

# **St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School**



## **PARENT-STUDENT HANDBOOK 2023-2024**

**Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic School  
800 Brown Chapel Road  
Saint Cloud, Florida 34769**

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**Mrs. Lauren Schellenberg, M.Ed., Principal  
Mrs. Jean Askey M.Ed., Assistant Principal**

STACS Parents and Families:

Welcome to St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School. We are excited you are a part of our community!

As we begin our thirty-third school year, we look to continue a tradition of providing a high quality, Catholic education to prepare students for success in our 21<sup>st</sup> century world. We encourage each of you to strive for personal, academic and spiritual excellence as you explore and meet new challenges each day. Take full advantage of your education through a cooperative effort between you and the school to meet the high standards of excellence at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School.

The handbook is a resource for students and parents of the St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School community. The following rules, policies, and expectations are created to assist in maintaining a positive learning environment and ensure that every child will receive the best that St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School has to offer.

We invite parents and families to join us in the journey of educating your children academically and spiritually. Your role in supporting our policies and procedures is vital to our school and we appreciate the partnership in this. Our staff will always work to do what is best for all students and pursue an active role in this partnership that includes communication of any issues necessary to maintain a successful educational experience.

The Diocese of Orlando asks that you please read this Parent-Student Handbook in its entirety so that rules and regulations are clearly understood. All students and families are bound by the contents of this handbook, including any edits that are made throughout the school year, as indicated during the enrollment process. The most recent copy of the handbook is always available on our school website. I am excited for the opportunity to support you and your student for the upcoming school year. Go Crusaders!

Yours in Christ,  
Mrs. Lauren Schellenberg  
Principal  
St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School

## **About our School**

### **Mission Statement**

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School promotes a reverent, respectful, responsible community of believers who are empowered to know, celebrate, and share God's love through academic excellence, spiritual development, and service to others.

### **Vision Statement**

The vision of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School is to teach as Jesus taught by striving to personify reverence for God and creation, respect for all people, and responsibility for our actions. STACS will provide academic preparation through a challenging curriculum. We will inspire spiritual development through participation in the sacramental life and service mission of the Catholic Church. This education of the whole child will support the growth of the next generation of Christian leaders. STACS students will strive to meet their full potential in a life of learning and productive service to society. By utilizing their God given talents and the education provided, they will become the best versions of themselves, contributing to a bright future. This is the hope Christ has for all children and we share it.

### **The History of Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic School**

In 1987, the parish community of Saint Thomas Aquinas, under the direction of the Pastor Reverent Fabian Gimeno, approached the Diocese of Orlando with a desire and plan to build the first parochial school in Osceola County. Father Fabian presented a plan and study to the Diocesan Board of Education, that got him the approval to build a school on the church's property on Brown Chapel Road.

In December of 1987, Saint Thomas Aquinas launched its fund-raising campaign, quickly raising the funds to begin construction. Built as the first school in the newly formed Diocese of Orlando, Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic School opened on August 21, 1989, under the devoted leadership of the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland. Presiding over the school as principal, Sister Linda Martin, along with Assistant Principal Sister Ann Whitley, welcomed the first one hundred and twenty-three pre-kindergarten to second grade students.

As years passed, Saint Thomas has steadily increased its enrollment figures. Thirty plus years of quality Catholic education, along with the vision of the current school community, have provided a solid foundation to children and families in the St. Cloud area. As a Catholic school, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School views the spirituality of its children as one of its highest priorities. The school day must revolve around the faith, both in teaching and in living. Our Catholic identity is lived and celebrated every day at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School.

## **School Accreditation and Teacher Certification**

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School pre-kindergarten through eighth grade is fully accredited by the Florida Catholic Conference, which is recognized by the Department of Education of the State of Florida. The school is also approved by the Department of Education of the State of Florida. St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School successfully completed its re-accreditation process in spring of 2017. All classroom teachers are degreed and certified by the Florida State Department of Education. Both certification for all teachers and accreditation for the school are required by policy of the Office of Schools of the Diocese of Orlando and the Florida Catholic Conference. Periodic accreditation reviews for the school are done one year and three years after it is accredited by the FCC. Teacher certification must be maintained through regular, on-going in-service education and professional workshops and conferences.

# **Faculty and Staff**

## **Administration**

**Mrs. Lauren Schellenberg**  
**Principal**

**Ms. Jean Askey**  
**Assistant Principal**

## **Support Staff**

Krystle McGuire, Receptionist  
Kerry Dalstra, Enrollment & Admissions Coordinator  
Suzette DiDonato, Bookkeeper  
Lisa Landy, Communications Coordinator  
Jean Ramirez, Development Coordinator  
Emily Merritt, Guidance  
Alicia Swim, K-5 Resource

## **Early Childhood**

Patrice O'Neil, Director, Prek-4 Teacher

Estela Castillo De Mejia,  
Prek-4 Teacher Assistant

Gloria Lorini, VPK-4 Teacher  
Jannelle Priester, PreK-3 Teacher  
Debbie Walker, PreK-2 Teacher

Patty Persichilli, PreK-4 Teacher Assistant  
Belky Laureano, PreK-3 Teacher Assistant  
Placida Pena, PreK-2 Teacher Assistant

## **Elementary School**

Camille Pino, Kindergarten Teacher

Annette Cooper, Teacher Assistant

Lauren Amond, Kindergarten Teacher

Gabriella Dunn, First Grade Teacher

Elsa Tejada, Teacher Assistant

Dawn Norman, Second Grade Teacher  
Jenn Rabb, Second Grade Teacher

Fabiana Gonzalez, Teacher Assistant

Monica Madera, Third Grade Teacher  
Dina Gomez, Third Grade Teacher

Eleanor Studly, Teacher Assistant

Brooke Cimmino, Fourth Grade Teacher  
Cecilia Williams, Fourth Grade Teacher

Cecile Ramirez, Fifth Grade Teacher  
Vicky Ospina, Fifth Grade Teacher

Anias Paez, Teacher Assistant

## **Middle School**

Shannon Lestage, MS ELA/ MS Dean  
Brian Keller, MS Social Studies  
Christopher Thomson, MS Math  
Madeline Thomson, MS Science  
Mark Gallagher, MS Religion/ Campus Minister

## **Special Areas**

Magy Brown, Art Teacher  
Noel Muniz, Music Teacher  
Juan Ospina, Spanish Teacher  
Melissa Ryan, PE Teacher  
Jessica Vansickle, Technology/ MS Resource

## **Diocese of Orlando Policies**

1. Acceptable Use Policy
2. Child Abuse Reporting
3. Child Protection
4. Crisis Plan
5. Custody- Records Request
6. Emergency Drills
7. Faithful Citizenship
8. Fingerprinting Policy
9. Hazardous Materials Policy
10. Immunization Policy
11. Inappropriate Behavior/ Language
12. Media Consent Policy
13. Raptor System
14. Review of Records
15. Safe Environment Training
16. Special Education

## Admission Information

**St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School welcomes and does not discriminate against qualified students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin in respect to admissions, and all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded are made available to every student at the school.** A variety of criteria will be considered in decisions to admit a student to St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School. The main consideration will always be the proper fit of the child and school for one another, as well as the family's willingness to accept all policies and goals of the school. Before acceptance, all students must complete the admissions assessment process and the application folder must be complete, including the most current report card and any IEP/504 documentation. Admissions applications are reviewed, and acceptance is determined by the admissions and enrollment committee.

### **Registration**

Registration for the upcoming school year typically begins during Catholic Schools Week in the January/February timeframe. Priority of acceptance into the school will be determined by the following criteria:

1	Currently enrolled families who are registered, supporting parishioners.
2	Currently enrolled non-parishioners.
3	New families who are registered, supporting parishioners.
4	New families who are non-parishioners.

If classroom space remains available after the initial registration period, priority of acceptance will be determined according to the admission and enrollment process. If the maximum classroom or school enrollment is attained, a formal waiting list will be established at the school office, and classroom vacancies will be filled according to the above criteria.

**Returning Students**, who are re-registering students, are required to submit a completed registration form annually. Family accounts must be current, or the application will not be processed or accepted until such accounts are current. According to the Florida State statues, new students entering kindergarten must be FIVE (5) years old on or **before September 1st of the new school year**. Children entering first grade must be six years old on or before September 1st of the new school year and have successfully completed kindergarten.

New students, once accepted, are required to submit:

1	Copy of latest interim or report card from the current school.
2	HRS Form 680 Immunization Record.
3	HRS Form 3040 Physical Examination.
4	Certified copy of a birth certificate.
5	Registration form and nonrefundable fee.
6	Copy of the child's baptismal certificate is also required for Catholic students.



**NOTE:** Students coming from other Catholic or private schools must have cleared their accounts at the former school before beginning school at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School.

## **Financial Obligations**

### **Tuition and Fees**

Tuition rates are determined annually by the pastor, principal, and finance committee and approved by the school board. Supply fees and registration fees are not included in the tuition. Tuition and special fees are determined through information gathered in developing the annual budget for the school year. Tuition, fees and fundraising are the major sources of revenue for meeting the expenses of running the school. Generally, tuition and fees account for approximately three-quarters of the actual cost of educating a child at STA school; the balance must be met through fundraising and other special sources.

### **FACTS Tuition Management Service**

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School School employs the FACTS Tuition Management Service to handle its tuition collection. **Parents are required to maintain an active FACTS account at all times.** In order to facilitate the collection of tuition and to assist parents in their monthly, personal budgeting, several payment options are available.

### **Payment Options**

The payment plans include:

- A single annual payment before the start of school
- Payments can be made semi-annually, in August and January.
- Payments can be made over 10 months.
- These automatic payments are drafted from your checking account or credit card, a “set-up fee” is charged for this service.

School fees are separate from tuition and are billed to each family in July.

All families pay a registration fee for each child annually. If the student is voluntarily withdrawn by the family for any reason, this registration payment is not refundable.

Tuition terms are specified in the registration packet and available through the school office. Any questions should be directed to the principal.

### **Financial Aid/ Scholarships**

We accept Step Up for Students scholarships provided by the state of Florida. If your family is awarded any scholarships, it is the responsibility of the parent to notify the school of the award and student award ID number.

### **Application for Tuition Assistance**

Tuition assistance may be available to parishioners who demonstrate true financial need, after application to the Step Up Scholarships. The amount of funds available varies and is dependent

upon the amount donated to the scholarship fund. This fund is designated for use by those who have applied for and been granted assistance. It will not be used to bring past due accounts current. STACS uses the agency recommended by the Diocese, FACTS Tuition assistance, to determine family eligibility for tuition assistance, and all information submitted for review is strictly confidential. Neither the school nor the parish alone shall determine which families receive aid. Unless tuition assistance is applied for and approved, the school assumes that full tuition will be paid. Tuition assistance granted for one year does not guarantee that it will be granted every year, and by Diocesan policy families must reapply each year for such assistance.

### **Late Payment Policy**

If bank accounts or credit cards from parents are found to have insufficient funds through FACTS, then FACTS will levy a charge of \$30.00 per transaction for insufficient funds. This fee will be applied to the family FACTS account and is not covered by STACS.

### **Hold on Records**

Student records, including academic report cards, will be held by the school if student accounts are in default or have past due balances. Records will be released once student accounts are made current in the FACTS system.

