



# We Are...

# STM STRONG!

A GUIDEBOOK FOR THE SAFE REOPENING OF  
ST. THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC SCHOOL  
AUGUST 2020



July 24, 2020

Dear STM Parents and Families,

I hope this letter finds you healthy and enjoying a beautiful summer! As we approach the beginning of our new school year, I am praying fervently that we will be able to proceed smoothly with our reopening plans. I wanted to thank you for your patience in the past several weeks with getting this information to you. We (the Leadership Team and I) have been praying, discerning, and working throughout the months of May, June, and July on our reopening strategies and wanted to be sure we had all the best, most accurate, and thorough information to give you, as a means of understanding the reopening process and alternatives. The guidelines that you will be reading below have been developed through a compilation of many guiding principles. In arriving at our decisions, and to ensure the safety and health of our students, families, faculty, and staff, we examined information given to us by:

- State, local, and Archdiocesan leadership;
- Children's Hospital;
- Tri-County Health Departments;
- Parent Surveys given by STM and the Archdiocese;
- American Academy of Pediatrics;
- Local Catholic, private, and public schools

While we are hopeful that we will maintain in-person learning for the duration of the school year, we are also realistic in thinking that a spike in COVID-19 cases may force our hands into using a form of distance learning. This communication will provide more clarity on those models and how they would impact our community of learning. Please do take the time to read all information in its entirety as many of our new procedures will be in place the first day of school, and even the week before school begins.

**Lastly, the Leadership Team and I will be hosting a virtual town hall meeting on Wednesday, August 12 at 6:00pm to review information and answer any questions you may have. Please be watching for the invitation in the coming days.**

As I have mentioned several times before, we are all so blessed to be part of the STM Community. We will get through this next phase of our "new reality" together and will continue to thrive and be a community of disciples for Christ.

Much peace and many blessings to you all,

Mrs. Gretchen DeWolfe, M. Ed.  
Principal

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***"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." ~Philippians 4:6-11***



## OUR BELIEFS

During the planning stages of our reopening, the Leadership Team supported several guiding principles and beliefs that drove our approach in the development of guidance and protocols for our Fall opening. We believe it is important to be transparent about the “why” behind the “what” of our decisions. It is also important to articulate our underlying beliefs to you, the community at large, to help clarify that it is not fear or other forces that drive our planning, but rather it is mission-aligned, Holy Spirit inspired conviction that has been our foundation. The principles and beliefs we hold and consistently focus on are:

- We believe that we are a community of charity and solidarity, called to seek and protect the good, safety, health, and well-being of our children, families, teachers, staff, and volunteers, especially those most vulnerable in our STM community.
- We believe that community is the best way to form children and allow them to flourish.
- We believe that adults set the tone for students to be adaptable and resilient.
- We believe students succeed when they are loved, heard, protected, and challenged.
- We believe that true freedom and healing comes from knowing, serving, loving, and being loved by Jesus.

As many of the school districts have decided to begin their year with remote learning, the question is then, why and how is STM still able to safely open for in-person learning? We circle back to what was mentioned earlier this summer. STM has smaller classes, more flexibility, and a campus that will allow us to distance, if needed. We are truly blessed to have the support and infrastructure in place to support and allow for safe in-person learning with minimal worry of exposure and transmission of illness.

The reopening of our school allows us to invest in the faith formation, education, and well-being of our children in the areas of academics, social formation, and emotional security, while trusting in the guidance of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This being said, none of us can go this alone. This is a time for trust, not necessarily in each other, but in God. He alone will do what is right; He alone will love us in the way we need; He alone knows our path. Put your trust in God and his Divine will.



## WHAT DO WE KNOW?

### COVID-19 AS IT RELATES TO CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS

The most recent research done by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is indicating that the risk of COVID-19 to children is very low and the rate transmission FROM children TO others is also low. However, it has also been stated that even though the transmission from children is low-risk, it is important for schools to ensure they are doing everything possible to mitigate spread and ensure protection for the most vulnerable members of our communities. Promoting a community of mask wearing, temperature checks, and social distancing to the best degree possible will aid in the battle of transmission of COVID-19.

### STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL OFFICIALS

As of June 30, 2020, Governor Polis reiterated that it is UNLIKELY that there will be an order to suspend in-person learning; however, that all depends on Colorado's ability to maintain low levels of transmission. Governor Polis also stated that it is HIGHLY UNLIKELY that there would be any orders that would:

- Restrict the capacity of schools;
- Mandate the 6 ft. social distancing protocol in the classroom;
- Mandate the use of masks for all students

### MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY

In late May, both STM Catholic and the Archdiocese of Denver sent out surveys to all parents and staff members in Catholic schools. Below are the results of the surveys, which indicate that, overwhelmingly, our families and staff want to see our schools open in the fall.

| ANSWER CHOICES  | RESPONSES  |
|---|------------|
| I/we want the school back in session at full capacity at the beginning of the academic year; I/we would send my/our child/children to school.                                     | 47.51% 878 |
| I/we want the school to take a gradual approach to reopening with limited capacity at the beginning of the academic year; I/we would send my/our child/ren to school.             | 7.41% 137  |
| I/we want the school back in session at full capacity, but understand it may not be possible right away; I/we would send my/our child/ren to school.                              | 18.89% 349 |
| I/we want the school back in session, but only if the school is able to assure me/us of the health and safety precautions put in place going forward.                             | 21.70% 401 |
| I/we understand and support the school reopening, but I/we will not send my/our child/children for in-school learning right away.   | 2.16% 40   |
| The school should not open at all until we have immunity or vaccination available; distance learning should continue. I/we will not send my/our child/ren for in-school learning. | 2.33% 43   |
| <b>Total Respondents: 1,848</b>   |            |



## LEARNING PLAN SCENARIOS AND HEALTHY SCHOOL LEVELS

Due to the ongoing changes in health guidelines and the unexpected nature of COVID-19, STM is prepared to transition between three plans based on the following scenarios: (1) unrestricted in-person learning, (2) restricted in-person learning, and (3) distance learning. Each scenario is outlined in more detail below. **As of July 1, 2020, STM Catholic will be reopening using the Unrestricted In-Person Learning.**

Additionally, we will be using a "Healthy Schools Levels" model that have been developed taking into consideration a) health and hygiene, b) cleaning and disinfecting processes, c) illness tracking, d) communication with state and Tri-County Health Department. These protocols are defined below. **At this time, STM will reopen using HSL 2.**

### Learning Plan Scenarios

| Unrestricted In-Person Learning  |  |
|--|--|
| What it will look like   | Details  |
| School will resume on August 24, 2020 as normal. Daily schedule and calendar will run as normal. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cohorts of 20+ people</li><li>• In-person learning 5 days a week</li><li>• HSL 1 – 3</li></ul> |

| Restricted In-Person Learning          |   |
|--|---|
| What it will look like                 | Details   |
| School will resume on August 24, 2020. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cohort of &lt;20 people;</li><li>• Daily schedule will be based on 3 hours of in-person learning and 3 hours of distance learning while all students remain on campus;</li><li>• 50% of families will have in-person learning from 8:00 – 11:00am while the other 50% of families will have monitored distance learning on campus;</li><li>• Lunch/recess in classrooms from 11:00 – 11:45am;</li><li>• The 50% of families who had morning in-person learning will have monitored distance learning from 12:00 – 3:00pm and the other 50% of families who had monitored distance learning in the morning will have in-person learning from 12:00 – 3:00pm;</li><li>• All distance learning will be done on campus;</li><li>• Carline will run at normal time;</li><li>• This model would be in effect until restrictions are lifted;</li><li>• HSL 2-3</li></ul> |



| Distance Learning  |  |
|--|--|
| What it will look like   | Health Protocols   |
| All students would participate in distance learning in both synchronous and asynchronous settings. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Full school closure;</li><li>• At home learning only;</li><li>• Mandated by state or Tri-County Health;</li><li>• HSL do not apply</li></ul> |

