



**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT ~ CATHOLIC SCHOOL SUPPORT SERVICES**

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*Knowledge must result from the activity of the pupil's own mind. Along with acquiring knowledge with the aid of the teacher, he can also acquire knowledge by applying his mind by which he knows the first principles of all knowledge. The teacher often points out issues, which the pupil had not thought of and shows the relationship between the concepts which the pupil would have not noticed without the teacher pointing them out...*

***Saint Thomas Aquinas***

August 10, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians of Catholic Academy and Parish School Students,

On Friday, August 7, 2020, Governor Cuomo informed New York State that all schools can open for in-person instruction, beginning in September 2020. Our Catholic Academies and Parish Schools have been preparing school re-opening plans, so that children could return to safe and healthy school environments, which will adhere closely to New York State, New York City, and Center for Disease Control guidelines and measures.

COVID-19 has impacted families differently, with many families not certain that in-person learning is the best choice for their children at this time. Hearing the need to support families with their educational choices, the Office of the Superintendent~Catholic School Support Services will be launching a Diocesan-wide distance learning Catholic academy. *Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy* will serve as a full-time distance learning option for students in Kindergarten through Grade 8. The distance learning Catholic academy is intended to support the Catholic Academies and Parish Schools within the Diocese of Brooklyn and enable families to remain enrolled at their current Catholic Academy/Parish School but receive their instruction remotely.

*Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy* has been established to provide a Christ-centered instructional program, which is student-centered, differentiated and academically challenging, using diagnostic testing and frequent benchmark indicators to accurately, regularly measure student progress. Teachers will communicate student learning expectations, provide resources, collect assignments, and provide feedback, using a platform most appropriate to meet student needs.

A principal has been hired to oversee the development and implementation of *Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy's* academic and faith formation programs. At the present, a talented team of experienced teachers, with experience in digital teaching is being assembled.

Virtual conferences will be set-up, during the week of August 17<sup>th</sup>, allowing all interested families to receive additional information about *Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy*. Enclosed with this letter is a copy of a Frequently Asked Questions handout, and a programmatic details handout. It is our hope that the handouts will provide you with additional information.

Continued prayers for you, and your family!

Sincerely,

***Thomas Chadzutko***

Thomas Chadzutko, Ed.D.  
Superintendent ~ Catholic School Support Services

# Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy

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**Saint Thomas Aquinas**

## St. Thomas Aquinas' philosophy centers around the following beliefs:

- ❖ each student has been created in the image and likeness of God;
- ❖ the school community shares in the responsibility to help all students develop their God-given talents, to the best of their ability;
- ❖ the school community shares the responsibility of creating a safe atmosphere of caring, sharing, and challenge.
- ❖ each student learns most successfully through differentiated educational opportunities, and religious experiences;
- ❖ each student deserves individualized attention and recognition.

**Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy** has been established to provide a Christ-centered instructional program, which is student-centered, differentiated and academically challenging, using diagnostic testing and frequent benchmark indicators to accurately regularly measure student progress.

## School Design

**Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy** will provide real-time instructional experiences, with students in the following ways:

- ✓ **Mini Lessons:** Students would participate in real-time mini lessons on specific topics during specific times established by teachers.
- ✓ **Small Group Instruction:** There will be instructional time devoted to teaching in small groups. One of the benefits of remote learning is that it eliminates the need to manage large classes at the same time.
- ✓ **Scheduled Office Hours:** students can join office hours to ask questions or discuss learning with their teachers and classmates during specific times established by teachers.

Teachers will communicate student learning expectations, provide resources, collect assignments, and provide feedback, using a platform most appropriate to meet their needs.

- ✓ Students will have daily lessons in the various subject areas;
- ✓ When a learning experience includes a project or extended application of learning over multiple days, lesson updates will be posted. (If students are required to engage in a project or extended application of learning, the project will be broken down into smaller actions/outcomes with deliverables/check-ins);
- ✓ A written explanation and/or recorded video/screencast to introduce, explain tasks, or provide instruction for a lesson
- ✓ Digital/scanned resources, assignments, etc.
- ✓ Teachers will respond to student and parent e-mails/questions within 24 hours.

**Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy** will implement the following tools as part of our students' online experience.

