

## **Principal's Letter on Opening St. Thomas the Apostle School for the 2020-2021 Academic Year**

At St. Thomas the Apostle School, staff and faculty are committed to keeping Covid-19 as contained as possible in our school community. We must all understand that we will have to learn to live with the virus until there is a cure and/or a vaccine. The Health and Safety Plan that we sent to you is based on the guidelines and recommendations of: the State of PA Departments of Health and Education, the CDC, Office of Catholic Education, the state/county health departments, and the governor of Pennsylvania's office.

We have focused on the following main concerns for reopening:

- Distancing as much as possible (3'-6')
- Face coverings (masks worn at all times if not 6' apart by all)
- Procedures for entering building and dismissal
- Safety procedures for Covid-19 symptoms
- Daily procedures such as: class time, recess, lunch
- Live Virtual Learning for those who are home or if school is closed by governor's office
- Disinfecting/cleaning, hygiene

Numerous committees were formed to address the above as well as: Before/After CARES, car line, temperature checking, student mental health, DCIU instruction, Library and PE classes. In our plan, we have addressed health and safety concerns beginning from the moment students arrive at school until they are dismissed.

### **Classrooms and Instruction:**

STA will offer face to face in building instruction and a LIVE stream for students who are ill or opt to stay home. Virtual instruction is much more robust than last spring. The students will follow a regular schedule from 8:20-2:50 pm everyday and students will need to sign on and be seen for attendance purposes. **Please know that choosing virtual or in building is NOT for the whole school year. If you are switching from virtual to building or vice versa, all you need to do is email the teacher 24 hours ahead.** Keep in mind, we do not expect students to be in 1-2 days then next week switch back. The virtual option is for anyone who is ill or if parents are concerned about being in school. We strongly encourage students to be in the school building when possible. Please have the students dress appropriately when participating in virtual learning, NO pajamas, and we suggest an STA shirt.

One thing we must all keep in mind is that all our/your plans must be fluid and flexible. We will continue to provide everyday instruction in the building for parents who are working. Those at home will be able to follow the class/teacher in a live stream Google Meets session that will allow for instruction as well as interaction for engagement. Weather permitting, Classes will be

held outside as much as possible. Please note, We did not provide a hybrid option (half of the week in-school learning and the other half virtual learning) as it is difficult for working parents to be home, and does not always allow for tech support. We need consistency in instruction since the live stream follows the lessons as presented in the classroom as well as to not to overload students and teachers with different content for at home and in building instruction.

**Please contact Mr. Mike DelVacchio at: [techsupport@staglenmills.org](mailto:techsupport@staglenmills.org) to arrange for any devices you might need due to multiple children at home at same time participating in virtual learning. We will be very happy to assure all children have needed devices.**

Teachers will always wear masks in/out of classes and all teachers will move from class to class instead of students, with the exception of PE, library, Honors Math and some science labs. By allowing some student movement throughout the day, our students can receive all of their coursework and as well as a change in surroundings so they are not sitting in one classroom for the duration of the day. Guidelines for each of these classes are attached as part of the Health and Safety plan. Objects used in a PE class will NOT be shared and will be disinfected before next class.

#### **Before School and School Arrival Safety:**

Parents will be asked to take their children's temperatures BEFORE they come to school or get on buses. We are awaiting Pick Up Patrol to provide us with an online health check in system to save time and eliminate papers being lost in travels.

- **IF YOUR CHILD IS SICK, PLEASE KEEP THEM HOME.**
- Children who arrive via carline will have their temperature taken upon arrival, before their dropoff vehicle leaves. There will be two staff members stationed at the carline by the mailboxes with touchless thermometers taking children's temperatures. If a child has a temperature (100.4 F or higher) the child and their siblings will return to their vehicle and go home. This procedure will save parents the problem of leaving and having to return to school.
- Children who arrive via bus will have their temperature checked as they first enter the side door. If a child has a temperature (100.4 F or above) they will be asked (discreetly) to report to the nurses office with their siblings (if any) and their parents will be contacted.
  - Busing is under the supervision of the specific school district, please contact them concerning questions about transportation.
- All other students will proceed to their classrooms in masks as soon as they exit the bus or car.

- BEFORE CARES students will have their temperature checked by the staff member monitoring BEFORE CARES. We ask that you remain in your car or by the side door until we have finished checking your child's temperature. If their temperature is 100.4 F or above the child will need to leave, but this procedure helps parents from needing to directly return to school for pickup.
- **If your child is late, please come to the front door, we will check their temperature and ask you or the student to sign in as usual through the Lobby Guard kiosk.**

Procedures for anyone ill or testing positive for Covid-19 are included in the Health and Safety Plan along with Covid-19 symptoms and procedures from the nurse's office. Please see the Nurse's Plan.