### **Healthy School Levels**

Learning Scenarios and Healthy School Levels are two overlapping pieces within this plan. For instance, while implementing Learning Scenario 1: Unrestricted In-School Learning, it may be required that families, students, and staff, would operate at Healthy School Level 1 when health guidelines are relaxed. If guidelines become more stringent, our Learning Scenario may remain in Unrestricted In-Person Learning, but begin to operate at Healthy School Level 2 or even Healthy School Level 3. It is possible for a homeroom, grade, or even a building to operate at a different HSL than the rest of the school if an outbreak or individual case can be traced to a particular group. STM will continue to follow the guidance of local and state health officials, and the Office of Catholic Schools. Limiting factors, such as gathering size restrictions or distancing requirements, may impact the school's ability to maintain in-school learning five days a week.

Healthy School Levels allow adaptability to changing health mandates while remaining within a particular learning scenario. It is anticipated that STM will operate within Healthy School Level 2 for the majority of the school year. Changes to the Healthy School Level will be determined by state mandates, unexpected outbreaks, and/or recommendations from Tri-County Health officials. We will communicate changes to the school's Healthy School Level on an as-needed basis.

On a recent call with Office of Catholic Schools leadership, Governor Polis indicated that it was highly unlikely that there would be orders to suspend in-school learning or restrict the capacity of schools. Based on the information we have at this time, the possibility of another state-wide, closure similar to what we experienced in the spring of 2020 is extremely low.

**Healthy Schools Levels information can be found on the next page.**



| <b>Healthy Schools Levels</b>  |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Level</b>                   | <b>Details</b>   |
| 1 – Limited Health Protocols   | <p><b>Health Screening:</b> Symptom and temperature screening done in carline before exiting the vehicle; stay home with symptoms;</p> <p><b>K – 8 Masks:</b> Highly encouraged at all times; to be worn when moving within the building and in morning and afternoon carline;</p> <p><b>Handwashing/Sanitizing:</b> Universal precautions in place; prioritized in daily routines;</p> <p><b>Cleaning:</b> Daily disinfecting of all surfaces in the classrooms and building between cohorts; bathrooms disinfected regularly throughout the day;</p> <p><b>Social Distancing:</b> Distancing of desks of at least 3 feet as space allows;</p> <p><b>Precautions:</b> Desk shields, handwashing, and sanitizing</p>   |
| 2 – Moderate Health Protocols  | <p><b>Health Screening:</b> : Symptom and temperature screening done in carline before exiting the vehicle; stay home with symptoms</p> <p><b>K – 5 Masks:</b> Highly encouraged at all times; to be worn when moving within the building and in morning and afternoon carline; possibly have to be worn outdoors;</p> <p><b>6 – 8 Masks:</b> Required at all times when 6ft. distancing cannot be realized;</p> <p><b>Staff Masks/Face Shields:</b> required to be worn when in close proximity (&lt;6ft.) of another person;</p> <p><b>Handwashing/Sanitizing:</b> Universal precautions in place; prioritized in daily routines;</p> <p><b>Cleaning:</b> Daily disinfecting of all surfaces in the classrooms and building between cohorts; bathrooms disinfected regularly throughout the day;</p> <p><b>Social Distancing:</b> Distancing of desks of at least 3 feet as space allows;</p> <p><b>Precautions:</b> Desk shields, handwashing, and sanitizing</p> |
| 3 – Stringent Health Protocols | <p><b>Health Screening:</b> : Symptom and temperature screening done in carline before exiting the vehicle; stay home with symptoms;</p> <p><b>K – 8 Masks:</b> Required at all times;</p> <p><b>Staff Masks/Face Shields:</b> Required at all times;</p> <p><b>Handwashing/Sanitizing:</b> Universal precautions in place; prioritized in daily routines;</p> <p><b>Cleaning:</b> Daily disinfecting of all surfaces in the classrooms and building between cohorts; bathrooms disinfected regularly throughout the day;</p> <p><b>Social Distancing:</b> Distancing at the greatest extent possible;</p> <p><b>Precautions:</b> Desk shields, handwashing, and sanitizing</p>  |



### **Temporary School Closure**

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) recommends for schools to be prepared for COVID-19 outbreaks and individual exposure events to occur in their local community. In the case of an outbreak, CDPHE or Tri-County Health will notify the school if a closure is required. These officials will help administration determine a course of action. In the case of a confirmed COVID-19 case, the Colorado Department of Education recommends a 48 hour minimum closure, inclusive of weekends, for disinfection, case investigation, contact tracing, isolation, quarantine, etc.

