

St. Thomas the Apostle School “Back to the Classroom” Reopening Plan For the 2020/21 School Year

St. Thomas the Apostle School will reopen for the 2020/21 school year with full time in-person classes. Our faculty and administration will continue to work diligently to provide a top-quality education for your child in the upcoming school year.

We live in extraordinary times. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of our lives and has left a mark on education. St. Thomas the Apostle School quickly evolved, using the creativity, ingenuity, and dedication of our school employees to maintain and provide quality education for our students. Our school has received high praise from families and the general public for their incredible work throughout these unprecedented challenges.

We have consulted with public health, education, and civil authorities in forming this reopening plan. It is our intent to safely reopen our school to families this September, and the following plan to reopen will successfully do so. Each day, the school will review the health and safety of all students, faculty, and staff and will make adjustments to in-person learning if or when necessary.

As the Diocese of Springfield looked at reopening, informed decisions were made by consulting educators, parents, and medical professionals. Decisions were informed by Massachusetts DESE Initial Reopening Guidance, CDC Guidance on School-Opening, and EEC Standards and Guidelines.

Guiding Principles Considered For Reopening St. Thomas the Apostle School:

- 1.) The safety and well-being of students and school employees are our primary concerns. We will do what we must so that every person in our school feels safe in our learning environment.
- 2.) Everything possible is being done to reopen our school and provide a faith-centered education in a safe and timely manner.
- 3.) The progress of the COVID-19 pandemic in Massachusetts remains unpredictable, and there remains the potential that school buildings be closed again if a significant rise in cases were to occur. We will rely on Governor Baker’s guidance to make local decisions, and will be ready should we need to move from classroom to remote learning.
- 4.) Faithful citizenship is crucial! We expect our families to take personal responsibility for the common good as well as their own safety.

Safety Protocols

- Students will be assigned to a “cohort,” which will correspond to their homeroom class and teacher. Students will be kept within their cohort, traveling together when necessary throughout the day. This cohort strategy will help maintain a safe environment by strictly limiting the interaction between students. It allows for rapid response and containment in the event of a student or staff member testing COVID-19 positive. Our school will strive to physically separate students in the same cohort as much as possible to help mitigate risk. Students within a cohort will remain 6 feet apart, or as far apart as possible, to prevent the spread of illness.
- Masks will be required for all administration, faculty, and staff members. Masks are required for students in grades 2-8 and recommended for Preschool, K and 1. Masks may be removed during designated break times (such as mask breaks and lunch) and only then if students remain 6 feet apart from one another. Students who are medically exempt from wearing a face mask will be required to wear a face shield. With the spacing of 6 feet between desks, students will be able to remove masks/shields during scheduled break times. Social distance of at least 6 feet apart must be maintained in the moments when masks are not being worn (breaks and lunch). Families are asked to provide the masks and will be asked to wash them after each school day. Masks with distracting messages or images will not be allowed. All students will receive training on proper mask wearing. Masks must be worn upon exiting the vehicle in the morning, and entering the vehicle at the end of the school day.
- At morning drop off, students will go to the designated entrance of the school and proceed directly to their classroom. All students and employees must wear face masks/shields upon arrival. Parents and guardians should not enter the building to escort students to/from their classroom at arrival and dismissal. At dismissal, students will be dismissed to their buses or family transportation. Parents will greet and escort their child to their vehicle. Parents are asked not to congregate outside the school exits or in the parking lot. Bus transportation will be provided and seating guidelines as outlined by the town will be followed.
- Access to the school building will be limited to visitors during the school day. Access for parents who must come to school will be limited to the school office. Events which attract visitors to the school are cancelled or postponed at this time.

- In order to prevent cohorts from intermingling in the school cafeteria, children will eat in their classrooms supervised by an adult. There will be no school lunch program and families will need to provide student lunches. Children will be allowed recess time outdoors, where they may remove their masks while maintaining proper social distancing. Recess and break times will be supervised by adults.
- St. Thomas the Apostle School will follow aggressive cleaning and disinfecting procedures. Sharing of school supplies such as pencils, markers, and art supplies will not be permitted. Equipment that must be shared (for example, PE classes) should be used by as few children as possible and cleaned and disinfected after each use. All students will be provided access to handwashing facilities and hand sanitizer. Each classroom space will have a gallon hand sanitizer with a pump and hand sanitizer will be placed throughout the building. Sanitizing desks, chairs and common touch points will take place throughout the day.
- Water bubblers will be turned off and students will be encouraged to bring their own personal water bottles to school.
- Physical guides and signage throughout the school building will ensure that faculty, staff, and students remain 6 feet apart in lines at all times during the school day. Hallways and staircases will be marked for two directions as well as doors for entry and exit.
- AS/EC will be provided for families in need and not as a social event. The program will be set up in the gym and preschool room. Social distance will be maintained throughout the afternoon, and school day guidelines and procedures will be extended throughout the afternoon.
- Our specials classes will be "a la carte" as library, music, computer, Spanish and art will travel to each cohort's classroom. Music classes will avoid singing and the playing of instruments. Teachers may opt to move classes outside, especially PE classes, when possible.
- The HVAC system is maintained on a regular basis, open windows will be required through fall, and proper maintenance protocols will be followed.
- Parent and teacher meetings will be conducted virtually or by telephone communication.

Illness

While ongoing medical care will be provided, families are required to keep their children home if they are exhibiting any signs and symptoms of illness, particularly those related to COVID-19. Below is a list of symptoms for which parents and staff should monitor themselves. (DESE report 7-17-20)

- Fever (100.4 Fahrenheit or higher) chills or shaking chills
- Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)
- Difficulty breathing and shortness of breath
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Headache when combined with other symptoms
- Muscle /Body aches
- Nausea, vomiting , diarrhea
- Fatigue with other symptoms
- Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to known causes like allergies)

In the event a student appears ill at school, they will be immediately referred to the nurse. Students with COVID-19 symptoms will remain in an isolation area until they are picked up. When being dismissed from school for this reason, parents are asked to respond immediately to the request.

St. Thomas the Apostle School will continue to keep you informed if /when changes occur.