St. Thomas Aquinas Academy
Family Handbook



2026-2027

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HEAD OF SCHOOL'S INTRODUCTION

Dear Families of St. Thomas Aquinas Academy,

Parents, please read and discuss the contents of this handbook with your children.

As is discussed more fully in the pages that follow, S*t. Thomas Aquinas Academy is a community of joyful disciples cultivating saints to serve Christ and His Church by forming young people in faith, wisdom, and virtue through the Catholic liberal arts tradition*. This is our mission, and it informs everything that we do.

Our vision for this formation of wisdom and virtue is more than simply an intellectual pursuit of truth. It goes hand in hand with faith and discipleship – conforming ourselves to the person of Truth, Jesus Christ. The Litany of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus reminds us from whence wisdom and virtue come: "Heart of Jesus, the abyss of all virtues . . . Heart of Jesus, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,...Jesus, meek and humble of Heart, make our hearts like unto Thine."

The most significant contribution parents can make is to embrace their sacred role as the primary educators of their children. This is achieved "first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule". It is also necessarily accomplished through the witness of their own lives: "parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children" by modeling the virtues and obedience to the laws of Christ and the Church (CCC 2223). As the "first heralds" of the mysteries of our faith, "family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith" (CCC 2225-2226). Parents embrace the "responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children" by leading their families in active participation in the Church's life (CCC 2225). This begins with faithful attendance of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, regular reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion, and through participation in the various fasts and feasts of the liturgical calendar. Divine grace received through the sacraments purifies and elevates the virtues. For this, we "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, His mercy endures forever" (Psalm 136:1).

Blessings,
Mrs. Erin Miller
Head of School

"For you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."
-ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

STATEMENT OF FAITH

As members of the St. Thomas Aquinas Academy community, we embrace the classical method of education, deeply rooted in the rich spiritual and moral traditions of the Catholic Church. We recognize our dual role in reinforcing these teachings both in the classroom and through our lives—serving as a testament to our faith in action.

Central to our educational ethos is the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ—true God and true man—as our sole Redeemer. His Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection are the cornerstones of our faith, revealing the paternal heart of God and calling us to live in accordance with divine filiation.

With fidelity to the teachings of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, we affirm:

- *The inherent dignity of every person, whose worth is immeasurable from the very moment of conception, guided by a societal imperative to uphold God's commandments.*
- *Our adoption as children of God through the waters of Baptism, initiating us into the mystical body of Christ.*
- *Our ultimate accountability before God, who justly assesses our earthly deeds in the light of His eternal law.*
- *The role of Divine Revelation, particularly as transmitted through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, and the Church's role as the custodian of this Revelation.*
- *The sanctity of human life, created in the imago Dei—the image and likeness of God—demanding respect from conception until natural death.*
- *Our identity, intrinsically linked to our biological sex, bestowed by God from whom all life originates.*
- *The sacramental bond of matrimony, uniquely uniting one man and one woman, mirroring the creative love of the Creator.*
- *The Church's moral directives regarding the sanctity of marriage and family life, the proper understanding of human sexuality, and the value of chastity.*
- *As the "source and summit of the Christian life," the Eucharist is central to the life of the school community.*
- *Our final vocation, which is to attain the beatific vision, wherein lies our perpetual joy and the fulfillment of our destiny.*
- *The belief in the intercession of saints, the veneration of relics, and the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all saints as models and intercessors for the faithful.*
- *The teachings on Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell (the Four Last Things) are essential components of Catholic eschatology.*
- *A deeper exploration of all seven sacraments, especially Confession, and their role in the life of the faithful.*
- *The importance of personal and communal prayer, as well as the practice of traditional Catholic devotions and spirituality.*
- *The understanding of vocation, including the call to holy orders, consecrated life, and lay apostolate.*
- *The teaching about the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, with the Pope and bishops in union with Him as the visible head, and the role of the Church in salvation history.*

We are committed to an education that is permeated with Catholic teaching, honoring the rich legacy of the Church's doctrinal and moral principles, and enkindled by the exemplary lives of the saints. In this, we seek not only to impart knowledge but to form the whole person in virtue and wisdom, preparing our students for their temporal and eternal callings.

We fully consent to provide our children with this sacred heritage, desiring earnestly that they be formed in the totality of truth, as preserved in its fullness by the Catholic Church and taught by St. Thomas Aquinas Academy.

MOTTO

Non nisi Te Domine
(Nothing if not You, Lord)

ACADEMIC VISION

Our Patron Saint

Our saint, Thomas Aquinas, exemplifies the ideals and principles of Catholic liberal education through his life's work and philosophy. Born in 1226 in Roccasecca, Italy, St. Thomas Aquinas was a Dominican friar, philosopher, and theologian, renowned for his intellect, virtue, and humility. He pursued his calling with unwavering commitment, eventually studying under Albert the Great and surpassing his peers in knowledge and piety.

His profound contributions to theology and philosophy, particularly through his seminal work, the Summa Theologica, continue to inspire and guide Catholic education. His emphasis on the harmony of faith and reason aligns with our academy’s mission to cultivate wisdom, virtue, and service to Christ and His Church. St. Thomas Aquinas Academy's dedication to providing a faithfully Catholic education mirrors the holistic approach Aquinas took in his teachings, integrating faith formation, intellectual development, and character building.

Core Values

As the patron saint of Catholic schools, academics, and students, St. Thomas Aquinas's legacy is a beacon for educational institutions and guides our academy's core values.

Community Life

We are not merely a school but "a community of joyful disciples." Our aim is to bring families together in pursuit of one shared goal: heaven. We recognize the importance of a strong, rich culture that intentionally observes the Church's liturgical calendar–solemnities, feasts, seasons and devotionals–understanding that practices form the virtues and their corresponding affections.