CDPHE will evaluate the need for a potential longer closure. In the case of a temporary school closure, STM will implement distance learning until in-school learning can resume.

In the unlikely case of school closure, STM will implement a distance learning program with adjustments based on the feedback gathered from the May parent survey. These adjustments will include an increase in synchronous (live) learning for 1 hour - 3.5 hours daily depending on the student's grade level.

### **St. Isidore Catholic**

St. Isidore is a new online alternative being offered to all families whose children attend a Catholic school within the Archdiocese of Denver. This is a great option if you have reservations about your child attending school in person this fall. The curriculum offered through St. Isidore is the exact same as we use here at STM, including our religion curriculum. Classes will be taught by licensed Colorado teachers who are currently teaching in our Catholic schools. If you are thinking of homeschooling your child/ren or enrolling them into a public online school, I would HIGHLY encourage you to consider St. Isidore. St. Isidore details are included in this mailing.



## GENERAL PROTOCOLS

### Carline

#### Morning Drop-Off

- We will be running carline as is typical at the main entrance of the school.
- **Students are prohibited from exiting their vehicle until screened by a staff member.**
- Drop students off between 7:25 – 7:40AM. **Students are not allowed to be dropped off early,** unless they are signed up with Lion's Den. Drop-Ins to Lion's Den will no longer be allowed.
- Before students exit the car, temperatures will be taken and a brief symptom screening will be conducted by school staff.
- Students in grades K – 5 will enter the building using the main school entrance.
- Students in grades 6 – 8 will enter the building using the middle school doors.
- Masks must be worn by ALL students until they are in their classroom cohorts and then as directed by school personnel.
- Masks must be worn by all students in grades 5 – 8 at all times throughout the day while inside when a distance of 6ft. cannot be realized. .
- Students that are tardy may check in at the main office, regardless of grade level.

#### Afternoon Pick-Up

- All students should be picked up on the school side in the afternoon.
- Students will be required to wear masks and will be standing with their cohorts during pick-up hours and until they are in the car.
- STUDENTS MUST BE PICKED UP BY 3:20PM. PLEASE BE PROMPT WHEN PICKING STUDENTS UP.

### Classrooms and Cohorts

#### Grades K – 5

The cohort for all students in grades K – 2 will be based on homebase. Grades 3 – 5 will generally be in cohorts based on their grade level to allow for math groupings. Cohorts will stay in the same group for the entire day. This protocol will reduce the likelihood of exposure to a larger group within the school and will help prevent the closure of the entire school if a small outbreak does occur.

#### Grades 6 – 8

The cohort for all students in grades 6 – 8 will be based on grade level. Cohorts will be able to switch classes as a common unit and at staggered times throughout the day to avoid exposure to other grade level cohorts.

**\*\*In the case of an executive order restricting the number of students in a classroom, STM has the capability to accommodate all students on campus and would divide the cohorts into smaller cohorts. Although all students can/will be present on campus for normal school hours/days, a hybrid instruction model will be put into place. This model will be comprised of a combination of in-person direct instruction and distance learning with teacher and staff monitoring.**



## Lunch and Recess

Both the large and small cafeterias will be used for lunches. Handwashing stations have been purchased and all students will be required to wash their hands/sanitize before entering either cafeteria. Students will also be required to wash their hands after lunch as well. All cohorts will be spaced from each other as required for distancing protocols. Students will be taken outside for lunch and eat on the picnic tables outside as much as possible, except on inclement weather days. All students will be taken out for lunch recess and will be kept in their cohorts by using a rotating schedule as to the areas of the field/grass/playground. All students will be required to wash hands thoroughly upon entering the building. All tables used will be sanitized between lunch periods.