### **Withdrawal and Refund Policy**

If it is necessary to withdraw a student during the school year, parents should advise the school as early as possible of the anticipated date of withdrawal. Parents must complete a Diocesan Withdrawal Form and settle all accounts before student records may be transferred. No official records are ever handed to parents. The school must have at least five (5) days advance notice to insure the timely processing of records and accounts. All original records will be transferred directly to the child's new school upon the request of that school.

All tuition adjustments, due to late entry to or withdrawal from school, will be determined on a daily-prorated basis, based upon 181 school days. No tuition refunds will be made for students withdrawn after February 15th.

# **Academic Policies and Information**

## **Curriculum**

STACS follows the content-based standards approved by the Office of Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Orlando. Specific resources are reviewed and vetted to align with developmental expectations, academic rigor, and our Catholic faith.

### **Advanced Courses**

Eighth-grade students at STACS may receive credit for the Algebra I course taken at STACS. This course serves to encompass the academic materials of the ninth-grade curriculum and syllabus used by Florida high schools. The specified courses are designated Advanced courses and potentially grant high school credit. As an elementary school, STACS has no authority to grant high school credit. Students matriculating to Bishop Moore Catholic High School and meeting school determined criteria will be able to explore the option of an advanced math track. Students matriculating to a public high school may receive high school credit for this course upon meeting specified criteria and passing the EOC offered by the public school. Arrangements to take the EOC are the obligation of the student/ family.

### **Student Placement**

Similarly, students will be placed in the appropriately placed classes in order to best promote their academic success. These determinations will be made using classroom performance, assessment scores, and teacher/ support staff recommendation among other factors. Whenever possible and reasonable, parents will be included in these determinations. However, the final placement is at the discretion of instructional staff and administration.

Classroom placement is also determined through extensive consultation with instructional and support staff prior to any decision being made. Careful consideration is given to student academic success and support, social and developmental factors, and schoolwide resources. STACS staff works extensively to create classroom environments that foster the growth, development, and success of each student. For these reasons, and many others, classroom requests cannot be honored.

### **Student Services**

STACS is able to provide resource services to students in need of extra support to achieve academic success. Resources services include, but are not limited to, extra time, push in/ pull out teacher support, small groups, Title services through Osceola County Public Schools, and tutoring. A student's academic needs determine the level of support that can/will be provided. All accommodations will be determined by the Student Support Team, in consult with the classroom teacher(s) and parents.

STACS does not accept IEP or 504 plans. However, we do accept students needing these academic services and supports, provided STACS is able to provide them. In most cases, qualification for such services and supports must be determined through a public school evaluation and/or a psychoeducational evaluation.

STACS also employs a full-time Guidance Counselor. This resource is available for all STACS students and families. For students to receive regular check-ins, parents will need to sign a permission form. Guidance classes will also be provided for classrooms in order to help facilitate developmentally appropriate social, emotional, self-regulation, and executive functioning skills.

### **Physical Education**

All students are required by law to participate in the physical education program, unless a written physician's statement limiting the student's physical activity is provided. "A sound mind in a sound body" continues to be a motto for the ages. The PE program, prescribed for elementary and middle school grades by the Diocese of Orlando, is followed at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School, with age-appropriate skills and games being introduced throughout the school year. As described in the Uniform Code section, a St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School PE uniform, including closed-toe black sneakers, must be worn to Physical Education class by all students in grades K-8. Failure to come in uniform for PE, the student's grade can be lowered for that class.

### **Modified Curriculum – Specific Learning Needs**

If the academic curriculum is accommodated or modified to facilitate the specific learning needs of a child, a brief explanation will appear on that student's report card, denoting the modification(s) or accommodation(s) of the curriculum in those subject areas.

Although, by Diocesan policy, a student does not need an IEP, these are often very helpful for classroom teachers to demonstrate ways in which the child can receive the most optimum assistance. In addition, Catholic schools in the Diocese of Orlando do not write 504 Student Disability plans. Accommodations or modifications are offered at the sole discretion of the school staff and must be based on an evaluation of the documentation provided and other factors deemed relevant by the school staff. Teachers can provide accommodations for students in need of academic accommodations and interventions in most cases. The school does not guarantee that all accommodations for students with disabilities can be met.

### **Standardized Testing in the Diocese of Orlando**

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School students in grades 2-8 participate in the Terra Nova Assessment. Testing is administered in the Spring. The results of these standardized tests are published and shared with the parents when received back from the Data Recognition Corporation.

Students in 5th and 8th grades are also required to take the Assessment of Catholic Religious Education (ACRE) test in February of each year. These results are used to assess the quality of the religious education program in the school to assist in improving it and ensuring that no gaps exist in the spiritual formation of the students.

All schools in the Diocese of Orlando are required to administer standardized testing as an integral part of the total instructional program. This testing, however, is *not* "high-stakes"

– the results are not used to determine teacher efficacy, nor are they used solely to determine a child’s promotion or retention. Test results/scores are simply one measure of the total composite of a child’s individual academic progress; thus, the information is used to assist teachers in meeting the specific and targeted learning expectations for a child’s appropriate developmental level. This information is critical in helping our teachers provide the best educational opportunities for our students.

Given the number of benefits derived from the standardized testing, the Diocese of Orlando does not allow a parent or a student the choice of “opt-out” of testing. Students who are absent for any reason, including medical absences, during the school’s designated testing window will be rescheduled for testing upon his/her return to school at the discretion of the school’s administration. Students will not be exempted from taking standardized tests.

Accommodations or modifications will be offered as required to meet the qualified child’s learning needs. This means accommodations or modifications are allowed *only* when specifically indicated through testing via a professional evaluation completed as part of the IDEA Child Find process by the public school District, or through a private psychological-educational evaluation approved by the Office of Catholic Schools.

### **Class Size**

STACS works diligently to maximize the instructional environment for each student. In doing so, we seek to balance the opportunity for Catholic education with class sizes that maximize instructional growth. By the Diocese of Orlando and FCC policy class size of a maximum of 35 students are allowed in grades 1-8. In kindergarten, class size is limited to 30 students with a teacher and a full-time instructional assistant. In Pre K3 class size is limited to 20 students with a full-time teacher and a full-time assistant. Pre K4 class size is limited to 20 students with a full-time teacher and full-time assistant.

### **Parent Conferences**

Parent/teacher conferences will be offered twice per year as needed. This meeting provides an opportunity for teachers and parents to discuss the student's progress. Teachers or parents may request a conference at any time during the school year to discuss behavior, academics or any other concerns.

### **Homework**

Homework is an extension of the learning process begun at school. Its purpose is to:

- Promote independent study
- Encourage individual initiative
- Reinforce skills and information introduced during the school day
- Provide extra practice needed to perfect fundamental skills
- Make use of resources outside the school
- Facilitate the communication of what is being learned at school with home

The amount of time needed to complete assignments will vary according to the child’s study habits and abilities, as well as the type of assignment being done. Long-range projects maybe be assigned

for students to develop project-based learning. Regular homework is generally assigned every day, especially in ELA and Math. Homework may involve written work, projects, studying, reading, and practice of fundamental skills.

Parent support of student's homework is a key factor to student support. Ways to support your student include:

- Encourage quality and completion.
- Check your child's comprehension by listening to him/her read and asking him/her questions pertaining to the material read.
- Whenever a child's written assignment is completed, check to see if it is legible, neat, complete, and prepared to be handed in.
- Establish a definite time and a quiet place for home study.
- **Please do not correct a child's homework, as it is intended to show the teacher the areas in which a child may need additional assistance or where a student or class needs to review a concept.**

A general guideline for the time to be spent on homework assignments each evening is:

- Primary Grades: 20-30 minutes
- Intermediate Grades: 40-60 minutes
- Middle School: 60-80 minutes

### **Middle School Homework/Classwork/Assignment Policy**

Homework, classwork, and assignments in grades 6-8 are a critical part of a student's academic experience and preparation for high school. It is the responsibility of the student, and it is expected that homework will be completed neatly, properly and on time.

The following policy is established in this regard by the middle school faculty:

1. Homework, classwork, and assignments must be turned in on the due date and during the class for which the homework was assigned. Points will be deducted for late assignments.
2. If homework, classwork, or assignments are not turned in or if there is a pattern of missing work, the student may be required to attend study skills classes to complete work in lieu of electives. These parameters will continue to be enforced until the assignments are completed and turned in to the teacher.

### **Grading**

The following are letter and numerical equivalents used in student assessment reports:

A = 90-100	B = 89-80	C = 79-70	D = 69-60	F = below 60
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Lower grades use a proficiency system for assignments and assessment, which is explained on the report cards.

## **Honor Roll**

STACS seeks to recognize students for their academic success. As such, students in grades 3-8 achieving specific criteria, as set forth by the teachers and administration, will be recognized with the STACS Honor Roll each trimester.

- The St. Thomas Aquinas Honor Roll recognizing students earning an overall average of 95% in all core subject areas, with all 1's in Learner Behaviors on their report card.
- The Honor Roll recognizes students earning an overall average of 90% in all core subject areas, with all 1's in Learner Behaviors on their report card.

## **Grade Reports**

A published, official report card will be distributed three times during the academic year. In addition, midway through each grading period an official progress report will be distributed to families. Grades are available throughout the trimester in the FACTS/ RenWeb system.

## **Academic Probation**

Following Progress Reports or Trimester Report Cards, students may be placed on Academic probation. This status impacts the level of participation the student may have in enrichment or extracurricular activities. Specific determinations will be made by administration and will remain in effect until specific academic goals are met.

## **Promotion/ Transfer/ Retention**

Promotion is the assignment/advancement of a student to the next grade level after the successful completion of all current grade level requirements. "Administrative Placement" or "Probationary Promotion" is the assignment to the next grade level of a student who has failed to fully and properly complete grade level requirements. This is done in consultation with the principal. Retention is the assignment of a student to repeat the same grade level for the next school year. School Administration and student's teacher will make the determination to recommend promotion or retention based on the student's performance.

If a parent requests a probationary promotion, this **may be done one time**. If a similar situation presents itself the following year, the child then must be retained or seek admission to another school. Final decision on retention is at the discretion of the principal. Parents will be notified after the end of the third grading period if retention or administrative placement is being considered for the following school year. Final decisions are made at the end of the school year.

## **Graduation**

Students, who have successfully completed the course of studies prescribed by the Office of Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Orlando, are eligible to receive a diploma certifying the successful completion of the program of studies. The diploma further signifies that the student is eligible to move on to studies at the secondary school level. The official documents needed for such advancement, however, is the student's transcript, which the school retains, and not a copy of the diploma. Transcripts will be sent to the secondary school upon its request to STACS.

## **Records**

Every student has academic and health record folders on file with STACS. Those who have been tested for special services may have an additional, separate file folder. These records are available for review by the parent upon appointment with the School Principal. When requested, official records are forwarded by the school directly to the next school. No official records are ever handed to the parents. Information about students who have attended STACS, are kept on file for fifty (50) years by State law. Information must be available to verify the student's attendance at the school and all associated information. Records of serious injury to any student are kept in the school's accident report file for 7 years. All such records are kept under lock and in a secure area resistant to water, theft or fire. Records are available only to authorized personnel.