Common Prayer

Our administrators, faculty, staff, parents, and students will be rooted in prayer. In particular, we recognize that sacramental life must be at the center of our community; through sacramental grace the bond of charity is strengthened and renewed. Moreover, it is our plan and mission to incorporate regular praxis of traditional Catholic spirituality (discernment of spirits, regular examination of conscience, lectio divina, devotion to the Blessed Mother, etc.) so our young students come to know and understand the fruits of spiritual discipline–a relationship with Christ.

Study

Study is not an end in itself; the end of study is love. As students grow in their understanding of God and His creation they will come to desire the true, good, and beautiful, better equipping them to serve both God and neighbor. This is the beauty of the classical Catholic curriculum and the tradition of the liberal arts. Academic subjects are not studied in a fragmented manner. Instead, content is carefully selected and pedagogy is specially designed to bring students to a better understanding of history as a story of salvation, math as evidence of objective truth and inherent order, science as a humble quest to appreciate God's creation, literature as the expression of man's search for God, and theology as the summit of human inquiry.

Service

While students will be developed in faith, wisdom, and virtue as persons it is also crucial that they hone the social virtues of charity and justice. We affirm that as members of the Church we are the hands and feet of Christ. Our goal is to light an evangelical fire in our students so they are moved to build the kingdom and spread the Good News.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

PK4 & Kindergarten

The Aquinas educational journey begins with the Montessori-inspired 4-year-old preschool program. The stand-alone PK4 class provides our youngest students an engaging, integrated, and hands-on exploration of creation; age-appropriate development of attention, memory, and courtesy; as well as early academic skills. Nursery rhymes, fables, poems, songs, and fairy tales both inspire delight and enrich the foundation of each child's moral imagination.

As students enter our Kindergarten classroom, they continue their sensory rich exploration of the created world, development of personal and social virtues, as well as exposure to beautiful children's literature. In addition, students in Kindergarten will receive structured early literacy and numeracy instruction, including writing and penmanship.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Students in both PK4 and Kindergarten will participate in our beloved Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program, designed to assist the child in growing his or her relationship with God. In CGS, Catechists share the words of Scripture and age-appropriate explanations of various aspects of our faith with students. Students are then welcomed to explore of child-sized versions of the articles of the Mass and other liturgical items, figures of Our Lord and the people of Scripture, a 3D map of the Holy Land, etc. These sensorial experiences invite our youngest students to contemplation and prayer.

Classical Liberal Arts – 1-8

"The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for. … But this search for God demands of man every effort of intellect, a sound will, "an upright heart", as well as the witness of others who teach him to seek God." -The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 27, 30

The classical liberal arts are the heritage of the Catholic Church, rooted in the understanding that faith and reason are complementary means of arriving at the truth. At STA, the Catholic

faith is studied and practiced in its own right, but not as an isolated subject among many or an appended set of activities. Rather, our faith tradition is the lens through which all areas of study are approached.

The Incarnation, sacrificial death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the focal point of history, science and mathematics are viewed in light of God's intricate design, and the arts are understood as a means to draw us closer to God, to reveal our Creator in ways unique to the arts, and to open our hearts in wonder to the beauty and order of his creation.

The end of a classical liberal arts education is the formation of the soul in faith, wisdom, and virtue in service of students fulfilling their vocation and attaining salvation. The categories of its academic content are mostly familiar: math, science, history, literature, poetry, grammar and composition, foreign language, fine arts, and physical education. Logic, Latin, and theology were considered an essential part of education from antiquity until relatively recently. At STA, they are integrated into our course of study.

The selection of the content within these categories, the texts and works of art in particular, is guided by what has stood the test of time, is ennobling, and lays the foundation for participation in the great conversation of western civilization. The methods of classical education in grades 1-8 favor but are not limited to direct observation and Socratic inquiry, immersion in narrative, integration of subject areas, memorization, narration, recitation, imitation (of masters in the arts), and invention.

At STA, teachers and students pursue excellence in all worthy things. This lofty goal requires attention, diligence, and intellectual rigor appropriate to a child's age as traditionally understood. We aim to equip students with the virtues and habits that open the door to high standards of academic inquiry leading to deep and precise thinking over a range of topics and disciplines. The course of study is challenging but rooted in content and methods that have borne the fruit of excellence in thought and achievement.

All of this takes place in an educational environment and school culture that is intentionally joyful, ordered, and in pursuit of virtue. If our students are to become saints who serve Christ and his church, they must be armed with both the knowledge of virtue (knowing what is right and why) and the habits of virtue (practice in doing what is right even when difficult). Our faculty and staff establish high and ennobling cultural norms within a context of loving and gracious relationship with their students. This begins with modeling virtuous behavior, training students in the routines of the class and habits of civility, guiding students to join in striving to grow in virtue, looking together to the lives of saints and heroes for inspiration, and consistently upholding standards of behavior with an eye towards the restoration and growth of each heart.

Portrait of St. Thomas Aquinas Academy Graduate

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy will graduate a student who

- *has developed a well-informed, Christ-centered and personal sense of purpose.*
- *understands our faith as revealed in Scripture and the teachings of the Catholic Church.*
- *knows how to pray according to the rich tradition of the Church (e.g. lectio divina) and can draw upon this tradition to develop a relationship with God.*
- *is equipped for and intent upon continuing to pursue and deepen this relationship with our Lord and seeking God's will for his life.*
- *has experienced true friendship and strives to be a good friend.*
- *communicates verbally and in writing with marked clarity and beauty.*
- *listens carefully to others, thinks before speaking, and when speaking can exercise reason ordered to truth.*
- *is well-prepared to pursue any course of study or development with diligence and humble confidence, especially to engage the great books with depth and insight.*

Independent Board

The Board of Directors of St. Thomas Aquinas Academy has ultimate responsibility and authority for the operation of St. Thomas Aquinas Academy. They hire the Head of School to execute this responsibility and authority.