We understand that parents will be checking temperatures at home, but checking their temperature upon arrival is simply an added layer of protection before the child enters the building. If a child presents symptoms of Covid-19 at any time throughout the day, they will be asked to report to the nurse's office for further diagnosis. The old gym will become our St. Raphael Room (quarantine). This allows for an air-conditioned area in warmer weather, and for students to be spread out 6' or more. Students may still use WiFi or movies can be viewed for the younger students. A triage center will be set up in the old gym for the nurse to assess students as needed. Students in the St. Raphael room will use the restroom in the nurse's office to allow for a smaller area to be disinfected and leave outside bathrooms for classes. A triage cart will be utilized for the nurse to move as quickly as possible from her office to the St. Raphael room. All tables, carts, and equipment used by the nurse will be disinfected throughout the day.

Precautions have already been taken throughout the school to eliminate the risk of cross-contamination, such as disabling the water fountains. Students will be permitted to bring water bottles to class and we will have small bottles of water for refills if needed that can be discarded after use. Touchless hand sanitizers will be installed in each classroom, library, gyms, DCIU room, science lab, and the nurse's office. Each grade will have their own touchless thermometer for temperature checks if needed throughout the day. Stick on decals will be used to send students to nurse without using the previous plastic badge to prevent cross contamination. The new nurse will start at 8:00 am and be at school until 3:00 pm.

### **Lunch Changes:**

Classrooms that are able to distance 6' or more will have lunch in their rooms, or outside as a cohort, to allow for the students to remove masks and eat. For classrooms that are unable to distance 6', one half of classes will remain in the classroom for lunch and the other half will go to the new gym for lunch. Within the new gym, we will place tables in cohort groups with 6'

distancing to allow the students to eat and have a mask break in grades K-4 and 5-8. Students will not be permitted to move about at lunch and if they need to use the restroom a mask will be required. Cohorts will alternate, so each group is in the classroom one week and then in the new gym the next week for a mask break and lunch. Teachers will supervise this.

Hot lunch will be available to order online as usual. Meals will be provided in individual wrapped boxes. Pizza will be available through this route as well. Lunch monitors will wear masks and gloves during lunch.

Tables will be disinfected at the end of each lunch by lunch monitors and the area will be swept by an assigned student to hasten cleanup.

### **Sanitation and Additional Precautions:**

Classrooms, common areas, handrails, and door knobs will be disinfected throughout the day and by cleaning crew at night. Washing of hands will be emphasized and built into class time. Hands will be washed or sanitized before and after lunch. We have purchased and are awaiting a UV disinfectant spray "gun".

We are adjusting our bell/class schedule to better accommodate childrens' needs. This year we will not have a scheduled morning snack, however lunch will be served one hour earlier to account for this change. Kindergarten-4th grade teachers will do their best to provide students with a snack break before lunch. All students will be allowed to purchase an individually wrapped pretzel snack, any students who do not get to eat their pretzels for snack will have the opportunity to enjoy them during lunch. We ask that you please ensure your child has eaten breakfast before arriving at school. Children will not be allowed to share food or snacks at any time. Preschool will have a slightly different schedule noted in their plan to account for the needs of our younger students.

Please do not send in outside food, snacks, party items, or materials for students to share. Students will not be permitted to share common items (Chromebooks, writing utensils, books, etc.) due to the cross-contamination risk. Visitors will not be allowed in the building until further notice. If you need to drop an item off, please use the banker's window draw to leave the item with the child's name and grade on it. We will ensure the child receives the item.

Teachers and staff are undergoing online training on various aspects of the new class routines, such as switching from Zoom to Google Meets for virtual learning, recognizing the signs/symptoms of COVID-19, as well as identifying mental health concerns within children. Our school counselor, reading specialist, and speech instructors will be in the building with permission from the DCIU and our office.

We need to balance guidelines/recommendations with pragmatism and educational awareness and appropriateness. What works for one school does not always work for another. Sadly, this has become the “new normal” and I am not sure how much will change in the very near future. There is no set of measures that can eliminate the risks of infection from Covid-19. However, we believe we have put in place a plan that will allow for education and some normal procedures, yet provide the safety we need at this time.

Thank you to our faculty/staff for their hard work and assistance in preparing this plan. A special thank you to Mrs. Hayes, Mrs. Schneider, Mr. Harshyne, Mrs. Andresewski and Mr. Morrow for their input and recommendations. Thank you to Mr. DeVecchio for guiding us through setting up our virtual program. And thank you to Mrs. Ryan and Ms. Tipton, our Health and Safety Coordinators, for working so diligently in putting together our Health and Safety Plan.

Updates and changes to our plan will be noted and communicated through school media, school website, and Option C with notifications from OCE, governor’s office county health office.

Sincerely,

John W. Keeley-Principal