If parents have not cleared accounts with the school, student records will be held until such financial obligations are satisfied. Retention of records is the only possible way the school has to ensure the satisfaction of all debts owed to it. This is an action the school, of course, prefers not to take. Parents are asked to take care of financial and other such obligations and not put the school or the children in this difficult situation.

## **School Resources**

As part of attendance at STACS, students are provided resources to use to enhance their academic experience. These resources are often above the cost of tuition and fees. It is the expectation of STACS that students utilize such resources for their intended instructional purpose and use respectful consideration for care. If resources are damaged, lost, or found otherwise unusable, the student's FACTS account will be charged the designated fee.

### **Library/Media Center**

In addition to assigned library periods in the student schedule, opportunities are provided for students to make use of the school library. We ask students and parents alike to make sure that all books and materials are returned to the library on or before the due date. **Any loss of or damage to books or materials will be charged to the family's FACTS account.**

### **Textbooks**

All textbooks must be well cared for by the student. The full cost of hardcover books is not met by our General Fees. Elementary school textbooks cost as much as \$80 -\$100 each. The books are merely rented by the students each year and must be treated with care for others to use in subsequent years. Subject area textbook rotation involves the replacement of texts with updated editions every five years. Students may not write in books (other than consumable books) or mark in them in any way. **STACS school will charge the full replacement fee for damaged hardcover books or lost/damaged consumable books to the family's FACTS account.**

### **iPads and Electronic Resources**

STACS is a one-to-one device campus, and each K-8 student is allocated an iPad for use on campus each year. It is the expectation of STACS that each device is kept in usable condition throughout the year according to the iPad agreement and that devices are used solely for instructional purposes. Any violation of this agreement will impede access to



the resource and/or cause a fee to be charged to the student's FACTS account. Please see the iPad usage agreement and the Diocesan policy for more detailed information.

## **Arrival/ Dismissal Procedures**

**The speed limit in the parking lot is 5 mph and cell phones are not permitted in arrival and dismissal lines.**

**Please follow these guidelines for the safety of all our children.**

**Parents are asked to please refrain from walking their children to class** after the first day of school. The school assigns faculty members and safety patrol students to assist the children in entering and leaving the school safely. Following the arrival/dismissal procedures will help move traffic in and out of the school parking lot quickly and ensure a safer environment for all personnel.

### **Arrival**

#### **Preschool:**

The pre-school gate opens at 7:40 a.m., and parents of Pre-K students only may park in the parking lot adjacent to the church and walk the Pre-K students to their classroom door. No child is allowed to leave the car on his/her own and must be accompanied by a parent. Pre-K students must be signed into their classrooms daily. Older siblings or “carpoolers,” who arrive with preschoolers may also use that gate to enter school. All non-Pre-K students are to proceed directly to their classroom.

#### **Grades K-2:**

Students in these grades are to be brought through the back drive-up line each morning. Supervision and opening of gates begin at 7:40 a.m. Students should not leave their cars or be left unattended until the AM carline begins. Students dropped off prior to 7:35 a.m. must go to Before Care in the gymnasium. All students are to proceed to their classrooms following arrival.

#### **Grades 3-8:**

Students in these grades are to be brought through the front drive-up line each morning. The gates are not unlocked before 7:40 a.m. Students may be dropped off at the gates on either side of the front office starting at 7:40 a.m. Students dropped off prior to 7:35 a.m. must go to Before Care in the gymnasium. All students are to proceed to their classrooms beginning at 7:40 a.m.

**All gates are locked at 7:55 am. Any student arriving after that time must enter through the school office to be signed in.**

### **Dismissal**

#### **Preschool Half-day Dismissal**

For half-day dismissal, parents are to park in the **back parking lot** and walk to the classroom to pick up your child and sign them out. You are asked to please avoid coming through the office unless the gate is already closed. The gate closes at 12:10 pm for safety reasons.

#### **Regular Dismissal**

Carpool riders: The older children/siblings should assemble at the dismissal area of the youngest in the carpool.

## **Identification**

To help identify your car, you will receive a car hanger with your family name. Please place the hanger on your rear-view mirror so the faculty can identify your car during dismissal. It is especially important to do so during rainy day dismissals.

## **Preschool Classes**

Preschool students are dismissed at preschool classrooms. Parents must park and sign out their children even if there is a rainy-day dismissal.

## **Kindergarten, First Grade, Second Grade**

Please enter the drive-up line through the Staples/ Aldi parking lot, or Chevron Station Lane, making a circle around the front entrance of the church. Please do not enter the drive-up line through the church parking lot. An aide or teacher will escort your child to your vehicle. **No one is to walk up to the building through the drive-up line to pick up his or her child.** Your cooperation with this procedure is appreciated as it may put students, as well as drivers, at risk. Please observe the cones and directions from the assigned faculty.

## **Third through Eighth Grade Students**

All students in grades 3-5 are released through the gate at the front drive-up. Parents are to enter through the church lot entrance (the first driveway on Brown Chapel Rd. closest to Rt. 192 - near the flagpole) and make a complete circle around the pickup area. **Do not enter through the Church Office Driveway.** Students will be called as you approach the building.

## **Bicycles**

Bicycles may be ridden to school provided St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School receives a letter of permission from the parent or guardian of the student in question. We recommend that students riding bikes to school enroll in a bicycle safety course offered by local police departments. Students are always expected to wear a helmet when riding to or from school.

## **Safety Reminders**

- Always remain inside your vehicle. Do not leave your vehicle.
- No cell phone use is allowed in drive up line.
- Do not allow your child to exit from the left or driver's side.
- Do not cross the carline. If there is a need to park, all cars should park by the church and use the sidewalk with a parent escort.
- Walking your child into the classroom is not allowed.
- If you must come into the building for business, please park your car and enter before the dismissal procedure in the afternoon or in the morning before the start of the drop off starts. **Do not park in front of the door as this is a fire lane.**
- You are asked to always maintain a positive, Christian attitude as you model this behavior for your children, regardless of any unforeseen delays or complications.
- Road Rage has no place in our Catholic School parking lot. Be courteous and kind at all times.

## **Rainy Day Dismissal Procedure**

Rainy Day Dismissal decisions will be made by 2:45 pm. In some cases, it is difficult to make such decisions. Rainy Day Dismissals will be communicated through RenWeb email and text messaging. In heavy rain or lightning we will conduct the normal rainy day dismissal procedure. All kindergarten - 8th grade will be dismissed from the cafeteria. Parents are to be sure their **family/carpool names are visible in the front windshield** of the vehicles. Teachers will be strategically assigned to read off the names, so children may be ready to board your vehicle. Teachers will escort the students to the vehicle.

### **Vans from Day Care Centers**

Outside Day Care Center vans which pick up students at our school at the end of the day must proceed through the regular dismissal line procedures. They are not to get out of line to pick up children nor to try and go around the traffic. Such drivers will be informed of this policy.

## **Before and After School Care**

### **Before School Care**

Students arriving before 7:35 am must go to Before School Care for safety and supervisory purposes. Before Care is located in the classroom in the gym. The fee for before school care is \$1 per family per day. FACTS accounts will be charged at the end of each week.

Regular classes end each day at 3:00 p.m. (2:00 p.m. on Wednesdays) The dismissal period lasts approximately fifteen minutes. Students not picked up by the end of the dismissal period will be placed in the After School Care Program. The After-Care gym doors will remain locked until 3:30 pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, or 2:30 pm on Wednesday. No students will be released prior to the beginning of aftercare. This policy is put in place for the safety of all students in the parking lot areas. The After School Care room is located in the classroom in the Gym.

All students should be picked up at dismissal in the designated carline. Students needing care after the school day and/ or after sports practices and games must be registered for aftercare. Students needing care after dismissal, but not registered for our aftercare program, will have their FACTS account charged \$10 from 3:15pm to 3:30pm (2:15pm to 2:30pm on Wednesdays). After 3:30pm (2:30 on Wednesdays), student(s) will be additionally charged \$1 per minute to their FACTS account.

### **Leaving School Before Regular Dismissal Times**

No student will be permitted to leave the school grounds during the school day without the permission of his/her parents and in the company of an appropriate, supervising adult. The approval of the principal or school office member is required in each instance. Leaving the campus without permission is a serious offense and may result in serious disciplinary action.

Medical appointments are discouraged during school hours, as valuable learning time is lost. Of course, there are times when this cannot be helped. When medical appointments are necessary during the school day, the student is to present a note from the parent to the teacher the day before the actual appointment. Students must be picked up in the school office by the parent or an authorized person.

Due to safety considerations and the disruption it causes to student learning, students may not be checked out of school 30 minutes prior to dismissal. Students coming to school late or being checked out early will need to present a doctor's note or appointment card in order for their absence to be excused. An absence from class must be excused in order to make up missed assignments.

## **Attendance and Tardy Policy**

Attendance is a basic requirement for academic success, and the State of Florida Department of Education has established attendance policies, which must be followed by all schools. Naturally, any student absence detracts from this requirement and prevents the student from fulfilling an essential condition for earning scholastic credit. STACS takes student attendance and tardies very seriously. Attendance and tardiness to school significantly impacts a student's academic achievement and adjustment to school. In addition, the Florida scholarship programs have stringent policies that can impact a student's continuation with scholarship programs. In addition, the school strongly discourages parents from removing students from class for vacations outside the assigned vacation periods.

These permissions cannot be granted over the telephone. **The school needs proper documentation for its records by policy of the Diocesan Office of Schools.**

### **School Hours**

School starts at 7:55 am and ends at 3:00 pm except on Wednesday, which ends at 2:00 pm.

#### I. Diocesan Attendance Policy

- A. Attendance in school is a major predictor of student academic success. Students must attend school punctually and regularly, and conform to the attendance policies for the school, the Diocese of Orlando, and the laws of the State of Florida.
- B. It is the shared responsibility of the school and the home to assist students in developing desirable habits of punctuality and attendance.
- C. Schools shall maintain accurate attendance records for all students and follow the Diocesan Record Retention Policy.
- D. The Diocese of Orlando requires all schools to develop a calendar which represents 181 instructional days per school year and meets or exceeds Florida Statue A-1, 09512.