Governing Board Members

Emily Fisher
President

Nury Siekkinen
Vice-President

Chad Mizelle
Treasurer

Elvita Freeman
Secretary

Andrew Blank
Director

Academy Faculty and Staff

Erin Miller
Head of School

Emmanuel Gozo
Dean of Students & Formation

Elvita Freeman
Dean of Curriculum & Pedagogy

Emily Fisher
Director of External Affairs

Will Veitkus
Director of Admissions & Advancement

Camila Montejo
Director of Communications & Office Manager

Rosie Betancur
Finance Manager

Ed Maurer
Facilities Manager

Mary McDermott
PK4 Lead Teacher

Isabella Barco
PK4 Aide

Melissa Larsen
Kindergarten Teacher

Amy Hunchman
1st Grade Teacher

Kristee Miller
2nd Grade Literacy/Math Teacher &Assistant to Head of School

Deb Reedy
2nd/3rd Grade Teacher

Alison Perez
4th Grade Teacher

Ashley Thomas
5th Grade Humanities & Middle School Math Teacher

Karla Rodriguez
6th Grade Humanities & Middle School Science Teacher

Rebecca Lopez
7th/8th Grade Humanities & Middle School Latin Teacher

Tori Knight
Physical Education Teacher & CGS Catechist

Nancy Maurer
Art Teacher & Teacher Aide

Matthew Kuizon
Music Teacher

Kenadi Knight
After-School Care Supervisor

THE ACADEMY DAY

Drop-Off & Arrival

Students may begin arriving at school each morning at 7:40 AM. Parents will have two options for drop-off. (See page 15 for map illustrating both Carline and Park and Walk options.)

1. Carline: Enter the school campus from the S. Manhattan Avenue. Continue toward the back of the parking lot near the church, making a left to drive in the lane closest to St. Patrick Catholic Church. You will continue to drive north toward St. Thomas Aquinas Academy and the St. Patrick Parish Office (both on your right). Staff will be there from 7:40-8:00 to unload students from their cars on the passenger side/sidewalk side ONLY. Students will then proceed to their classrooms with staff members supervising and/or escorting students to their classrooms, as needed. **In carline, please be sure to stay in your car and allow a staff member to help your child out from the passenger side of the vehicle. Please drive slowly, do not use cell phones, and do not pass another car that is unloading.** Continue and exit via Hubert Avenue. *Please note that the exit gate will open as you approach it.*
2. Park and Walk: Enter the school campus from the S. Manhattan Avenue. **Please drive slowly as there may be students unloading from cars throughout the parking lot.** Park in any available space and walk your child toward the front of the church. From there, you will walk on the path alongside the fence until reaching the gate of the South Building. Please do not escort your child to the classroom. A staff member, sibling, or older student will be happy to escort your child if they are not comfortable walking alone.

Students are considered tardy after 8:00 AM. Parents will need to park their cars and walk their students to the office to sign them in at this point. On-time arrival gives your child the best start to the school day. Please partner with us in ensuring that your child starts each day successfully by arriving before 8:00 AM each morning.

Holy Mass

At St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, our mission extends beyond academics to the Catholic formation of our students. Central to this mission is daily celebration of Mass, which stands as a cornerstone of our communal spiritual life and Catholic identity.

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi ("the rule of prayer is the rule of belief")

Teaching our students to conduct themselves with reverence and respect during Holy Mass is a means of opening the eyes of the heart to the unseen eternal reality: the Mass is a meeting of Heaven and earth, where the Lord of the Universe makes a gift of Himself in the Holy Eucharist.

These habits of prayer include: entering the Church in quiet, genuflecting to our Lord in the tabernacle, maintaining silence when appropriate, and participating reverently with appropriate postures and verbal responses. Each student is already prepared with a suitably modest and non-distracting appearance as required by our Uniform Guide.

Family and friends are most welcome and encouraged to join us at St. Patrick's 8:30am daily Mass. With respect for the role of parents as the primary educators and acknowledging the role of the community in assisting the formation of the young, we ask that you keep in mind that your children are already engaged as students under the direction of their teachers and ask for your participation in setting an example of reverence and respect during the celebration of the Holy Mass. This includes keeping conversations outside of the church, silencing/turning off electronic devices, etc. We particularly ask that St. Thomas Aquinas Academy family and friends dress in a way that honors the Lord, demonstrates dignity, and shows respect for others. We recommend coverage from shoulders to knees.

Prayer

The Catechism teaches us prayer *is* the "vital and personal relationship with the living and true God" (CCC 2558.) As such, prayer forms an essential part of school's mission to help students develop in faith, wisdom, and virtue and become the saints God has called them to be. This is reflected in our daily schedule, in the routines of the classroom, and in our celebrations.

Teachers are encouraged to lead students in prayer at the beginning or end of each class. This practice serves to sanctify the educational process, inviting God's presence and guidance into the classroom. It is a practice to foster a sense of community, reflection, and gratitude among students and staff alike.

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy's approach to prayer emphasizes Sacred Scripture and the rich wealth of the Church's Tradition. This begins in the youngest years with learning the Sign of the Cross, the Our Father, Hail Mary, the Glory Be, as well as following along and participating in the recitation of the Rosary. Other prayers learned and prayed through the years include but are not limited to the: Morning Offering, Angelus or Regina Caeli, prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas, Magnificat, Memorare, prayers of the Mass, and prayers that accompany the reception of the sacraments such as the Act of Contrition and Anima Christi. This also rightly includes modes of contemplative prayer such as Lectio Divina and Visio Divina.

