

# Campus safety guidelines during coronavirus 2020-21 School year

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## Introduction

The purpose of this document is to outline a plan for safety processes and protocols when it is safe for students and faculty to return to campus. Knowing that true normalcy will not be achieved until there is a widely distributed vaccine against COVID-19, St. Thomas is committed to ensuring the safety and security of our community by implementing the practices recommended by Federal, State, and local health officials, which are scientifically sound and reasonable measures to mitigate the risk of community spread. Text in this document *which is italicized* has been copied exactly from these official documents, and the source indicated at the bottom of the page for reference and further reading.

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The guidelines here have been synthesized from many sources, including case studies of international schools who have already returned to campuses amidst the pandemic, and childcare facilities who provided care for the children of essential workers. Like all plans, this is an ever-evolving document, and adjustments can and will continue to be made as new information is learned or our local context changes.

## **Considerations for our campus**

When it is safe to reopen campus there are many levels of safety protocols that will need to be established. Until there is a vaccine against the novel coronavirus and that vaccine is widely disseminated, schools (ours included) will be reopening amidst a context of minimal to moderate community spread. *If local health officials report that there are multiple cases of COVID-19 in the community, schools may need to implement additional strategies in response to prevent spread in the school, but they should continue using the strategies they implemented when there was no community transmission<sup>1</sup>.* These categories of consideration are listed here, and specific guidelines will be identified under each respective category.

- **Social distancing**
- **Active monitoring**
- **Handwashing & hygiene**
- **Clean facilities & equipment**
- **Educate & inform**

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### **Social Distancing**

Social distancing helps ensure that particulates from one person are less likely to come into contact with the surrounding people. This is accomplished by maintaining a recommended 6 foot distance wherever possible, and also through maintaining low-density occupation of common spaces. Education, especially in elementary schools, often involves close proximity to students and amongst students and this poses some unique challenges and adjustments for students and staff alike.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>

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## Arrival and dismissal

Normally students arrive through the front entrance, often with their parent(s)/guardian(s) or are dropped off in the side circle drive. This year we ask that parent(s)/guardian(s) wait in the vehicle with their child until entry to the school is granted after a temperature check. Beginning in August 2020 we will make the following changes:

For the safety of students, parents and staff, this year there will be multiple designated drop-off & pick-up locations for different grade levels.

- PreK student designation is the door leading directly into the PreK classroom just to the right of the main entrance.
- Kinder student designation is the main entrance.
- 1st & 2nd grade student designation is under the breezeway in the circle drive off San Sebastian Ln.
- 3rd-5th grade student designation is the gate between the main and annex buildings.

To help traffic flow, please use the parking lot entrances off of Vinland, and exit onto San Sebastian. 1st and 2nd grade families using the circle drive can U-turn into the drive from San Sebastian, and must be mindful of those exiting the parking lot.



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Dismissal will be conducted in the same fashion, with students being dismissed directly from their classrooms rather than gathering in Krist Hall. Parents/guardians will pick up children at the same drop off locations according to grade level. After care students will gather and social distance in Krist Hall once all other students have been dismissed. Parents/guardians will pick up students from after care under the breezeway in the circle drive.

### Classroom distancing

Whenever possible, desks will be configured to keep students 6 feet apart. For the 3rd grade homeroom class, we will repurpose the currently empty room next door to increase the space, as this is our largest class size.

\*Note: The task force discussed the use of plastic divider shields between desks and determined this was not ideal for 2 reasons. First, the protective effect of such shields will be provided by masks/shields, and the circulation of air within a classroom would be such that these dividers would have a minimized impact. Secondly, the socioemotional environment would be stressful and potentially harmful to children who are already having to make many new adjustments to their school routine. These dividers effectively build a cubicle-like box around each child and could be a source of disease and feelings of disconnectedness.

Our preschool capacity for students is 22 under normal operating conditions, however, in order to ensure distancing with our 3 and 4 year olds, we will be limiting preschool enrollment to only 15 students this year. We will be implementing the following as well:

- *at nap time, ensure that children's naptime mats (or cribs) are spaced out as much as possible, ideally 6 feet apart. Consider placing children head to toe in order to further reduce the potential for viral spread.<sup>2</sup>*

Additional best-practices for social distancing with preschool children are being researched and developed throughout the summer in collaboration with other Episcopal schools and our accrediting body, the SAES.