- ✓ All students will use I-Ready software for benchmark assessments and independent, standards-based activities
- ✓ Google Classroom will serve as the Learning Management System for grades 3-8
- ✓ Grades K-2 will use SeeSaw software as part of their online learning

## Curriculum & Assessments

- ✓ The Academy will implement I-Ready software as our benchmarking assessment tool. Data from the program will be used to inform instructional needs and grouping.
- ✓ The Academy will select digital resources to supplement instruction in core subjects.
- ✓ Student learning will be assessed through a combination of project-based learning, formative assessment, performance tasks and online activities aligned to standards.

## Instructional Plan

- ✓ Instruction will begin with whole group mini-lesson, followed by students meeting with their teacher in a small groups setting, or working individually, on an independent assignment.
- ✓ Teachers will work with select groups; students not meeting with their teacher will work on an independent assignment.
- ✓ Teachers will use interactive activities like icebreaker or other team-building activities to form connections between and among their student groups.

## Sample Student Schedules

Sample Kindergarten Schedule					
8:30am-9am	Morning Mtg/ Religion	Morning Mtg/ Religion	Morning Mtg/ Religion	Morning Mtg/ Religion	Morning Mtg/ Religion
9am-10:30am	Blended ELA Instruction*	Blended ELA Instruction	Blended ELA Instruction	Blended ELA Instruction	Blended ELA Instruction
10:30am-11am	iReady Literacy work	iReady Literacy work	iReady Literacy work	iReady Literacy work	iReady Literacy work
11am-12n.	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction
12.-12:30	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:30pm-1pm	iReady Math work	iReady Math work	iReady Math work	iReady Math work	iReady Math work
1pm-1:45pm	SEL/Art/Music	SEL/Art/Music	<b>Professional Development (collaborative planning, workshops, etc)</b>	SEL/Art/Music	SEL/Art/Music
1:45pm-2:30pm	Blended Science or Social Studies Instruction**	Blended Science or Social Studies Instruction**		Blended Science or Social Studies Instruction**	Small group Enrichment Activity

## Sample Student Schedules

Sample Schedule for Grades 1-5					
8:30am-9am	Religion	Religion	Religion	Religion	Religion
9am-11am	Blended ELA Instruction plus iReady Literacy work	Blended ELA Instruction plus iReady Literacy work	Blended ELA Instruction plus iReady Literacy work	Blended ELA Instruction plus iReady Literacy work	Blended ELA Instruction plus iReady Literacy work
11am-12n.	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction
12-12:45	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:45pm-1:30pm	Blended Social Studies	Blended Social Studies Instruction	<b>Professional Development (collaborative planning, workshops, etc)</b>	Blended Social Studies Instruction	Blended Social Studies Instruction
1:30pm-2:15pm	Blended Science Instruction	Blended Science Instruction		Blended Science Instruction	Blended Science Instruction
2:15pm-3pm	SEL/Art/Music/iReady Math work	SEL/Art/Music/iReady Math work		SEL/Art/Music/iReady Math work	SEL/Art/Music/iReady Math work

Sample Schedule for Middle School					
8:30am-9am	Religion	Religion	Religion	Religion	Religion
9am-10:45am	Blended ELA Instruction*	Blended ELA Instruction	Blended ELA Instruction	Blended ELA Instruction	1-1 student conferences or Independent Student Activity
10:45am-11am	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
11am-12n.	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction	Blended Math Instruction
12-12:45	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:45pm-1:30pm	Blended Social Studies Instruction	Blended Social Studies Instruction	<b>Professional Development (collaborative planning, workshops, etc.)</b>	Blended Social Studies instruction	Blended Social Studies Instruction
1:30pm-2:15pm	Blended Science Instruction	Blended Science Instruction		Blended Science Instruction	Blended Science Instruction
2:15pm-3pm	SEL/Art/Music	SEL/Art/Music		SEL/Art/Music	SEL/Art/Music

## *Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy*

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

***How will my student access remote learning materials? Will Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy students be provided with devices?***

Every Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy will receive the necessary tools and materials, including either an iPad, or a Chrome book for remote learning. In order to keep students connected and be able to meet instructional requirements when learning remotely, every student will also have access to Google Classroom, and other apps.