The ultimate goal is to help students cultivate their unique relationships with the Lord so they will learn how to hear His voice and follow Him.

Lunch

It is the responsibility of the parent to pack a healthy lunch and snack for your children.

Though the school does not provide a hot lunch program, hot lunch may be offered at various times throughout the year, served by parent volunteers. The dates and ordering information will be shared in advance.

Delivery services such as Uber Eats are not permitted on campus during school hours.

No student is permitted to leave the school building or grounds during school hours or at lunch without the permission of an administrator and under the supervision of their legal guardian.

Recess

At St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, recess is a critical component of our holistic approach to education, nurturing the body, mind, and spirit of each child. Through both structured play and free exploration, our students learn to embody the virtues of our faith in all aspects of life, laying the groundwork for a lifetime of healthy habits and healthy interactions with the world around them.

Unless it is raining, students are expected to go outside for recess each day. Students who are prevented from participating in recess due to injury or other physical impairment, guided by communication from a parent or physician, may remain indoors after prior coordination with their classroom teacher.

Dismissal

Carline will begin at 3:00 PM each day. Parents may choose to drive through carline to pick up their children or park in the St. Patrick's parking lot and walk to the STA gate to pick them up. Please follow the same procedures as morning drop off for these two options.

For the safety and efficiency of the carline, parents are asked to remain in their vehicles at all times. Parents with children in car seats should pull over and park, rather than stopping in carline.

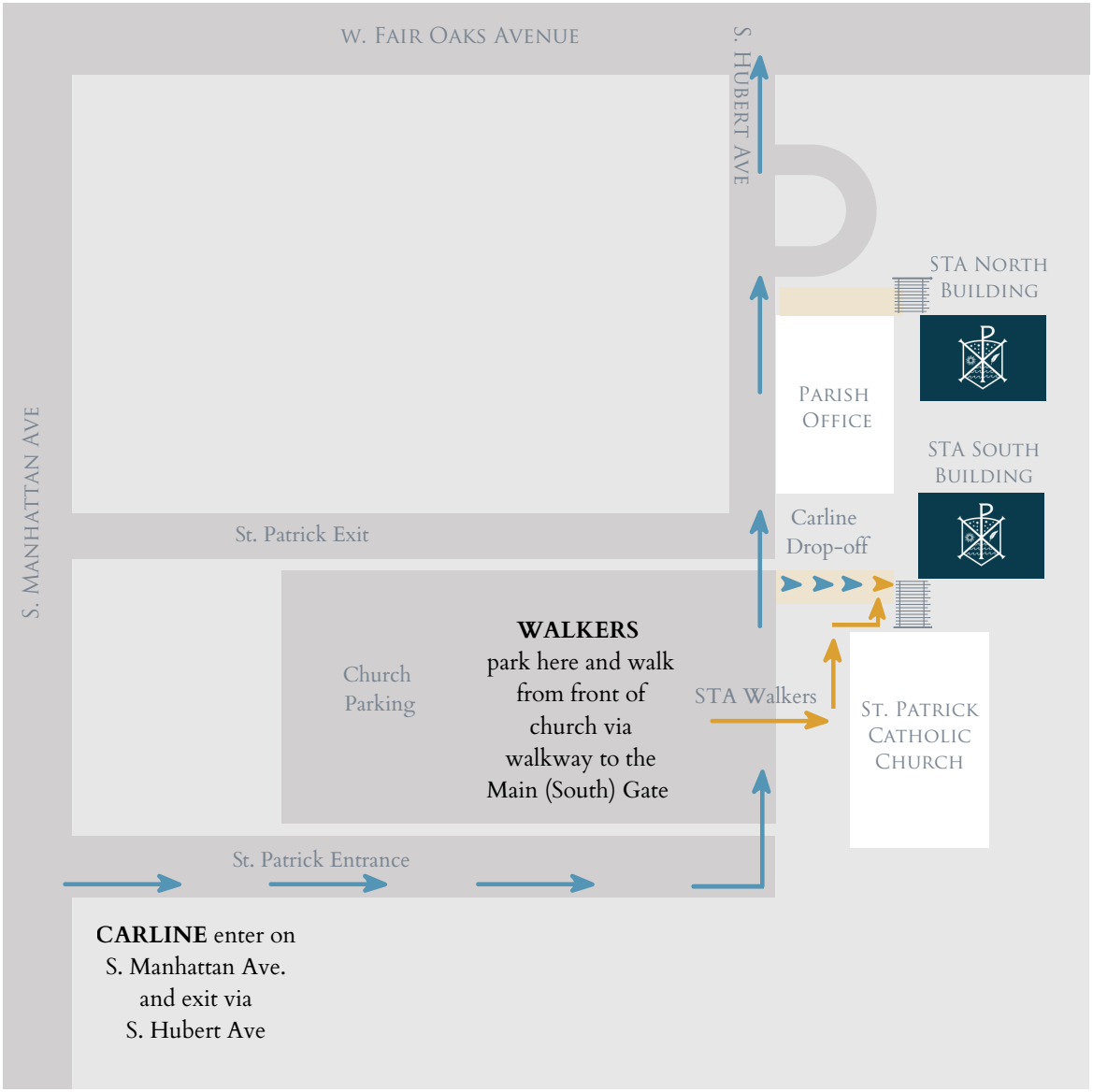
Pick-Up During the School Day

Parents who arrive to pick-up their children after morning carline or before afternoon carline will need to ring the STA gate bell to let someone from the office know they are here. Parents must proceed to the office to sign their students out.

