine for the minimum 10 days, regardless of the results of their Covid test. In other words, if a child tests negative on day 4, they must remain at home until after day 10.
- You are not required to be tested upon your return if you are not showing symptoms.

If a student tests positive for covid - will the school close?

- The health department would give us guidance regarding the particular case.

There will be NO covid testing done at St. Thomas or by the St. Thomas school nurse.

Schools and universities across the country are reopening, then quickly closing due to COVID19 outbreaks. Despite the universities and schools taking many precautions there are outbreaks. What will St. Thomas school do differently to keep our children, families and community safe from the spread.

- We are taking every precaution possible to ensure the safety for our students and staff.

How will the nurse's office facilitate social distancing?

- Students will only be allowed into the office one at a time, and only for emergencies.
- Any student who presents with a fever or any other concerning symptom will be automatically placed into the isolation classroom, which will allow students to be spaced 6 feet apart.
- Any sibling of a student who is sent home with a fever or symptoms will be sent home as well.

BEFORE AND AFTER CARE

I understand that "drop in" aftercare is not offered for this school year. If I do not need the aftercare services when the school year begins, due to my job allowing me to work from home and work during school hours, am I able to opt back in to aftercare services if my work hours change?

- Space in our after care program will be limited. If you decide later in the year that you need the service, you are welcome to opt in as long as there is space available.

We are new parents to the school. Our son is scheduled to attend the Pre-K 4 program. We would like to schedule him for the before and after care programs. When can we register him and how do we go about doing that?

- After Care information will be sent home by the end of next week.

On the schedule emailed, it states that September 8th is a full day ending at 2 pm. Is after care provided on this day?

- September 8th is the first day that after care will be available.

On the schedule for after care, will there be older students or teachers to help the 4 year olds with their homework during the hours of 3-4 pm?

- After care should not be considered tutoring. Homework is supervised by the teachers and adults who are in charge of the program.
- Due to social distancing issues, older students can not help younger students with homework.

Before Care

- Before Care will be held in the computer lab as usual (as it will not be used for any classes during the day), and therefore can only accept a small number of students.
- You do not need to attend every day to use the service, however we need to know in advance what days the service will be used.

MISCELLANEOUS

Is Bingo still required? What if I do not feel comfortable working bingo?

- Unfortunately we are not permitted to have volunteers in the building to work off their bingo requirement. If you are uncomfortable with working bingo, please contact Angelica Gangemi, our bingo coordinator, in the pastoral center to see what other options may be available to you.

Will there still be fire drills?

- The State of NJ has placed a ban on all types of evacuation drills until the health emergency restrictions have been lifted.
- The teachers will still discuss the guidelines of all evacuations with their students even though we can not hold "official" drills.
- We will still do indoor drills (shelter in place, lockdown, etc).

What about 8th grade activities?

- At this point there are no activities scheduled. We are hopeful that we will be able to plan things for later in the year.
- Regardless, we will do our best to include our 8th grade remote learning students in all activities.