#### II. Procedures/Guidelines

- E. A record of attendance and tardiness is maintained for every student through an automated student attendance recordkeeping system approved by the Diocese of Orlando (RenWeb/FACTS) and kept in each student's permanent record. This is a legal document for all educational institutions.
- F. For students in K-8, attendance must be taken at the start of the day. Students in K-12 are considered absent when more than 50% of the school day is missed.
- G. A student is considered absent when he/she is either not in the school building or fully present in a virtual setting. A student is considered tardy when not on campus by 7:55am.
- H. **If a student is absent from school on a given day, he/she cannot participate in any extracurricular/sports activities on the day of the absence. A student must**

**attend at least a half day of school in order to participate in extracurricular/sports activities that day.**

- I. Attendance expectations are for all students:
1. It is the parent's/guardian's responsibility to contact the school prior to 10am if their child will be absent and to state the reason for the absence.
  2. The legal/custodial parent or guardian must provide a satisfactory explanation for the pupil's absence for all or any part of the school day. The explanation must be obtained in writing and will be retained as documentation. Failure to provide this will result in an automatic, unexcused absence.
  3. Policy and Procedures for defining and tracking excused or unexcused absences are as follows:
    - a. Excused absences include the following:
      - i. Illness, or injury, to the student, or communicable disease.
      - ii. Illness, injury, or death in the immediate family.
      - iii. Scheduled medical appointment.
      - iv. Other major family emergencies.
    - b. Unexcused absences include but are not limited to the following:
      - i. Vacations or pleasure trips.
      - ii. Personal activities
      - iii. Any other event not covered by the "Excused Absences" definition.
  4. A physician's note is needed when the student:
    - a. Has been absent for three or more consecutive days.
    - b. Has had surgery.
    - c. Is returning to school after a hospitalization.
    - d. Has been under a doctor's care for a significant illness; or
    - e. Is returning to school after being excluded because of a communicable disease.
  5. Only the Principal may authorize an absence for any exceptional circumstances.
- J. Make up Work
1. In the event of absences, it is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with teachers to receive the necessary assignments and materials. The student is also responsible for the completion of all homework assignments and tests which are expected to be turned in upon returning to school. Students failing to complete such assignments will be graded accordingly.
  2. Teachers will NOT be responsible for re-teaching material covered if the student is absent due to a family vacation or other absence considered to be unexcused. Any work missed during an unexcused absence will not be allowed to be made up and all tests will be taken immediately on the day of the student's return at a designated time.
  3. A student has one day for each day of an excused absence to make up missed work. If the missed work is not turned in when it is due, the student will receive no credit and will be graded accordingly. After a prolonged, excused absence, special arrangements may be made with the teachers to make up the work.

- K. For long-term or extensive absences due to medical conditions, parents should enroll students in the applicable county public school district for home instruction or make an arrangement with the school administrator for continued academic progress.
- L. Should there be a need to quarantine individual students or groups of students as required by the local departments of health and in accordance with Diocesan protocols, asymptomatic students are expected to participate in the school's established academic continuity process which could include, but is not limited to digital instruction, recorded instruction, online meetings, and learning packets. Additionally, students must comply with the II. B of the Attendance Policy.
- M. Students whose absences exceed 5 unexcused absences within a calendar month or 10 unexcused absences within a Trimester shall be referred to the principal for a conference to be held with the student, his or her parent(s) or legal guardian(s), and the school administration.
1. Parents/ Guardians will be notified of attendance concerns in the following ways:
    - a. 5 Tardies/ Absences will be communicated via email
    - b. 10 Tardies/ Absences will be communicated via email with potential Attendance probation
    - c. 5 Tardies/ Absences will be communicated via email and a meeting will be held with STACS Administration and/or the Pastor.
- N. Attendance concerns will be addressed by administration and will include one or more of the following:
1. Corrective action
  2. Prevention and intervention strategies
  3. Written plan for academic remediation
- O. St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School Administration has final determination on any attendance issue.
- P. Students who do not comply with the school's published attendance policy may be retained or be asked to withdraw. Students enrolled in the Florida School Choice Scholarship Program who are out of compliance with Diocesan attendance requirements risk the loss of the scholarship.



# **Parental Partnership and Participation**

## **Parents' Role in Education**

Parental participation is a very important aspect of our school's mission and thriving community. We strive to include families in our school community through opportunities to partner with us and participate in activities throughout the year. We encourage our parents and parishioners to participate in the great work of Catholic education.

## **Parent Code of Conduct**

Parents are encouraged to support the activities of the school, as a way of modeling for the children the fact that they value the education at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School. It is important that all adult participation in school activities reflects our Catholic faith and values. As adults, it is paramount that we reflect the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church and model these consistently and appropriately to our students, and each other, at all times. For additional and specific details, please refer to **the Diocesan Code of Conduct for Parents, Guardians, Caregivers, Volunteers, and Visitors of Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Orlando.**

## **Parent Fundraising Requirements:**

Parents also make a very important contribution by participating in fundraising and other school activities. Tuition is generally maintained at as reasonable a rate as possible through the dedication of parent volunteers.

STACS Parents who receive Parish Tuition Assistance are required to commit to volunteering at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School and Parish events for a minimum number of hours as determine by the Pastor.

All parents are encouraged to participate in school fundraising activities that include, but are not limited to: Boosterthon, 5K Run, and Handbag Bingo.

## **Committees in Partnership with STACS**

### **Parent Involvement Committee:**

The Parent Involvement Committee oversees many of the day-to-day supports of the school, including teachers, students, and families. This team of volunteers facilitates community events, activities, and celebrations that bring our school members together as a community. PIC is divided into several subcommittees and is open to all who desire to participate, partner, and support STACS.

### **School Board**

The board is established in accordance with Diocesan policy to assist in the governing of the school. The School Board is “consultative” in nature, meaning the members cannot act apart from the Pastor and/or Principal, and cannot make decisions binding on the school without the approval of both Pastor and Principal. The membership of the St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School Board shall consist of the Pastor, Principal, Assistant Principal, teacher representative, the school board president and other members who will be broadly representative of the school community it serves. Board members will be approved by the pastor.

**Finance Council**

The Finance council is an appointed group of STACS stakeholders and school representatives responsible for advising school administration on school-related financial matters. This council provides guidance on expenses, tuition, budgeting, capital purchases and strategic planning. Accreditation benchmarks and Diocesan plans guide the work of this council. The council meets quarterly and has a representative on the School Board.

**Facilities, Safety, and Technology Committee**

The Facilities, Safety, and Technology committee is an appointed group of STACS stakeholders and school representatives responsible for advising school administration on designed matters. This committee provides guidance on capital improvements, advancing the safety and security of the school, and maintaining and planning for technological needs. Accreditation benchmarks and Diocesan plans guide the work of this committee. The committee meets quarterly and has a representative on the School Board.

**Development, Marketing, and Enrollment Committee**

The Development, Marketing, and Enrollment committee is an appointed group of STACS stakeholders and school representatives responsible for advising school administration on designed matters. This committee provides guidance on strategic development projections for the school, marketing needs and direction, and fostering healthy and sustainable enrollment. Accreditation benchmarks and Diocesan plans guide the work of this committee. The committee meets quarterly and has a representative on the School Board.

## **STACS Communication**

It is the policy of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School that **no communication of any kind will be sent to school families through the school unless it has first been reviewed and approved by the school administration.** The principal or representative must review all items relating to athletics, class fundraising or activities, student organization activities, or teacher requests prior to their dissemination to the school families or other outside organizations. This policy is intended to protect the school and its associated organizations by assuring that any and all printed communications leaving the school are in compliance with the philosophy, policies, and practices of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School.

All school publications form a key link between the school and the home. **We urge parents to read:**

- The Crusader Chronicles, schoolwide Thursday newsletter
- Classroom weekly newsletters
- The school news section of the Parish bulletin
- Any other communications sent home, especially in Monday Red Folders

The Parent Portal on FACTS and our school website are also means of communication to and with parents. This handbook, informational letters, calendar dates and other news may be found in these locations.

### **Required Written Notes**

A written note is required in the following circumstances:

- Excused tardiness.
- Excused absence.
- Permission to leave early or to stay after school.
- Permission to take medication.
- Permission to walk or ride a bike home.
- Permission to go home with a student/family not on your pickup list.

### **Change of Address**

If your address, telephone or email address changes, please notify the school office immediately. This is especially important in light of the school's need to reach parents in cases of illness, emergencies or a variety of other school-related issues and situations. This request also relates to emergency numbers for other authorized adults to be called in the event parents cannot be reached. Changes in family status, such as separation, divorce, etc. should also be brought to the school's attention to be sure that the school is aware of such traumatic events in the child's life. This information is always held confidential.

### **Mutual Respect**

All communications should be viewed through the lens of our Catholic faith and mutual respect should be at the forefront of all communications. No teacher or staff member at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School should ever be subjected to disrespectful words, actions or gossip, or to either verbal or physical assault by the parents or relatives of any student. Faculty and staff, as professional educators, should treat parents, students and others with similar respect and courtesy.

Any such incidents cited above should be reported to the principal verbally or in writing as soon as possible. The principal will then contact those involved and any witnesses to the reported incident and will take such action as deemed appropriate to resolve the situation.

### **Parent/ Teacher Communication**

If you wish to contact a teacher, email should be used as the primary method. Telephone calls to the teacher or student during school hours interrupt the educational process. No teacher or student will be called from class for a telephone call, except for **extreme** emergencies. Please allow 24 hours for the teacher to respond. Students may only use the school telephone in case of an emergency, illness or cancellation of an after-school event. They are to seek permission through the school office. Please be respectful of the teacher's work hours and expected responses after hours.

### **Problem Solving Suggestions and Procedures**

#### **Communicating Effectively:**

- Try not to speak negatively about anyone, especially in the presence of a student. It is detrimental to your child's proper development and learning. This is especially true in relation to teachers.
- Remember a key relationship that facilitates learning is the one between the student and the teacher. Any negative comments can affect relationships between all parties.
- **If you are angry, wait until you can review and deal with the situation objectively before initiating communication. Effective communication takes place when both parties can calmly talk and listen.**
- Remember to "live as Jesus lived."

#### **If a problem arises:**

- The student should discuss the problem with the teacher, preferably one on one. If the child is shy, have the child write a note to the teacher explaining his or her concerns. This is a wonderful learning and maturing opportunity. If the problem goes unresolved, the parent should email the teacher explaining the problem more thoroughly. The teacher should respond to the email or by telephone within 24 hours.
- If the problem persists or goes unresolved, schedule an appointment with the teacher and be sure to include the student.
- If the issue is still not resolved, schedule an appointment with the teacher and the principal.

# **Safety and Security Procedures**

## **Visiting the School**

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School is a closed campus. All visitors, including parents, must be signed into the Raptor system in the school office and receive a visitor's badge. Parents are most welcome at our school, but **no one may enter the interior school area without permission. This policy is intended to protect your children.** Classes may never be interrupted by parents or other visitors without the principal's or teacher's **specific and express permission.** Parents should NOT look in classroom windows/doors to distract the children. Parents who are at school for a meeting or to volunteer are asked to refrain from wandering through the halls. **We ask that you go directly to your meeting location. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated by the faculty.**

Parents are not permitted to eat lunch with their children in the cafeteria. This is a time for student socialization with their peers.

**All visitors must check in at the front office and wear a visitor's badge.**

## **Fingerprinting/Background Check**

Nothing is more important in our schools than the protection and safety of our youngest and most vulnerable members, our students. In light of this and at the urging of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, the Diocese of Orlando in 1998 initiated a program requiring all parents and other volunteers to safe environment trained, fingerprinted, and have background checks run to allow them to participate in our schools as volunteers and coaches. Teachers and other employees are required to go through this process at the time of hiring and must be rechecked every five (5) years. All other persons volunteering to work with or around students must have a cleared fingerprint and background check on file in the school office. These are renewed every five (5) years. These must be processed through the diocese and the FBI– no other background check or fingerprint verification is acceptable. Please follow the diocesan steps for setting up an appointment to be fingerprinted. A list of fingerprinted/approved parents must be kept in the school files. Only these parents, whose fingerprints have cleared the background check, will be eligible to assist at school activities and in the presence of our school children.