After-School Care

The after-school care program is available for families as needed and provides students with a safe, supervised environment. During after-school care, students will have time to complete homework, play games, and do arts and crafts. Students should not bring games or toys from home as we will have games and activities for them at school. Please be sure to send an extra snack for your child to eat during after-school care. *Please see the Enrollment & Tuition section for After-School Care hours and fees.*

Drop-Off and Pick-Up Carline Map



SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Absences

Regular attendance and prompt arrival at school are vital to the student's attitude, development of character and sense of responsibility, and subsequent success as a serious scholar. While it is possible to make up missed assignments, it is impossible to replicate the missed spark of insight and inspiration that happens in the dynamic of the classroom converstaion. Absences are therefore highly undesirable and to be avoided whenever possible. Parents must notify the school office by 7:45 a.m. if your child is going to be absent, via phone at 813-825-0426 or via email at schooloffice@aquinastampa.org.

Absence for Illness

Students should be fever-/vomiting-/diarrhea-free for 24 hours before returning to school. Accordingly, students who are sent home during the school day with a fever are not permitted to return to school the next day. As a rule, students who are absent due to illness will be granted one day for each day of absence to complete missed assignments, quizzes, or tests. Exceptions to this rule may be made when appropriate. When a student is absent for three or more days due to illness, a parent may call the school office before 10:00 AM to arrange for homework assignments to be sent home. Homework assignments may be picked up at the school office.

Absence During the School Day

Students may be excused from school for appointments during school hours with a written note from a parent. Parents are required to sign out their children. Students returning to school during the same school day must be signed in at the Front Desk. Students who are away from school for an appointment for 3 hours or more will be counted as absent for ½ a day. Three (3) early withdrawals each of which are less than 3 hours are considered a 1/2-day absence.

Maximum Absences

The Head of School or designee will notify parents in writing when a student has accumulated 10 absences. Excessive absences may result in loss of school privileges such as a field trip and/or athletic participation. Administration reserves the right to address each case individually and act appropriately. For prolonged illness exceeding three days, the school may require a physician's medical explanation.

Missed Assignments for Absence

The school calendar provides breaks and extended weekends throughout the school year. Parents are encouraged to schedule family outings during these times in order to eliminate the need to interrupt a child's learning experience.

Missed assignments are the student's responsibility. For short absences, middle-school students should make arrangements with classmates regarding assignments. Students may also receive missed assignments from their teacher when they return to school.

Teachers are not required to give make-up tests or assignments for voluntary absences (vacations). As a rule, assignments will not be given in advance and in anticipation of vacation. Exceptions to this rule are at the discretion of the teacher and the head of academics.

Arrangements for regular classroom tests missed because of an absence must be made with the individual teachers. As a rule, these tests must be taken within one week of the original test date. Regular attendance is essential to a student's success at the school, and numerous absences are also destructive to the student's and the school's morale. Excessive absence (10 days per semester) may result in a student being retained in his current grade for another year, at the discretion of the school.

Tardiness

Students are considered tardy for school if they arrive on campus later than 8:00AM.

Tardiness at school presents a major disruption to the teachers and students. It also sets the tardy student up for a day of confusion and loss of important information. The responsibility for having children at school on time is, for the most part, in the hands of the parents. Please help prevent habitual tardiness. Excessive tardies may result in action by the Administration, which reserves the right to address each case individually and act appropriately.

ACADEMIC CALENDAR

2026 – 2027

August 10 ..... *First Day of School - First Day of Assumption Term (Q1)*

September 7 ..... *Labor Day – No School*

October 8 ..... *Last Day of Assumption Term (Q1)*

October 9 ..... *Professional Day – No School*

October 12 ..... *Columbus Day - No School*

October 13 ..... *First Day of All Saints Term (Q2)*

October 16 ..... *Conference Day – No School*

November 16 ..... *Professional Day – No School*

November 23–27 ..... *Thanksgiving Break*

December 18 ..... *Last Day of All Saints Term (Q2)*

December 21–January 1 ..... *Christmas Break*

January 4 ..... *First Day of Epiphany Term (Q3)*

January 15 ..... *Professional Day – No School*

January 18 ..... *MLK Day - No School*

February 15 ..... *President's Day - No School*

March 1 ..... *Professional Day – No School*

March 12 ..... *Last Day of Epiphany Term (Q3)*

March 15 ..... *First Day of Paschal Term (Q4)*

March 19 ..... *Conference Day – No School*

March 25 ..... *Holy Thursday - ½ Day*

March 26 ..... *Good Friday - No School*

March 29 - April 2 ..... *Easter Break*

May 27 ..... *Last Day of School - Last Day of Paschal Term (Q4)*

ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS, EVALUATIONS, & STUDENT PROMOTION

Academic Expectations

At St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, our mission extends beyond academic achievement; we seek to cultivate a community where every student is given the opportunity to engage deeply with our rigorous curriculum, rooted in the great works and foundational truths of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

We hold a foundational belief that all students, created in the image and likeness of God, possess an innate capacity to learn and grow closer to Him. However, this does not presuppose uniformity in capability or outcomes of our students. Just as each individual is unique in their gifts and talents, so too are their academic journeys.

Rather, we value and measure success by the growth of our students in maturity, character, and understanding throughout their time at STA. This growth is not only academic but also in the formation of each student into a person of virtue, wisdom, and faith.

A student's engagement, curiosity, and perseverance are key to their flourishing at STA. We recognize that talents vary among students, but we firmly believe that with diligence, commitment, and a genuine desire to embrace the fullness of our educational experience, every student will be prepared to lead a life of purpose, service, and fulfillment, rooted in the Catholic faith.