***How will my child grow as a Catholic Christian at Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy?***

St. Thomas Aquinas believed that each child is created in the image and likeness of God, and the school community shares in the responsibility to help all students develop their God-given talents, to the best of their ability. Students will take an active role in understanding and participating in their faith formation. Catholic Christian doctrine will be taught through meaningful lessons and activities, integrated through rich multimedia, relevant and connected to the student's life.

***Can my child begin at Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy in September, and return to their home school anytime during the school year?***

The intent for all students enrolled in Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy is to complete the entire 2020-2021 school year. Parents may choose to return to their home school upon the completion of the first trimester, subject to seat availability in the home school.

***Who will be my child's teacher at Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy? Will my child be taught by a teacher from his/her home school?***

All classes will be taught by teachers, specifically chosen to be part of this distance learning Catholic academy. Within the Diocese of Brooklyn there are high-quality teachers ministering throughout all the Catholic Academies and Parish Schools in Brooklyn and Queens. Parents and students can expect the same caliber of teacher, with consistent experience.

***Will my children know any of the other students enrolled in Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy?***

While creating class sections, the school administration will make every effort to have same grade level children from a particular home school be placed together.

***Does my child have to wear a Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy school uniform?***

Students will not be expected to purchase a Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy school uniform, however when classes are in session, students will be expected to wear their home school' s uniform.

***Will my child be learning the same curriculum as his/her classmates in their home school?***

All students attending Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy will have courses aligned to the New York Learning Standards. The instructional plan is to provide each student with access to the Savvas Realize digital instructional platform. Students will have access to the most up-to-date instructional materials, including digital versions of Reading Street, Elevate Science, enVision Mathematics, My World Interactive Social Studies series, and My Perspectives Reading and Writing series.

***Will my child be using the same books as his classmates at his home school?***

Instructional materials used throughout all Catholic Academies and Parish Schools are aligned to the New York Learning Standards. Many of the schools within the Diocese use Pearson/Savvas products. All products being used at Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy will be the most up-to-date digital versions.

***How will I be able to contact my child's teacher, if I have questions?***

Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy will establish protocols to communicate with families, including, but not limited to teacher emails, Microsoft Teams and Zoom meetings, and other tools.

***How will Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy share learning experiences with families?***

Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy will use a multi-pronged approach to help families engage with learning. Teachers will post assignments in Google Classroom and meet with students via Google Meet. Additionally, teachers may have synchronous online office hours where learners and parents can meet and discuss the learning units of study, which have been developed. Also, the teachers and school leader will respond to all emails from students and parents as soon as possible, within a maximum 24-hour timeframe.

***What will be Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy's grading policy?***

Your child will be assessed continuously and will receive progress reports and report cards. Detailed information about the grading policies will be provided, when the school year begins.

***How can I support my child's learning if we have multiple children at home?***

Creating schedules and having quiet places for study will help, when multiple children are attempting their schoolwork each day.

***How will I know that my child is staying on track with his/her learning?***

There will be many ways in which Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy teachers will be involved in monitoring the progress of students and sharing this information with families. Your child's teacher will provide feedback through various digital platforms and will be available to students and their families during designated office hours.

***What if my child has an IEP or receives Special Education services?***

Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy is currently investigating all possible service delivery methods to provide Special Education supports and services. Student's Individual Education Plans will be carefully reviewed, and services will be based on an individual student need basis.

***How will my child's attendance be taken and recorded?***

Attendance recording will occur through a child's daily meetings and interactions with their teachers. Attendance data will be monitored, to ensure that students are engaged in their learning and to follow up with families where there are concerns.

***My child is a high performing student, how will he/she be challenged, have his/her needs met?***

Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy will be adopting the adaptive learning system, iReady. Through periodic assessments, the iReady learning system will develop individualized student learning plans to support student acceleration.

***My child will be entering the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, will the high school application process be coordinated by Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy?***

Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy is a full-service educational program. Teachers will be responsible for the coordination of the high school articulation process and will communicate with the home school for any needed student data/records retrieval purposes.

There will be on-going communication between Saint Thomas Aquinas Distance Learning Catholic Academy and the home school, throughout the entire high school process.