## Student Mobility

- Students in grades K – 5 will remain in their homebase for the duration of the day, with the exception of math classes (grade 3 – 5 only) and possibly specials classes as well. This process will minimize exposure to others in the hallways and common areas.
- Lockers will be assigned and used only at staggered times throughout the day.

## Common Spaces

### **Library**

Students will be allowed to use the library in their cohorts. All tables, chairs, computers, etc. will be sanitized after each use. More details to follow as the school year starts.

### **Restrooms**

Restrooms will be sanitized and disinfected throughout the day. The following will be in effect:

- There will only be 3 people allowed in the restroom at once;
- Masks must be worn while in the restroom;
- Hand washing protocols will be in place;
- All social distancing guidelines should be observed at all times;

### **Hallways**

Hallways will be marked directionally to keep the flow of traffic contained and to ensure distance between cohorts to minimize possible exposure.

## Field Trips and Retreats

At this time, all field trips and retreats will not be allowed. When this policy changes, all will be notified.

## Visitors and Volunteers

- All volunteers and visitors will be limited at this time. If you have been asked to volunteer it must be scheduled through the front office;
- Lunch volunteers will still be needed and allowed as safety measures will be in place



## School Mass

- School Masses will be conducted according to Parish guidance.
- Masses will be attended on a rotating schedule on Tuesdays at 10:30am. For those grades that cannot attend Mass, it will be live streamed and attended in the classrooms;
- When attending Mass, students will remain in cohorts and will not have buddies at this time

## Early Pick-Up for Appointments or Illness

- If a student needs to be picked up due to illness, parents must call the office upon arrival and a staff member will escort the student to the car. A sign out sheet will be provided for the required parent signature.
- If a student needs to be picked up early due to an appointment, parents must call the office ahead of time AND upon arrival and a staff member will escort the student to the car. A sign out sheet will be provided for the required parent signature.

## Group Gatherings

At this time, we will not be having any large group gatherings. Back to School Night will more than likely be conducted virtually.

## Extracurricular Activities

We have been granted permission to conduct extracurricular activities. Clubs will be conducted using restriction protocols and based of Archdiocesan and state guidelines. Details will be distributed to families when various activities begin.

## Athletics

After much discussion and discernment, all fall sports at STM will be canceled. This includes Cross Country, Co-Ed Volleyball and Flag Football. Winter sports will be assessed in the coming months and communication will be sent to all families regarding play, safety, and protocols in the weeks/months preceding winter sports.

## Lion's Den

Lion's Den will continue to be open for morning and afternoon childcare. The following changes will be in place:

- No drop-in childcare will be available at this time;
- At least 24 hour advance notice must be made if you are needing to use Lion's Den;
- When dropping off, you must walk your child to the main school doors where health screenings (temperature checks and screening questions) will be completed;
- When picking up, you must call Ms. Sarah and your child will be escorted to your vehicle where the check-out sheet must be signed
- All students will be separated in both morning and afternoon Lion's Den according to grade level cohorts.



## HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROTOCOLS

On Thursday, July 23, 2020, the CDC made the following statement:

*"The best available evidence from countries that have opened schools indicates that COVID-19 poses low risks to school-aged children, at least in areas with low community transmission, and suggests that children are unlikely to be major drivers of the spread of the virus. Reopening schools creates opportunity to invest in the education, well-being, and future of one of America's greatest assets—our children—while taking every precaution to protect students, teachers, staff and all their families."*

With this statement, STM will continue with opening the school, while ensuring the highest safety and health standards for our students, teachers, staff, and families.

### Cloth Face Coverings

Archdiocesan wide, we believe that wearing a mask, is an expression of Christian charity and solidarity to help do our part in helping alleviate the spread of the virus. That being said, there is evidence that it is not practical and necessary for all age groups to wear a mask for the entire day. The requirements will differ among age groups and teachers/staff. Please note that ALL students, regardless of grade level, are required to have a MINIMUM of 3 CLEAN cloth face coverings at all times. Please be sure to label face coverings and put in a LABELED Ziplock bag. We must avoid cross contamination with all facial coverings.