Grading and Evaluations

Student Evaluations

The evaluation of students by their teachers is an important part of the educational process. The process of evaluation is ongoing, taking into account the present state of the student: what has successfully been appropriated, what needs improvement, and how improvement might be made. Evaluation is crucial for a student's parents to facilitate their continuing direction of the education of their children. At St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, we seek to deemphasize numerical and letter grades in order to emphasize on-going evaluation of demonstrated understanding through daily classroom performance. The evaluation of student work is progressive and should be on-going, thorough, and practically useful to the student. A student should be able to understand where she has contributed something intelligent to the pursuit of understanding,

solved the problem, etc. Similarly, students should be enabled to understand where errors have been made and how to make improvements. Again, the object of instruction is always to facilitate understanding; some common grading practices tend to end rather than stimulate the pursuit of understanding of a particular topic or area of study. Our practices therefore seek to avoid that dynamic and to use grades and evaluations as tools to strengthen the ongoing learning process.

To this end, teachers will be very restrained about branding assignments and tests with a letter grade to be returned to the student. Such grades tend to end the review of returned assignments rather than encouraging students to review their performance and read commentary from their teachers. Our intent is to encourage students to focus their attention on the substance of their education rather than viewing their studies in utilitarian terms. In general, the discussion of grades and grade point averages should be avoided in the interest of discussing actual achievement and areas for improvement.

Teachers are encouraged to structure their tests and quizzes in a way that is tiered to levels of mastery of the material. This need not correspond strictly to a percentage of correct answers, i.e., not all questions should be equally weighted. In this way, a student may demonstrate adequate command of the subject matter (a "C" level of understanding) by answering questions ordered to that level of understanding, and degrees of advanced understanding through sets of questions scaled to those levels of understanding. The breakdown of questions need not necessarily correspond to percentages aligned with a grading scale. Obviously, essay questions will be evaluated differently.

Returning Graded Work

Students must be informed of their current performance in the class. Teachers should return student work—homework, tests, labs, essays, etc.—in a timely manner, no later than one week after collecting it.

Student Grading of Work

Teachers alone are qualified to offer meaningful evaluation of student performance. Students are not permitted to grade other students' work. Teachers will not facilitate students' knowing other students' grades; it distracts from the educational purposes of the class and upsets academic confidentiality.

Field Trips (Field Studies)

- Field Studies are intended to correlate with teaching units and to achieve curricular goals.
- Field Studies are re-evaluated each year to determine compatibility with curricular goals.
- A field study is a privilege and not a right.
- All grades do not always have the same number of field studies.
- Field studies are permissible for all grades when advanced planning, location, and the experience ensure a successful learning opportunity.

- Individual teachers, in consultation with the Administration, reserve the right to restrict or deny student participation on any field study due to, but not limited to, poor academic performance and/or poor conduct.
- A written permission slip, signed by a custodial parent, is required for participation in any field study by a student. Verbal permission cannot be accepted.
- A telephone call will not be accepted in lieu of the proper field study permission slip.
- Parents may refuse to permit their child from participating in a field study by stating so on the proper form. Students who do not attend a field study will remain at home with the parent and will be marked absent for the day.
- Students who are participating in the field study must use the appointed transportation. Exceptions must be approved by the Head of School.
- Any money collected for the field study is non-refundable.
- Cell phones are not permitted on field studies unless otherwise directed by the teacher and/or administration.
- For insurance purposes, parents who are not "official" chaperones may not join a field study with the plan of accompanying the class on the field trip.
- Parents who chaperone a field study may not bring unenrolled siblings on the field study.
- All chaperones must be 25 years of age or older.

Homework

Research provides strong evidence that the right kind and quantity of homework benefits student learning. Too much homework, or the wrong kind, can be counterproductive to learning. No homework, or too little homework, does not maximize student learning.

The homework assigned at STA will have the following characteristics:

- **Purposeful**: Homework may involve practicing a skill students can do independently but not yet fluently, may be designed to deepen, extend, or apply a student's knowledge of content covered in class, or may introduce new content to be discussed in an upcoming class.
- **Appropriate Level of Difficulty**: Homework will be manageable and "completable" (usually independently) with a good effort on the part of the student. The independent reading students do at home will be at the "just-right" reading level as identified by the teacher.

- **Limited But Important Parent/Guardian Involvement:** Parents/guardians are involved in reading, phonics, and listening to students recite or explain content, but should not do the homework or act as teacher. In most cases parents/guardians should help students set up systems that assure their success in monitoring their own homework completion/correctness. Students make the subject and learning their own and develop personal time-management skills. As important as homework completion is for school success, the family ritual of reading together each night is even more important. Studies show an extremely high correlation of school learning success and students whose parents/guardians read to or with them regularly.
- **Carefully Monitored by Teachers:** Teachers have exercises in the classroom to help them determine quantity and kind of homework assigned. Teachers welcome parent/guardian input on how students are doing on homework and how teachers and parents/guardians working together can help the student be successful in completing appropriate quantity and quality of homework each night.

Students will need to make up missed homework after any excused absence, planned or due to illness, in a timely manner. Parents/guardians or the student should contact teachers (not the school) to inquire about assignments, handouts, and materials needed but not received due to absence.

Homework Expectations by Grade

In order to honor the life of the family as the domestic church, the following grid offers an average recommended amount of homework assigned for students. If your child is outside the range regularly, please consult your child's teacher.

GRADE LEVEL	NUMBER OF MINUTES/ SCHOOL NIGHT
K - 2	0 - 30
3 - 4	30 - 45
5 - 8	45 - 90

Reading nightly is a goal for every student whether there is a specific homework assignment or not.

Instruments of evaluation

There are four principal tools for communication about student evaluation at St. Thomas Aquinas Academy:

- Progress Reports and Deficiency Notices
- Narrative Evaluations (1st & 4th quarters)
- Report Cards at the end of the quarterly marking periods
- Parent-Teacher Conferences (1st & 3rd quarters)

Progress Reports and Deficiency Notices

At St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, we are committed to a posture of "no surprises" where academic deficiency is concerned. Accordingly, parents of elementary-grade students will receive regular Progress Reports from their teachers and parents of middle-school students will receive a Deficiency Report when a student falls into marginally passing or failing range for a particular subject. It is the responsibility of parents to sign and return a copy of the Deficiency Notice to the school or to the teacher directly, as soon as possible.