## **Restroom/Locker Room Privacy Policy**

*"St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School complies with the requirements of §553.865, Florida Statutes, The Safety in Private Spaces Act. Except where facilities are specifically designated as unisex, the school's bathroom and locker rooms/changing facilities are designated exclusively for use by biological females or biological males. Any student who willfully enters a school restroom or locker room/changing facility designated for the opposite sex and refuses to depart when asked to do so by any school personnel will be subject to disciplinary consequences as established by the school principal unless a specific statutory exception applies. This provision shall be considered a part of the school's code of student conduct and the instructional personnel Code of Ethics."*

### **Child Custody**

Divorced or separated parents and guardians are all “parents” in the true sense of the word. The word “parent”, as used throughout this manual, signifies biological parent or legal guardian. In the event there is a court order regarding the custody of the child, the school should have a printed copy of it held in a confidential file, otherwise the school is powerless to enforce such an order.

It is required that the custodial parent provide the principal with an official, updated copy of the custody order. In the absence of a court order, the school will provide the non-custodial parent the opportunity, upon request, for a parent-teacher conference. Likewise, the school will share pertinent information with the non-custodial parent in a timely fashion. It is also important to reflect all custodial information in parent accounts in FACTS. This is often the first point of information for instructional and front office staff.

### **Child Abuse Reporting**

Diocesan Policy #PS006, Florida Statutes Chapters 415, 232.50: Any clergy, religious or lay employee or volunteer of the Diocese of Orlando, who knows, or has serious cause to suspect, that a child has been subjected to any form of abuse or neglect by any person, is expected to observe the following procedures immediately:

- Contact the Florida Department of Children and Families toll free, abuse registry-hotline the same calendar day the abuse is discovered.
- Respond to the local DCF call back with additional information.
- Cooperate with any and all authorities in the investigation of any child abuse report.
- The teacher or principal must ALWAYS be with/ in proximity of the child when he or she is being interviewed by the DCF worker.

### **Fire and Emergency Drills**

In compliance with Diocesan Policy No. 655.3, fire drills will be conducted once a month. Additionally, emergency crisis drills and severe weather drills will be conducted at least twice a year. These will involve extreme weather situations (hurricanes and tornadoes) and other situations such as bomb threats and threats from persons with weapons. The Diocese of Orlando has an emergency management manual, which is on file at the school and which all Catholic schools will follow in the event of such crises.

## **Health Considerations and Policies**

"When a pupil becomes ill or is injured in an accident at school, the school office will contact the parent or designated guardian immediately. If no one can be reached, the student will remain in the clinic until an appropriate person can be contacted. In the event of an accident warranting professional attention, the principal or office personnel will call the police and/or rescue unit and seek their assistance." Diocesan Policy #655.2

All families must provide the school with emergency **medical information through FACTS** containing:

- Address and telephone numbers (home, work, or cell of the parent)

- Names and telephone numbers of two others given authority by the parent to assume responsibility for the student, if the parent cannot be reached.
- Name and telephone number of a family physician.
- Name of a preferred hospital for treatment.

**Emergency medical forms must be updated annually.** Students are covered by the student insurance policy for accidents that happen at school. The cost of this coverage is included in school fees. Information is available at the School Administrative Office.

### **Clinic**

Office personnel and volunteers staff our school clinic. **It is NOT a true medical facility.** They may clean and cover minor scrapes and cuts and/or apply ice to injuries. They do not provide "medical care." The school is not permitted to dispense any medication without an "Authorization to Dispense Medication" form. **We are not allowed to provide any over-the-counter medications**, such as Tylenol, aspirin, etc. If your child may need any such medication, it must be brought to the office along with the permission form. Please mark the child's name on the container. We cannot accept permission over the phone to give your child any form of medication. Such permission must be in writing, per Diocesan policy. Please see medication policies below.

A parent will always be called if the student is too sick to stay in school or is running a fever. We anticipate the child being picked up as quickly as possible.

### **Illness**

**All faculty, staff and students will be expected to stay home if sick. Students must be fever-free and symptom free for 24 hours prior to returning to school, without fever reducing medication.** Students will be sent home from school if showing symptoms of illness and timely pick-up is required.

In case of contagious disease, consult your family physician regarding a time for the student to safely return to school. Should your child be diagnosed with a contagious condition, such as Fifth's Disease, Chicken Pox, Mumps, Pediculosis (head lice), H1N1 virus (Swine Flu), COVID-19, etc., please inform the school office immediately. While every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality, we must be given the opportunity to inform/alert parents of the possibility of contagion.

### **Medication**

By law students may **NEVER** carry any form of medication (with the exception of an inhaler) on their person while at school. This is the law and a very strict policy. Students requiring prescription or nonprescription medication during school hours must leave it in the school office. The medication must be kept in the original bottle from the pharmacy and an "Authorization to Dispense Medication" permission form must be on file according to the State law listed below. Arrangements must be made if the use of an inhaler is required.

According to Florida School Law, (#232.46 1.b.1 and 2) "each prescribed medication the student's parents or guardian shall provide to the school Principal, a written statement which shall grant to

the principal or their designee permission to assist in the administration of such medication and which shall explain the necessity for such medication to be provided during the school day, including any occasion when the student is away from school property on official school business. The school Principal or their trained designee shall assist the student in the administration of such medication."

"Each prescribed medication to be administered by the school personnel shall be received and stored in its original container. When the medication is not in use, it shall be stored in its original container in a secure fashion under lock and key in a location designated by the principal."

### **Other Medical Conditions**

Special medical procedures, which must be performed during school hours, i.e. breathing treatments or insulin shots, **should be done by the parent** (or the student under supervision, if the student meets age requirements). School office personnel will not be allowed to perform such procedures, unless it is a matter of life or death, i.e. allergic reaction to a bee sting.

### **Immunization**

All students must have the following immunizations before being permitted to enter school:

#### **Kindergarten requirements (or students new to the school):**

Diphtheria/Pertussis/Tetanus (DPT) 5 doses  
Polio Vaccine 4 doses  
Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) 2 doses  
Hepatitis B vaccine series 3 doses  
Varicella/Varivax 2 doses

#### **7th Grade requirements:**

Hepatitis B vaccine series 3 doses  
T/D 4 Booster 1 dose  
Varicella Vaccine 1 dose  
(Or documentation of Varicella Disease)

The Hepatitis B vaccine series takes up to 6 months to complete. Following the 1st injection, a child must wait 1 month before getting the 2nd injection and 5 months before receiving the 3rd and final injection. Students who have not completed their shots, but have started the series, can receive a temporary extension in order to continue attending school. In accordance with the regulations of the Florida State Health Department, a child not submitting evidence of required immunizations may not attend classes.

### **AIDS**

The objectives of the Diocesan AIDS Guidelines are to protect the innocence of our children, to safeguard the health of our students, and to show compassion and respect for the victims of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Students should be made aware that the best defense against acquiring the disease is to be aware of the danger of the disease, to follow our Catholic teachings on sexual morality, and to abstain from the use of intravenous drugs. Faculty must all go through training in the proper procedures for handling the cleaning of any type of bodily fluid.



## **School Uniform Expectations**

STACS adheres to a uniform policy for the instructional and safety benefits of all students. It is our determination this policy provide a non-distracting, instructionally-focused, equitable campus environment. Abiding by the uniform policy also teaches our students a respect for themselves and appropriate attire expectations in such environments.

It is the parents' responsibility to see that children are sent to school wearing the proper uniform. All students are required to wear the approved uniform daily, unless a special exemption has been given. Students who are not wearing the appropriate uniform, as outlined below, will call home to have a parent bring in the proper uniform item before returning to class and may receive an infraction for continuous disregard of the uniform policy.

### **Uniforms for Girls**

#### **Kindergarten through Fifth Grade**

- MAROON STACS Dry-fit polo shirt with the STACS logo
- Plaid skirts no shorter than 3" above the knee
- All white socks above the ankles
- All black, closed-toe shoes including logos and soles. Mary Jane style shoes may be worn with skirts.

#### **Sixth through Eighth Grade**

- GREY STACS Dry-fit polo shirt with the STACS logo
- Plaid skirts no shorter than 3" above the knee
- All white socks above the ankles
- All black, closed-toe shoes including logos and soles. Mary Jane style shoes may be worn with skirts.

### **Uniforms for Boys**

#### **Kindergarten through Fifth Grade**

- MAROON STACS Dry-fit polo shirt with the STACS logo
- Black shorts and black belt no shorter than 3" above the knee
- All white socks above the ankles
- All black, closed-toe shoes including logos and soles.

#### **Sixth through Eighth Grade**

- GREY STACS Dry-fit polo shirt with the STACS logo
- Black shorts and black belt no shorter than 3" above the knee
- All white socks above the ankles
- All black, closed-toe shoes including logos and soles.

## **PE Uniform for K-8 Girls and Boys**

- Maroon PE school shirt with maroon PE mesh shorts with the STACS logo must be worn on PE days. Compression shorts must be no longer than knee length, **no full-length compression is permitted.** Shoes must be all black.

### **Pre-K Uniforms**

- Maroon t-shirts and gym shorts with the STACS logo, will be the uniform for both boys and girls.
- Shoes may be of the parents choosing at Pre-K grade levels only. These shoes must be regular shoes (closed toes/ no heels). For the safety of your child. No flip-flops or sandals are permitted.

### **Specific Uniform Policies**

#### **Shoes**

Closed-toe, all black shoes with black logos and soles are required. All shoes must meet be non-distracting and safe for the school environment.

Students Prek-8 may not wear open-toed shoes, sandals, heels, croc-type shoes, or boots.

**Fad shoes are not permitted.**

#### **Socks**

Socks must be white and visible covering the ankle.

#### **Belts**

Solid black belts **must be worn** at all times when wearing shorts or slacks.

#### **Skorts/Skirt Length**

K-8th girls may wear uniform skorts, or skirts, they must not be shorter than 3” above the knee when worn at the natural waist.

**The waistband of the skirt may not be rolled up at any time.**

No exceptions will be made to this 3” rule, regardless of grade level.

#### **Shirts**

All shirts should be always tucked in.

#### **Sweatshirts/Sweaters/Jackets**

Maroon sweatshirts, sweaters or jackets with STACS logo may only be worn while in school. **No other sweatshirts or jackets are permitted.**

#### **Zero Tolerance Makeup Policy**

Students are not permitted to wear any form of makeup to school at any time, **including dress down days.** Makeup includes, but is not limited to, lipstick, colored or clear lip gloss, mascara, eyeliner, eyeshadow, glitter, foundation, blush, bronzing powder or any other form of facial decoration. Students wearing any other form of makeup will be sent

to the office to remove the makeup. The child will have to wash the makeup off before being admitted back to class. **Students are not allowed to paint their nails or have any form of fake nails to include French tip, dip powders, acrylics or press/glue on nails of any nature.** Parents will be called if the offense is repeated. We will make no exceptions to this policy.

### **Jewelry and Accessories**

Boys and girls may wear a watch (**No Smart Watches**) and a small cross or religious medal on a light chain.

For the safety of your child, girls may wear **one pair of small post earrings**. No dangle earrings are permitted. No part of the earring may extend below the lobe of the ear. This is a safety issue.