#### **Grades K – 5**

Based on guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the benefit outweighs the risk, in terms of wearing a mask, especially for children who are 10 and younger. As such, students will not be required to wear a mask when in their cohorts. These students, however, WILL be required to wear a mask when in the halls or in a group that includes more than just their cohort. Students will also be required to wear masks at Mass and during all carline times. **You may request your child to wear a mask the entire day, but please know that we cannot guarantee the children will follow that instruction.**

#### **Grades 6 - 8**

Due to the current Executive Order from Governor Polis, all students in grades 6 – 8 will be required to wear a mask all day when a 6ft. distance measure cannot be realized. Students will also be required to wear masks at Mass, in halls, and during all carline times.



## Screening and Symptom Checking

### **General Screening**

- Pre-arranged visitors and volunteers will report to the office for a mandatory health check and temperature scan as soon as they enter the building and campus.
- All students will be screened before exiting the car at morning carline. Temperatures will be taken and parents will be asked questions related to symptoms.
- If any student has a fever  $>100.4^{\circ}\text{F}$ , they will not be allowed on campus.

## Physical Distancing

- All student desks will be arranged in a manner that allows for the greatest distance between students with the goal being 4ft. – 6ft. distancing;
- Desk shields for every student have been purchased to help reduce exposure to contaminants when at least 4 ft. from middle of chair to middle of chair cannot be achieved;
- We will make every effort to have students follow a one way traffic pattern while in the building. We will bring students outside as much as possible when moving from one part of the building to another.

## Illness and Confirmed COVID Cases

### **Illness**

If at any time a student spikes a fever of  $>100.4^{\circ}\text{F}$ , they will be isolated and parents will be required to pick their child up immediately. Students will not be allowed to retrieve books, bags, etc. A member of the office staff will gather student belongings. A separate isolation room will be used for students exhibiting signs of COVID-19.

### **Procedure for Confirmed Cases of COVID-19 in School**

- STM will immediately notify the Tri-County Health Department who will help administration determine a course of action for the school;
- Tri-County Health will give guidance on if STM will be required to dismiss just the individual, the entire cohort, or the entire school. This could be anywhere from 3 – 5 days in which distance learning could be put in to place;
- Tri-County can also ask the cohort or all of STM to close for an additional 14 days if the outbreak dictates that closure;
- Parents will be communicated to immediately when a case has been confirmed and the decision as to how long and who must stay home has been made.
  - If we are mandated to dismiss for more than 3 days as a school, we will implement a short-term distance learning protocol. Details regarding this option follows below.



### **If Confirmed COVID-19 Case**

If a student or staff member is diagnosed with COVID-19, a student may return to school when all 3 criteria outlined below are met:

- At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery (no fever without the use of fever reducing medications);
- Improved respiratory symptoms;
- Depending upon guidelines, a healthcare provider or county health department may need to confirm release to return safely to school

***If a student has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and does not get evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19, it is assumed that the student has COVID-19 and may not return to school until the three criteria listed above have been met. We are anticipating additional guidance from the CDC regarding COVID-19 outbreak procedures. We will communicate this to you as soon as it is received.***

## Facilities Cleaning

- All restrooms will be sanitized and disinfected throughout the day;
- Drinking fountains will only be used as filling stations for water bottles only; traditional use of drinking fountains will be disabled. **It is very important that you send your child to school with a water bottle.**
- Desks and other classroom and hall surfaces will be cleaned and sanitized at the end of each day by teachers and staff;
- Our contracted cleaning crew will also be cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces nightly;
- We have increased the air flow in the building by 40% to aid in the increase of circulation;

## Health and Hygiene Practices

- Hand sanitizers have been installed on the outside doors of all 2<sup>nd</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms;
- Grades K – 1 have sinks in their classrooms for handwashing;
- Students will be required to wash their hands before and after eating any food;
- Two portable handwashing stations have been purchased and used as necessary in the cafeterias or any location deemed necessary;
- Face shields have been purchased for use by teachers;
- Desk shields have been purchased for every student to use at their desks as an additional barrier;
- A secondary clinic location in the main office will be used as an isolation area for students that are ill and have fevers;
- The main clinic will be used for on-going medicine distribution and first aid needs.