Parents are encouraged to talk with teachers whenever they think their son or daughter might be struggling in a class; teachers are expected to be responsive, without exception. Early identification of areas of difficulty allows for easier resolution.

Please note: Any parent may make an appointment to meet or speak with a teacher either by contacting the school or the teacher (in person, by telephone, or by sending a note to the teacher's school email address). Teachers will respond to communication by the end of the next school day. Stopping by the classroom or faculty office before school starts is usually not a good time to meet with the teacher, unless an appointment has been made.

Narrative Evaluations and Report Cards

The teacher will submit Narrative Evaluations and Report Cards for each student at the end of each marking period. All reports will be filed with the school in electronic form; they will be given to parents in print form. FACTS will be used for the electronic recording of grades for all students.

First Quarter Evaluation/Parent-Teacher Conference

The formal First Quarter Evaluation is a thorough evaluation of the student's academic performance by the teacher. The First Quarter Evaluation is structured around four categories:

- Depth of Insight, Spirit of Inquiry, and Sense of Wonder
- Content Knowledge and Skill Mastery
- Character, Collegiality, and Catholic Consciousness
- Areas for Development

In the first category, the teacher answers questions about the student's demonstrable curiosity: How does he or she demonstrate engagement in the investigation of the material; is he inclined to solve puzzles, to clarify mysteries? Are the student's reflections superficial or deep?

The student's grasp of the essentials of the course content is discussed under the second heading; in the first we call for an evaluation of the manner in which the student contributes to the class discussion and investigation of the subject matter. Please keep in mind that this is not a participation grade that is measured by frequency of comment. Students of different temperaments or dispositions will contribute equally well with conspicuously different frequencies. A student who processes ideas "externally" will not be penalized or rewarded for an inclination to speak often, and a student of pensive reserve will not be graded down for relative infrequency of comment.

The second category itemizes the subject areas of study and the student's specific mastery of the content and development of skills. This category will include reference to test and quiz scores and evaluations of essays, papers, and other projects. These elements contribute to the evaluation of the student as illustrative of the dedication of the student to the search for truth.

The third category gives attention to the student's classroom behavior as a learner and as a member of a Catholic learning community.

The fourth category will highlight areas for development, either in order to address deficiencies or to maintain and expand accomplishment.

Concerning Teacher Judgment

Confusion in educational circles about grades and evaluations abounds. This confusion is compounded by the introduction of so-called "objective" and "subjective" accounts of student assessment. It is true that there can be tests, etc., where there are clear right and wrong answers that can be tallied in an unambiguous and indisputable fashion. However, the selection and weighting of these questions, and the scale to assign to the results is the result of the judgment of the teacher, who must take into account the goals of the course, the way in which the material has been taught, the right expectations from a particular class, etc. These are not to be understood as "subjective" considerations, as if they represent personal whim or feeling. At St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, we have full confidence in the ability of our teachers to assess the performance of a student relative to the goals of the class and then to assign an accurate grade. This is precisely what any teacher should be able to do, namely, to make the correct judgment about this specific child in this specific class and not simply to reiterate numerical scores and averages.

GRADE SCALE FOR GRADES K – 2 AND SPECIALS	
E	Excellent Performance
S	Satisfactory Performance
L	Learning in Progress
N	Needs Improvement

GRADE SCALE FOR GRADES 3 – 8	
A	90 – 100
B	80 – 89
C	70 – 79
D	65 – 69
F	64 and below

Promotion and Retention

Promotion of students shall be based on completion of academic work and mastery of academic skills. Credit for courses shall not be given solely on the basis of class attendance.

All decisions regarding retention are the responsibility of a school administrator in consultation with the teacher(s).

In cases of slow progress, each student should be considered individually. Any decision concerning non-promotion must be made after considering all the factors related to the student's development (emotional, physical, as well as intellectual and academic) collected from a wide range of sources throughout the year. Excessive absences and/or tardies may be cause for retention or withdrawal from the school.

The following are minimum procedures for retention:

- There is consultation between teachers and an administrator.
- A conference should be held during the third quarter to advise parents of the possibility of retention and to discuss possible remedial actions.
- Follow-up conferences with the parents are held to evaluate the progress of the student.
- Evaluations and reports to parents must indicate lack of student progress.

SCHOOL CULTURE POLICIES

Technology Policy

Instruction at St. Thomas Aquinas Academy intentionally minimizes the use of technology as a part of the learning process. While technology will be leveraged in some select activities at the discretion of the teacher, there will be no personal screens for students. According to research and informed by our understanding of the human person as illuminated by Holy Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, STA holds that formation of the whole person will best occur in the context of human relationships and by strengthening the mind-body connection through means such as penmanship, manipulatives, and books that can be held. By creating an environment free of the distractions of technology, students will honor the dignity of the people around them as they cultivate wisdom and faith. As such, students will not be permitted to bring smartphones, iPads, smart watches, or other internet-capable devices to campus. This policy frees parents, as the primary educators of their children, to determine when and how to teach their children technological skills without pressure from their school's implementation of digital technology as a means of instruction.

Pop-Culture Policy

In alignment with our mission, St. Thomas Aquinas Academy intentionally cultivates a common and civil community among its students and an educational environment that is free from distractions. This includes developing students' abilities to use respectful manners of speech and behavior, listen attentively, reason clearly, and engage with both the curriculum and each other to the exclusion of references to current pop-culture personalities, characters, music, movies, video games, and even politics and current events. To further this important educational purpose, STA requires students to use backpacks, lunch bags, and other accessories that are free from such images or references.