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<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html#SocialDistancing> Social Distancing strategies

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### Common Spaces on campus

For the time being, we will no longer use Krist Hall for lunch, dismissal, or Monday morning assemblies. Lunch will be held in the respective classrooms or outdoors. Our task force agreed that it would be possible to gather as a whole-school group in the sanctuary because of the large capacity of that space, provided everyone wears a mask, and there is no singing involved. While this is possible, we will begin the school year with our Monday morning assembly and Chapel services being conducted virtually, with students “attending” in their classrooms. As case counts fall, we may transition to school-gatherings in the sanctuary.

Recess and use of playground equipment is acceptable but must be done one class at a time to maintain low-density and distancing. There is some evidence to suggest that playground equipment in direct sunlight would be safe to use after a period of time; *Solar radiation rapidly reduces virus stability on outdoor surfaces*<sup>3</sup>. The same DHS document suggests that the relatively high average humidity (around 75%) in Houston may further compound the lower risk of transmission. We are planning for the following:

- All classes will have Mask Free Recess every hour for 10-15 minutes while social distancing outside. Recess times will be staggered for each class so that there is sufficient time between groups of kids to spray common surfaces like swing chains, monkey bars, and slides with a bleach solution. Surfaces will be sprayed and left to air dry.

Students will no longer rotate classrooms. While we love our departmentalized model of instruction, for this year, we are shifting back to being self-contained in order to minimize the teachers’ exposure to numerous students. It is our hope and expectation that we will return to a departmentalized model (students rotating between classes) for the 21-22 school year.

Bathrooms will be designated by grade level. Preschool restrooms are already housed in those rooms and only utilized by preschool students. Kindergarten through third grade will

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[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/panthr\\_covid-19\\_fact\\_sheet\\_v13\\_27apr-final\\_0.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/panthr_covid-19_fact_sheet_v13_27apr-final_0.pdf)

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use the restrooms on the main class hallway and next to Krist Hall, and fourth and fifth graders will use the bathrooms in the annex. Staff will use the sanctuary restrooms.

### Co Curricular classes

Students will continue to attend co curricular classes (Fine Arts, PE, Spanish), with those teachers traveling to students in their homeroom classes, or teaching outdoors.

Classes will no longer be combined for any co curricular lesson to keep total participation numbers in a given space limited.

PE will continue to be held outdoors on all possible days. During a rain day, students will have PE in Krist Hall and PE curriculum will be adjusted to minimize shared materials and physical contact.

The St. Thomas student choir, the Celestial Voices, currently has about 20 student members. The guidelines issued by Bishop Doyle for singing during church services [are here](#), and singing is not encouraged. Due to reports of singing being a high-risk activity for spreading, choir will be on hold.

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## **Active monitoring**

### Temperature checks

We will conduct temperature checks of all students and faculty on arrival to St. Thomas using non-contact thermometers. We will utilize the following guidelines for temperature screening:

- *If you use disposable or non-contact (temporal) thermometers and you did not have physical contact with the child, you do not need to change gloves before the next check.*
- *If you use non-contact thermometers, clean them with an alcohol wipe (or isopropyl alcohol on a cotton swab) between each client. You can reuse the same wipe as long as it remains wet.<sup>4</sup>*

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<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html#SocialDistancing> Screen children upon arrival (if possible)

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### Check signs of student illness

All staff will look for signs of illness and send students who seem unwell to the front office. We will have a designated area for students to wait if they need to be picked up early from school because of illness. School policy has always been that students cannot return to campus until they have been fever-free for 24 hours, and the same for symptoms like vomiting and diarrhea.

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### **Risk Tolerance**

School policy has always been that students cannot return to campus until they have been fever free for 24 hours, and the same for symptoms like vomiting and diarrhea.

#### *KIDS:*

- At the beginning of each week, parents/guardians will be asked a general health questionnaire about the students and the family.
- Temperature checks will occur upon student arrival and just before lunch every day.
- Checking signs of student illness:
  - All staff will look for signs of illness and send students who seem unwell to the front office. We will have a designated area for students to wait if they need to be picked up early from school because of illness. School policy has always been that students cannot return to campus until they have been fever-free for 24 hours, and the same for symptoms like vomiting and diarrhea.
- If a student presents with a fever at school, they will be isolated in the youth room. A parent/guardian will be notified immediately and must pick up the student within 1 hour. The student must be fever free for at least 24 hours before returning to school. All parents/guardians of the ill student's classmates will be notified.