No wrist or ankle bracelets or rings are allowed.

No type of body rings or studs are permitted.

Tattoos, real or temporary, are not allowed.

Hats and scarves are not permitted.

### **Hair**

Hair color may not be dyed or altered in any extreme fashion (**no unnatural colors**).

No hair decoration, such as glitter, fairy hair, or extensions may be worn. Fad hair styles that do not meet guidelines are not permitted. Boys' and girls' hairstyles should be neat and worn off the face.

**Girls** - may wear narrow ribbons, hair bands, or small clips/barrettes in solid, uniform colors or school plaid to hold their hair in place. Hair must be out of the eyes.

**Boys** - are to avoid haircuts or hairstyles that interfere with the student's vision or are extreme in appearance. Hair should be neat and brushed, also it should not touch the ears or shirt collar. **Boys must be clean-shaven. Facial hair, such as beards, moustaches or sideburns are not permitted.**

### **Dress Down Days Guidelines**

Students may wear jeans or shorts, providing the jeans are not ripped, torn, or tight and must be worn at the natural waist. No excessively baggy, tight or low-cut pants, nor extremely low rise or hip-huggers are allowed, this includes leggings. Shorts must be mid-thigh in length, and the waistband of the shorts are to be worn at the natural waistline. Short shorts are not allowed. **Undergarments should never be visible.**

Open toed shoes, flip-flops or sandals without back straps (including Crocks) may NOT be worn on school grounds at any time. This is for safety reasons. **No rollerblade type shoes or sneakers may be worn at school-on-school days or for any school sponsored event.**

No suggestive or offensive logos on any attire are allowed. Tank tops, ripped or sheer blouses, low cut, strapless or spaghetti strapped tops are NOT permitted. **No exposed midriffs are allowed.** Blouses or tops should be long enough to still be tucked into the

pants or skirts when the student's arms are raised above their head. This guideline will be used when the length of a top is in question.

Questionable attire will always be reviewed and remain the sole decision of the principal or designee. Students improperly dressed will be asked to call home for a change of clothing.

All dress down rules apply to all school gatherings including dances and festivals.

### **Cold Weather Guidelines**

When the weather forecast indicates **unusually cold weather** a “dress warm day” may be called. Guidelines for dress on such days are: STACS maroon jackets, STACS maroon Track jackets and track pants, STACS maroon sweatshirt and sweatpants or STACS shirt and long black pants. **Under no circumstance is any other outside jacket or sweatshirt allowed to be worn in the classroom, also no compression pants, leggings or any other shirts are to be worn under the uniform with the exception of short sleeve plain white undershirt.** Girls may wear black or white tights. These are the ONLY OPTIONS for “Dress Warm Day”.

### **Birthday Dress**

Birthdays are a special occasion for children. Children may dress down for his or her birthday. Students must follow the dress down guidelines. Students may not dress down on Mass days.

### **Dress Requirements for Mass Days**

Boys are to wear **long black slacks** and girls are to wear skirts or skorts as the official dress uniform on Mass days. Students who have PE on Mass day may wear their PE uniforms to school. On Holy days of obligation, students should wear their dress uniforms.

## **Code of Conduct**

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School strives to provide an academic community that will help each student grow in his or her awareness of God, self, and others, and encourage each student to achieve his/her maximum potential intellectually, personally, socially, physically, and spiritually. To that end, STACS has established standards of behavior and character development expectations for its students.

The following conduct objectives provide the standard of judgment and the guide for action in the area of student behaviors. When strict enforcement of this code of conduct and the student behavior policy achieve results contrary to the school's philosophy and objectives, the school's philosophy and objectives take precedence. St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School recognizes and accepts the responsibility it shares with the parents in the supervision of the student, while he/she is in school or at any off-campus event acting as a student of the school. This document is interpreted and applied by St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School as a form of instruction for all students in the school. The final interpretation of any given school behavior policy or situation remains with the administration.

## **Diocesan Policy Statement**

**In Catholic Schools the school and the Administrator can impose consequences for conduct occurring outside the school.** What students do off-campus can detrimentally impact a school or program's reputation. **By Diocesan policy the school administration reserves this right.** Parents also **share** responsibility for their children's conduct while they are in school or on an authorized school field trip. Teachers and staff members do share this responsibility with parents, while children are at school, and thus act "in loco parentis" (in the place of parents) in terms of all decision-making regarding safety and proper behavior of students.

## **Classroom Conduct Expectations**

Individual teachers will establish rules of conduct for their individual classrooms in line with the mission and vision of STACS. These will be explained to the students and parents and will be visibly posted in the classrooms. Teachers and/or administration select the proper response to both reward positive behavior and to discourage counterproductive choices. Our conduct policy focuses on the use of conscious discipline and restorative practices. Our goal is to shape student behavior to be productive for the individual and community. The emphasis will be on formulating positive behaviors.

## **Recess Conduct Expectations**

It is the belief of STACS that recess is an important part of the students' school day and the opportunity for this time will be provided on all available days. Recess will be supervised by STACS staff, and the time/duration will be determined in reference to the development and instructional needs of each grade-level.

The safety and security of our students and staff while at recess is paramount. For these reasons, specific procedures and parameters will be established for recess time. Failure to adhere to these parameters may result in recess privileges being revoked for a specified amount of time.

## **Disciplinary Procedures**

Teachers will be the primary facilitator in establishing classroom procedures and practices. **Issues and situations of a very serious nature may be brought to the administration**, who have the final authority in all disciplinary matters. Depending on the situation, warnings or further consequences are given. When consequences are warranted, the teacher or administrator will implement appropriate actions. Teachers and administration will communicate and work toward resolution with parents in the case of infractions. Infractions may be given for any of the following reasons:

### **Minor Infractions**

- Chewing gum, eating food or candy in the class or hallway.
- Misbehaving in class or in any other area of the school.
- Misbehaving in church.
- Using bad language.
- Dishonesty.

- Running in any area of the school other than recreational areas.
- Leaving the classroom without permission.
- Throwing any objects.
- Tardy to class.
- Public display of affection.
- Horseplay (pushing, shoving, tripping, pulling chairs, etc.).
- Insubordination to authorized school personnel, including, but not limited to, repeatedly failing to comply with the directions of teachers, substitute teachers, student teachers, teachers' aides, support staff members or any school employee.

### **Rules for Suspension and Expulsion**

"Suspension from school is imposed only for a very serious reason or for repeated infractions for which the student has received several warnings and detentions. The decision to suspend a student rests with the principal. Prior to suspension, parents will be notified of this disciplinary action and the reasons for such action." Any student who has been suspended from school will not be allowed to attend any after-school activities including sports and clubs or school dances.

"Expulsion is resorted to only when all other means of discipline have proved ineffectual, and the student's conduct is a definite hindrance to the welfare and progress of the school community. The measures taken to implement the decision and notification of the parents are the same as those for suspension, which is at the discretion of the principal." Diocesan Policy #652.2

**Students will be responsible for all work missed while they are serving a suspension.**

**Suspension (in-school or out-of-school), dismissal, and or behavior contracts may result from any of the following serious infractions:**

- Actions that endanger the physical well-being of self or others, such as fighting or the intent to injure another.
- Possession, use, or serious threat of use, or exhibition of dangerous weapons (including pen knives), fireworks, or instruments of similar nature.
- Possession of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, unauthorized prescription drugs, vape pens or any other harmful substance while in school or at school sponsored activities held off school premises.
- Coercion - forcing another by action or threat to do something against his/her will.
- Engaging in any form of sexual activity while in school or at school sponsored activities on or off school premises.
- Leaving the school premises at any time during school hours or activities unless signed out by parents.
- Sexual harassment in physical or verbal form.
- Serious acts of physical or verbal violence, including bullying.
- Cheating or helping others to cheat (including plagiarism).
- Damaging school, church or other personal property.
- Persistent harassment of students or staff members.
- Defiance or disrespect to adults and/or school rules and regulations

- Any behavior or action of a serious nature which reflects negatively on the school.
- Serious and persistent use of vulgar language or gestures and racial slurs.
- Inappropriate or unauthorized use of electronic devices including cell phones and iPads
- Inappropriate Conduct whether inside or outside of school and including the use of the internet or social site.

### **Harassment**

**As defined in the Diocesan Policy and Procedure Manual, Policy #ER008.** “The Diocese of Orlando strictly prohibits harassment of any individual in any form because of his or her age, race, religion, color, national origin, age or disability in any of its schools. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and will not be tolerated at any Diocesan entity. **Once a child is warned of an incident of harassment, they are in a “0” tolerance situation** and will be suspended for the next incident of harassment, and possibly expelled, depending on the severity of the infraction.” The school is required to follow these procedures by the Diocese of Orlando.

### **Bullying**

Harassment is a form of bullying, although bullying is traditionally defined as “a stronger, more powerful person hurting, intimidating or frightening a smaller, weaker person deliberately and repeatedly.” It is also seen as any negative actions by one or more person's being imposed on another person being bullied or victimized. Students being subjected to such behavior are to report such behavior to their teachers or the school office for resolution. People guilty of such bullying, whether it be physical, emotional or social, will be punished appropriately, as such behavior is NEVER acceptable. In a Catholic school we must follow Jesus’ words and actions and live a Christian life.

### **Email Threats or Hurtful Statements**

Email threats or hurtful statements are not permitted at any time and will receive appropriate consequences. It is not appropriate to use an electronic forum or social media to post potentially defamatory statements on peers, faculty, or the school. This includes written or pictorial representations. In cases of deliberate defamation of others or STACS, in any form not consistent with Christian values, students will be held accountable for intentional hurt they cause others and any other repercussions that result.

### **Search and Seizure**

Although rarely used, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School reserves the right to search the desks, person and personal belongings of a student when there is “**reasonable suspicion**”, and it is believed to be necessary for the health, safety, and welfare of other students. Students are advised that their desks, persons and personal belongings are subject to search for forbidden, dangerous or illegal substances or items. Students are instructed at the start of the school year that certain items are not to be brought to school, i.e. anything that could be construed as a weapon, any electronic devices, any form of drug, etc.

### **Cell Phone Policy**

Student cell phones are not permitted on campus, including dismissal and aftercare. Cell phones are to be dropped off at the front office and picked up at the end of the day. If a cell phone is found it will be confiscated and held in the principal's office until a parent can retrieve it.

### **Sports and Behavior**

Students who consistently receive detentions, who are suspended, or are on behavioral contracts will be suspended from participation in the sports program for a period of time determined by the Principal, Athletic Director and coach. Student participation may also be impacted by low academic performance.

## **Extracurricular and Enrichment Programs**

Curriculum enrichment and extracurricular activities are offered in accordance with student interest and the availability of sponsors, volunteer instructors and coaches.

At St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School we believe in providing a Christian educational environment that encourages each student to achieve his or her maximum potential intellectually, personally, physically, and spiritually. Extracurricular activities extend the STACS educational objectives from the classroom to other activities in the daily lives of students. In an effort to have a Christian value system permeate throughout the student's environment and reinforce the values implanted and fostered at home, each student and all family members are expected to demonstrate appropriate behavior at all STACS extracurricular activities. All STACS students and families represent our school at such activities and should display Christian values, encourage fairness and sportsmanship, be courteous and respectful to others involved, and present a positive image of STACS.