#### *TEACHERS/STAFF:*

- At the beginning of each week, teachers and staff will be asked a general health questionnaire about them and their family.

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- Temperature checks will occur upon arrival and just before lunch every day.
  - If a teacher or staff member presents with a fever at school, they will be sent home until they have been fever free for at least 24 hours before returning to school.
  - Families will be notified that a teacher or staff member is ill, but virtual learning will not commence due to low exposure risk.

#### Exposure/Positive Test Results

If a student has been exposed to or tests positive for COVID-19, all classmates of ill student must be tested and virtual learning for just that class will commence for 2 weeks and/or until all tests come back negative. The same will be implemented for teachers/staff.

- Siblings that attend STAES:
  - If one sibling has a fever, has been exposed to, or tests positive for COVID-19, all siblings must stay home until all test negative. Parents of classmates for all siblings will be notified.
- Siblings outside of STAES:
  - STAES student must do virtual learning until other sibling is symptom free for 24 hours.

The Harris County Public Health Department will be notified of any exposure to or positive test results from students or teachers/staff.

#### Closure

Should multiple students across the school present with symptoms, the school will close and commence virtual learning. Contact tracing will begin and all parents of exposed students will be notified.

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## **Handwashing & hygiene**

All students will receive a lesson on handwashing upon returning to campus following CDC protocols.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html>

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Students and staff will be expected to wash hands before snacks and lunch, and when transitioning from one place to another (i.e. returning from outside, going from classroom to Spanish, etc...). Preschool and 3-5th will have access to sinks in their classrooms, Kindergarten through 2nd grade will establish a shared restroom schedule to enable handwashing without crowding the restrooms.<sup>6</sup> There will also be a 4 person handwashing station in the Pollinator garden for students to use when coming in from recess.

Sanitation stations (pumps with hand sanitizer) will be set up in the following areas:

- 3 building entrances
- Library
- Staff offices
- Workroom
- Kitchen
- All classrooms will have a refillable sanitizer bottle with a pump. This is not to be used in lieu of handwashing, and clear guidelines will be needed for staff.

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## Clean facilities & equipment

All classrooms will contain a spray bottle with a bleach solution for disinfecting surfaces. When students are not in the classroom (i.e. in co-curricular class) teachers will clean the desk surfaces with this solution and cloth.<sup>7</sup>

Teachers will need to clean shared equipment at the end of each day with bleach solution and a towel. This includes classroom surfaces such as: tablets/iPads, LEGOs, blocks, math manipulatives, dictionaries, etc. Anything used by multiple humans needs to be noted and cleaned.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html> Wash your hands often

<sup>7</sup> *...Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted. Prepare a bleach solution by mixing: • 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water or • 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water*

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools-h.pdf>

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Whenever possible (weather, humidity, temperature permitting) windows should be opened to increase air circulation.<sup>8</sup>

St. Thomas staff will conduct a mid-day cleaning shift sanitizing the bathrooms and frequently touched surfaces in the building. The guidelines from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) outline the nature of this cleaning *Schools should arrange for additional cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces that are touched in common throughout the day. This would include objects such as door handles, common tables/desks, shared supplies such as art supplies, and high touch devices such as shared laptops or tablets.*<sup>9</sup>

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## Educate and inform

Staff will complete mandatory safety guideline training at the start of the school year during in-service.

Within the first three days of school, students will receive instruction to learn about the coronavirus, how it is spread, and how the safety guidelines at school will help keep our community safe. Lessons will focus on:

- Handwashing techniques
- How to sneeze and cough appropriately, and about microdroplets<sup>10</sup>
- Biology of viruses and spread

Teacher resources for these lessons include:

- <https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html>
- <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/trinka-and-sam-fighting-the-big-virus>

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<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools-h.pdf> Clean and disinfect thoroughly

<sup>9</sup> <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/covid/covid19-SY-20-21-Public-Health-Guidance.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/ataglance/845/>

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Safety Guideline posters will be made and posted throughout the building as a reminder to students, staff, and guests about how to be safe in the building. We will utilize CDC images/language from these informative posters, modified to be kid-friendly and accessible.<sup>11</sup> For example, handwashing posters above sinks, distancing posters in the hallways, etc.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/stop-the-spread-of-germs.pdf>