### **Extracurricular Activities**

The school will offer as many extracurricular activities and clubs as possible, depending on student interest and willingness to be involved. Activities include altar servers, STAN, safety patrol, student council, National Junior Honor Society, ministry programs, choir, band and so on.

### **Team Sports**

Volleyball, basketball, cheerleading, soccer, flag football and track are offered through Diocese of Orlando, Catholic Youth Sports Program (CYS). Students and parents must meet all requirements of the CYS program to participate. Participation in team sports requires a fee, which is paid to the conference, to underwrite costs of officials, administration of leagues, etc. All sport uniforms are school property and must be returned clean at the end of the sport season.

Student conduct and academic performance will impact the ability to participate in sports or any other after school activities.

**If a student is absent or served an ISS or OSS from school on a given day, he/she cannot participate in any extracurricular activities on the day of that absence/suspension. Students who have an unexcused absence from school the Friday before a game cannot participate in the game on the weekend.**

### **Attendance at After School Events**



Students who wish to attend an after-school activity as a spectator must be accompanied by a parent or other responsible adult. **NO STUDENT will be allowed to attend games without an adult "chaperone."** A written note from a parent stating that the child has his or her permission to attend the game alone or with a friend is not acceptable. Arrangements should be made with another parent to be responsible for the supervision of a child wishing to attend a game. Should a child be found at a game without supervision, the child will be allowed to call the parent to pick them up and will be sent to Aftercare to wait and will be charged accordingly. This is for the safety of all students.

If a student has an after-school practice or activity, he or she **MAY NOT BRING HIS OR HER SIBLING(S) to such practice or rehearsal.** The child(ren) will be sent to Aftercare immediately, and the parent will be charged for the time the sibling is in Aftercare.

## Spiritual Activities

### School Mass

School Masses are celebrated once a week and on Holy Days. Students must dress in school Mass uniform for all school Masses. All students in grades K-8 will attend school Masses. PreK4 classes are welcome and will begin to attend with the school depending on the developmental readiness as determined by the teachers.

### Religious Education

All STACS students are required to attend formal classes in religion. It is expected that all students, regardless of religious affiliation or belief, will participate fully in the religious/spiritual activities at the school, including Mass, liturgies and prayer services. Diocesan guidelines develop the curriculum plan for each grade centered on four major themes: Doctrine and Scripture, Prayer and Liturgy, Faith Response/Morality, and a Family Life Program.

### Sacramental Preparation

Sacraments are important spiritual events in the lives of individual Catholics and our parish collectively. The Director of Religious Education for the parish is the point of contact on sacramental preparation. The school will facilitate communication between the Director of Religious Education's office and our school families; however, the church handles and schedules the dates of these events.

Students are prepared for sacraments as follows:

First Communion:	Grade 2
First Reconciliation:	Grade 2
Confirmation:	Grade 8

These sacramental preparations require certain key prerequisites for their reception:

- Parents must be involved in the student's preparation and attend the required meetings. Students must attend required meetings and retreats.
- In preparing for each sacrament, it is important to understand that sacraments celebrate key spiritual events in our lives and help affirm the faith that is already being practiced. For this reason, it is important that parents and their children practice the faith, especially through regular attendance at Sunday Mass.

**Family Life Program**

Students at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School have the opportunity to participate in the Diocesan Family Life Program. The goals of this program, dealing with issues of family life and human sexuality, are to:

- Assist parents in opening lines of communication with their children in this very important area of life.
- Provide the necessary, age-appropriate information to the students.
- Help in the formation of a Christian conscience in areas of a sexual nature.

To achieve these goals, parents are encouraged to discuss the material with their children. Parents may review all instructional material prior to the start of the program.

## General Information

### School Calendar

An official school calendar of no less than 181 student days will be developed each year. Unless noted, all days will be full days. School calendar is posted on the school website. Additionally, FACTS/ RenWeb and the principal's newsletter emailed each Thursday, details the most accurate recounting of school events for the current month. Specific classroom or grade-level events will be detailed in the Grade Weekly Newsletter.

### Birthday Observances

#### School Celebration Procedures

A child's birthday is a very special event. Students may "Dress Down" for their birthday. All dress down rules apply. **If a student's birthday falls on a Wednesday, dress down can be used the day before or after as uniforms must be worn in Church.** If a parent would like to bring a treat for his/her child's class, he/she is asked to get the permission of the teacher and coordinate the time and type of items to be brought to school. We encourage only individual treats, such as cookies, cupcakes, brownies, that can simply be passed out one to each child. Treats for all grades will not be distributed during class time in order to observe all instructional time. Goody bags are not allowed to be passed out at school for any grade level. Students that have birthdays during the summer months may celebrate their birthday on their half birthday. For example, if a child's birthday is on July 15, then they may celebrate their birthday on January 15 provided teacher approval is received.

#### Issuing Invitations to Parties Held Outside of School

In fairness to and in consideration of all children, we do not allow invitations for parties to be passed out at school, **unless the entire class is being invited.** We must consider the feelings of those children who may not be invited. Nothing is more hurtful than to be "left out." If you wish to have a party for your child and are able to invite only certain children, we suggest that you mail the invitations directly to their homes. There are no exceptions to this rule.

#### Field Trips

According to Diocesan policy all field trips which take away from school instructional time, must have "a clearly defined educational component." At times trips which involve other purposes beneficial to the students may be approved by the principal. School field trips are a privilege, not a right, and students may be denied participation if they fail to meet behavioral or academic requirements. Diocesan permission forms are provided to each child in advance of the planned trip. Students are required to turn in the completed field trip permission slip, which is required by Diocesan policy. The permission slip cannot be altered or added to in any way. If this permission slip is not signed by the parent/guardian, then the school will not permit the child to participate in the activity. The school will not accept letters stating that the child may go on the trip. According to Diocesan attorneys, **only the proper Diocesan field trip form is acceptable.** Based on Diocesan policy, permission over the phone is not acceptable in lieu of the Diocesan permission slip.

The use of commercial transportation, rather than parent cars, is encouraged. In the event of parent transportation, all volunteer drivers are required to submit, at least one week in advance of the trip, a copy of a valid driver's license and proof of their insurance policy stating coverage amounts. The Diocese requires coverage amount of 100/300/50. Diocesan regulations require that all chaperones and drivers must have submitted their fingerprints and background check form and have been cleared by the Diocese, (see Fingerprinting) before being permitted to drive students (other than their own) on any trip. No siblings of students are allowed to attend the field trips.

Overnight field trips and other activities involving water related activities for elementary school students are not allowed by the Diocese. Liability for such trips quadruples insurance liabilities according to Diocesan authorities.

Parent/ Adult chaperones must meet all Diocesan approval and requirements in order to attend school sponsored field trips. This includes safe environment training and fingerprints. It is recommended that any adult anticipating chaperoning a field trip completes this process well in advance of the trip as no exceptions can be made.

In addition, chaperones are selected for each trip based upon student to adult ratio as determined by the Diocese of Orlando and the location of the trip. For these reasons, teachers and staff will determine the number of chaperones and the chaperones selected. While all attempts will be made to be fair, the requirements set forth will take precedent when determining chaperones.

### **School Lunch**

Lunch service is available Monday through Friday. Maschio's Food Services is our current provider. A monthly menu is provided to parents on their website. It is requested that accounts are set up for all students at the beginning of each school year, even if students do not plan to purchase lunch, to help provide for times when emergencies and unplanned events occur. We encourage parents to reach out to Maschio's Food Service with any questions or specific student needs.

Students are always welcome to bring their own lunch any day of the week. All food brought to school should have nutritional value. Students have no access to heat up food. Gum and soft drinks (soda) are not permitted. **Students are not allowed to bring drinks to their classrooms from outside companies like Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts. Students are only allowed to have bottled water in the classrooms.**

Additionally, due to safety concerns and Front Office staffing, outside delivery services such as Uber Eats and Door Dash are NOT permitted on campus.

Students must display proper behavior, manners and etiquette when eating lunch. A set of rules is established for the lunch period to maintain a calm, peaceful time for students to eat, socialize quietly and relax. There is a procedure for picking up lunch and the disposal of trash. Students who misbehave during the lunch period will not be allowed to attend lunch recess.

Specific tables are set aside for individual grades. **"Set seating" will be used at all grade levels,** and all students will have assigned seats with their classmates. Seats may change every month, so

that over the course of the year students may get to know all their classmates well. No student will be allowed to sit in any other than his or her assigned seat.

### **Forgotten Items**

Learning to be responsible is an integral aspect of growing up and an important skill learned in school. Students must learn to come to school prepared to work and be responsible for their obligations and possessions. **Students will not be allowed to call home to ask for forgotten homework, projects, books, money, clothes, sports equipment, permission slips, etc.** If the parent happens to bring an item that the student has forgotten, it should be left in the office with the student's name and grade on it, and **it will be delivered** to the student's classroom at an appropriate time. Parents are not allowed to deliver the item to the child in person, as this practice is very disruptive to the classroom.

### **Lost and Found**

Articles of clothing, lunch boxes, and other large items found around the school are kept in our lost and found area. Smaller items such as jewelry, glasses, money, etc. will be kept in the school office and may be retrieved by accurately describing the item in question. **To help alleviate the problem of lost items, please mark as many of the student's belongings as possible with his/her name.** At the end of each grading period, all unclaimed clothing items will be given away or sent to the uniform exchange.

### **Parties**

All schoolwide and classroom parties will be at the approval of administration and the determination of the teacher. Parents may be asked to volunteer items or assistance. All needs are determined by the teacher in line with the needs of the students, instructional practices, school policy, and safety. All volunteers must be fingerprinted through the Diocese in order to participate.

### **VPK Attendance Policy**

Please see the VPK specific handbook for the required VPK attendance policy

### **Closings Due to Inclement Weather**

In order to simplify the decision-making process in terms of severe weather conditions, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School will follow the decisions of the Osceola County Schools regarding closing school for severe weather situations. If Osceola County Schools are closed for the day or are dismissing early due to weather conditions, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School will follow this decision as well. The decision to reopen school will be that of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School and the Diocese of Orlando. These announcements will be found on the school answering machine or announced over local radio and TV stations. Please do not assume that STACS continues to be closed because the public schools are closed. Their decisions are often based on school transportation issues.

The Diocesan School Policy manual contains procedures and practices in this regard for all Diocesan schools. An email will be sent to all school families from the school office to assist in the dissemination of information to families in the event of an early emergency closing. At times, although the weather may not seem severe, if flooding or impassable streets are predicted, the

principal or designee may have to decide the best course of action under such circumstances. In all cases, the children will be kept safe and under supervision at school until a parent comes to pick them up.

**Use of STACS School Grounds**

In certain cases, STACS school grounds are available for use or rental. Priority will always be given to school use and events, followed by church needs and usage. Any use of the grounds or facility will need to go through administration and a Diocesan contract may need to be in place.



## St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School - Technology Responsible Use Policy 2023 -2024

**2.2 Technologies Covered:** St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School may provide Internet access, desktop computers, mobile computers or devices, video conferencing capabilities, online collaboration capabilities, message boards, email, and more. Also, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School may allow students to bring their personal devices which will also be covered by this policy.

As new technologies emerge, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School will attempt to provide access to them. The policies outlined in this document are intended to cover **all available technologies**, not just those specifically listed.

### 3.0 Usage Policies

All technologies provided by the school are intended for education purposes. All students are expected to use good judgment and to follow the specifics of this document as well as the spirit of it: be safe, appropriate, careful and kind; do not try to get around technological protection measures; use good common sense; and ask if you do not know. In the event that the inappropriate behavior happens outside of the school and it is brought to the principal's attention, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School will investigate and may have disciplinary repercussions at the discretion of the school according to the Code of Conduct.

- **Web Access**

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School provides its students with access to the Internet, including web sites, resources, content, and online tools. That access will be restricted in compliance with Diocesan Social Communication Policy, CIPA (Children's Internet Protection Act) regulations and school policies. Web browsing may be monitored and web activity records may be retained indefinitely.

Students are expected to respect that the web filter is a safety precaution, and should not try to circumvent it when browsing the Web. If a site is blocked and a student believes it should not be, the student should follow school protocol to alert Technology staff or submit the site for review.

- **Email**

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School may provide students with email accounts for the purpose of school-related communication. Availability and use may be restricted based on school policies.

If students are provided with email accounts, they should be used with care. Students should not send personal information; should not attempt to open files or follow links from unknown or untrusted origin; should use appropriate language; and should only communicate with other people as allowed by the school policy or the teacher.

Students are expected to communicate with the same appropriate, safe, mindful, courteous conduct online as offline. Email usage may be monitored and archived. Students are expected to cc their parents in any email to a teacher or staff member.

- **Social/Web 2.0 / Collaborative Content**

Recognizing the benefits collaboration brings to education, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School may provide students with access to web sites or tools that allow communication, collaboration, sharing, and messaging among users.

Students are expected to communicate with the same appropriate, safe, mindful, courteous conduct online as offline. Posts, chats, sharing, and messaging will be monitored by teachers and the sites will be protected from outside viewers. Students should be careful not to share personally-identifying information online. The use of personal social media sites for enjoyment is prohibited on campus during instructional hours. Students must refrain from taking and posting pictures and videos of themselves, other students or teachers at school during instructional hours.

- **Mobile Devices Policy**

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School may provide students with mobile computers or other devices to promote learning outside of the classroom. Students should abide by the same responsible use policies when using school devices off the school network as on the school network.

Students are expected to treat these devices with extreme care and caution; these are expensive devices that the school is entrusting to the student's care. Students should report any loss, damage, or malfunction to the Technology staff immediately. Students may be financially accountable for any damage resulting from negligence or misuse.

Use of school-issued mobile devices off the school network may be monitored.

- **Personally-Owned Devices Policy**

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School may allow students to bring personally owned devices to use in the classroom after it has been approved by the Technology staff. Students should keep personally-owned devices (including laptops, tablets, e-readers, smart phones, cell phones, and smart watches) turned off and put away during school hours unless as instructed by a teacher or staff for educational purposes or in the event of an emergency.

Because of security concerns, when personally-owned mobile devices are used on campus requiring the use of data, these devices must only be on the school network, data services must be disabled and permission from the Technology staff is required. For the Technology staff to grant permission, students need to submit the required paperwork with the appropriate information such as MAC address and serial number. In some cases, a separate network may be provided for personally-owned devices.

Students must to follow the same code of conduct for use of personally owned devices on St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School campus or at other functions, whether on or off property, related to the St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School.

- **Security**

Students are expected to take reasonable safeguards against the transmission of security threats over the school network. This includes not opening or distributing infected files or programs and not opening files or programs of unknown or untrusted origin.

If the student believes a computer or mobile device the student is using might be infected with a virus, IT must be alerted immediately. The student must not attempt to remove the virus or download any programs to help remove the virus.

- **Downloads**

Students should not download, attempt to download, or run .exe programs or any other executable programs over the school network or onto school resources without express permission from the Technology staff.

Students may be able to download other file types, such as images or videos. For the security of our network, download such files only from reputable sites, only for education purposes, and following copyright laws.

- **Netiquette**

Students should always use the Internet, network resources, and online sites in a courteous and respectful manner.

Students should also recognize that among the valuable content online is unverified, incorrect, or inappropriate content. Students should use trusted sources when conducting research via the Internet and follow copyright laws for their use.

Students should also remember not to post anything online that they would not want parents, teachers, or future colleges or employers to see. Once something is online, it is out there—and can sometimes be shared and spread in ways it was never intended.

- **Plagiarism**

Students should not plagiarize (or use as their own, without citing the original creator) content, including words or images, from the Internet. Students should not take credit for things they did not create themselves, or misrepresent themselves as an author or creator of something found online. Research conducted via the Internet should be appropriately cited, giving credit to the original author.

- **Personal Safety**

Students should never share personal information, including phone number, address, social security number, birthday, or financial information, over the Internet without permission from a parent or legal guardian. Students should recognize that communicating over the Internet brings anonymity and associated risks, and should carefully safeguard the personal information of themselves and others. Students should never agree to meet someone they meet online in real life without parental or legal guardian permission.



If you see a message, comment, image, or anything else online that makes you concerned for your personal safety, bring it to the attention of an adult (teacher or staff if you are at school; parent or legal guardian if you are using the device at home) immediately.

## **5.0 Cyber Bullying**

Cyber bullying will not be tolerated. Harassing, dissing, flaming, denigrating, impersonating, outing, tricking, excluding, and cyberstalking are all examples of cyberbullying. Do not be mean. Do not send emails or post comments with the intent of scaring, hurting, or intimidating someone else.

Engaging in these behaviors, or any online activities intended to harm (physically or emotionally) another person, will result in severe disciplinary action and loss of privileges. In some cases, cyberbullying can be a crime.

Remember that your activities are monitored and retained.

- **Sexting**

Any student taking, disseminating, transferring, possessing, or sharing obscene, sexually oriented, lewd, or otherwise illegal images or other content, commonly referred to as “sexting,” which can include, but is not limited to, pictures of themselves, other students or friends without appropriate clothing or in compromising or suggestive positions, will be disciplined according to the Student Code of Conduct, may be required to complete an educational program related to the dangers of this type of behavior, and, in certain circumstances, may be reported to law enforcement. This type of behavior needs to be immediately reported to the parent/guardian, and if it involves other students in the school it should be reported to the teacher or principal.

## **7.0 Examples of Responsible Use**

The student will:

1. Use school technologies for school-related activities.
2. Follow the same guidelines for respectful, responsible behavior online that I am expected to follow offline.
3. Treat school resources carefully, and alert staff if there is any problem with their operation.
4. Encourage positive, constructive discussion if allowed to use communicative or collaborative technologies.
5. Alert a teacher or other staff member if I see threatening, inappropriate, or harmful content (images, messages, posts) online.
6. Use school technologies at appropriate times, in approved places, for educational pursuits.
7. Cite sources when using online sites and resources for research.
8. Recognize that use of school technologies is a privilege and treat it as such.
9. Be cautious to protect the safety of others and myself.
10. Help to protect the security of school resources.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Students should use their own good judgment when using school technologies.

## **8.0 Examples of Irresponsible Use**

I, the student will **not**:

11. Use school technologies in a way that could be personally or physically harmful.
12. Attempt to find inappropriate images or content.
13. Engage in cyberbullying, harassment, or disrespectful conduct toward others.
14. Try to find ways to circumvent the school’s safety measures and filtering tools.
15. Use school technologies to send spam or chain mail.
16. Plagiarize content I find online.
17. Post personally identifying information, about others or myself.
18. Agree to meet someone I meet online in real life.
19. Send or distribute obscene, lewd or sexually explicit images.
20. Use language online that would be unacceptable in the classroom.
21. Use school technologies for illegal activities or to pursue information on such activities.
22. Attempt to hack or access sites, servers, or content that is not intended for my use.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Students should use their own good judgment when using school technologies.

## **9.0 Internet Safety Plan**

23. St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School implements an effective internet filtering and reporting solution CIPA Filter, that monitors internet activity, detects inappropriate usage and blocks and/or filters visual depictions that are obscene, pornographic or in any way harmful to minors as defined in CIPA
24. The internet filtering solution controls access by minors to inappropriate matter on the Internet and the World Wide Web and restricts access to materials that may be harmful to minors
25. Policies and procedures are in place that covers category blocking, automated weekly reports on internet activity, and identification of emerging threats
26. School network is secure with CIPA Filter from unauthorized access, including “hacking” and other unlawful activities by minors online
27. Faculty provides internet safety instruction integrated in their curriculum or as part of a technology class that covers appropriate online behavior, including interacting with other individuals on social networking sites and in chat rooms and cyber bullying
28. Technology Responsible Use Policy and Internet Safety Plan will be published in the parent/student handbook and St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School will hold an informational meeting to address the policy.

#### **10.0 Limitation of Liability**

29. St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School will not be responsible for damage or harm to any personal devices, files, data, or hardware brought to the school by students.
30. While St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School employs filtering and other safety and security mechanisms, and attempts to ensure their proper function, it makes no guarantees as to their effectiveness.
31. St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School will not be responsible, financially or otherwise, for unauthorized transactions conducted over the school network.

#### **11.0 Violations of this Responsible Use Policy**

Violations of this policy may have disciplinary repercussions at the discretion of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School, according to the Code of Conduct, and including but not limited to:

32. Suspension of network, technology, or computer privileges
33. Notification to parents
34. Detention or suspension from school and school-related activities
35. Legal action and/or prosecution

#### **12.0 References**

36. Children’s Internet Protection Act – <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/cipa.html> , <http://ifea.net/cipa.html>
37. Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act - <http://www.ftc.gov/ogc/coppa1.htm>
38. Protecting Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - [http://www.ntia.doc.gov/legacy/advisory/onlinesafety/BroadbandData\\_PublicLaw110-385.pdf](http://www.ntia.doc.gov/legacy/advisory/onlinesafety/BroadbandData_PublicLaw110-385.pdf)
39. Consortium for School Networking – <http://www.cosn.org>

# Parents Acknowledgement of Parent-Student Handbook Rules and Regulations

As directed by the Office of Schools of the Diocese of Orlando, each parent must sign a form indicating that he or she has read, understands and accepts the directive, rules and regulations, as outlined in the school Parent-Student Handbook. In this regard, you are asked to attach your signature on the line below to indicate your agreement with this directive. This is a requirement for your child to attend our school and must be completed within the first week of school.

The Parent-Student Handbook is part of the contractual agreement between the school and the parent and is essential to the smooth and informed running of the school program day to day. Parents having any concerns or questions about the contents may call the school, and the Principal or Assistant Principal will gladly discuss and help clarify any such issues.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand and accept the rules, regulations and directive contained in the St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School Parent-Student Handbook for the 2023-2024 school year. I have read the book and agree to follow the spirit and intent of the handbook. I also understand that the principal has the right to amend this handbook at any time if deemed necessary.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**THIS FORM IS ACKNOWLEDGED ELECTRONICALLY DURING THE  
ENROLLMENT PROCESS.**

**IN ADDITION, SIGNED FORM MAY BE RETURNED TO THE SCHOOL OFFICE  
WITHIN ONE WEEK OF THE BEGINNING OF SCHOOL.**