This paradigm helps students to push beyond the confines and limitations of the readily accessible thought-worlds of their times and that of their peers, introducing them to the broader and more permanent concerns of our human community. Students also gain a deeper freedom to develop their ability to think critically, adopt and defend a position based on evidence, and engage in robust discussion without the pressure to conform to majority opinion that often takes hold when contemporary topics are discussed. In this learning environment, students can better appreciate authors and artists of different times and cultures, and entertain ideas such as truth, justice, and virtue from the broad perspective of history.

Avoiding "chronological snobbery", STA further seeks to nurture in our students a posture of humility toward that which has been handed down by previous generations, including two millennia of Church teaching. Overall, STA asks and challenges students to step out of themselves—to step out of their times, their familiar idioms, even their preferred styles of art and music—in order to receive the wisdom and beauty of other times and places.

Developing this capacity is at the heart of classical education. Moreover, through the same paradigm, STA seeks to develop the unique character and giftedness of each student. The true self is neither discovered nor nourished through mass marketing or the most fashionable ideology. By removing these influences, we seek to…

Give students an educational space free from:

- what is shallow or temporary in popular culture on behalf of what is meaningful and enduring from universal human experience
- popular examples that may be merely superficial and time-bound, while sharing with them more permanent and universal aspects of human nature and human community
- peer pressure to be media and celebrity "literate"

Broaden our students' world by:

- elevating their imaginations and thoughts above the transitory, the base, and the mediocre to what is good, true, and beautiful (Philippians 4:8)
- creating points of reference and a common ground for conversation that transcends the student's age, experience, and cultural context
- giving them the broadest range of images and ideas from which they will eventually address the concerns of their own time and place
- helping them step outside of the worldview of our current society so they may be free to put on the mind of Christ (Romans 12:2), in particular with regard to the nature of a) God, b) the human person, and c) each student's true identity as a son or daughter of God the Father.

This policy helps create and preserve an educational environment of 'good soil' in which the seeds of faith and reason can be sown and bear fruit in the hearts of our students. It is also the intention of this policy to improve student learning, to reduce disciplinary referrals, and to elevate the conversations of students— in and out of the classroom.

Gifts

Students should not exchange individual gifts at school. This gesture only creates the foreseeable conditions for hurt feelings among other students. Invitations for parties should be sent by parents to the parents of invited students unless an invitation is being given to every student in the grade.

Valentines, Halloween treats, and other material gestures may not be distributed in class. Once again this creates the foreseeable conditions for hurt feelings.

Gum

Chewing gum is not permitted at school at any time. This includes before school, during school, and after school. Disciplinary action will be taken for all cases of chewing gum on school grounds.

BEHAVIOR & DISCIPLINARY POLICIES

"Holiness does not consist in not making mistakes or never sinning. Holiness grows with capacity for conversion, repentance, willingness to begin again, and above all with the capacity for reconciliation and forgiveness." -Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

STA strives to foster a disciplined culture of Christian development for the good of both the individual students and the school community. The ultimate goal of the school discipline policy is the development of human virtues. These firm attributes had habitual dispositions guide conduct according to reason and faith and "make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1804). Such training is foundational to Christian formation, as more virtues "dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love" (CCC, 1804) In order to be effective, guiding a student's growth in habits of virtue and establishing an ordered environment conducive to learning and Christian formation requires the collaboration of all – parents, administrators, teachers, and students.

Behavioral Expectations

STA holds Jesus Christ as the ideal for human behavior and sets before its students the high standard of virtuous conduct, made possible and "elevated by divine grace" (CCC, 1810). All students are expected "not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself" and tend "toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers" (CCC, 1803).

In particular, it is the responsibility of all members of the school community to act with justice, "the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor" (CCC, 1807). Students must respect the rights, needs, and property of others and establish "the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good" (CCC, 1807). In order to establish this harmony, behavioral expectations include but are not limited to the following basic expectations:

Honor and Bear Witness to the Truth (CCC2467)

- Respect school and private property.
- Complete all assignments with integrity.
- Show oneself true in deed and truthful in words (CCC 2468).

Take Charge of Personal Responsibility (CCC 1914)

- Be found trustworthy (1 Cor. 4:2).
- Arrive at school and each class on time and prepared with necessary materials.
- Dress in accordance with the uniform policy.
- Remain in assigned, supervised areas at all times.
- Turn in assigned work on time and deliver communications to and from school, as directed.
- Refrain from eating or drinking outside of assigned time and place (no gum at any time).
- Refrain from possessing unauthorized items (indecent media, cell phones, electronics, drugs, alcohol, weapons, etc.).

Always do Good to One Another and to All (1 Thess 5:15)

- Pay respect/honor to whom respect/honor is due (Rom. 13:7).
- Revere the Lord our God in prayer, sacramentals, the Sacraments, the Liturgy, etc.
- Adhere to all teachings of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church (CCC 888-892).
- Respect those in authority and esteem them very highly (1 Thess. 5:12-13).
- Be at peace among your peers, encourage one another, and build one another up (1 Thess. 5:11, 13).
- Show common courtesies and good manners toward teachers, other adults, and fellow students at all times.
- Give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess. 5:18).
- Refrain from all church, classroom, playground, lunchroom, or hallway disruptions.
- Observe basic rules of order and safety.
- Refrain from all foul talk (Col. 3:8), acts, gestures, etc.

Code of Conduct

The discipline in a Catholic school reflects Gospel values and the Church's teachings. Students are expected to demonstrate respect for others, including fellow students, teachers, staff members, clergy, and school visitors. When a student violates a school rule or displays behavior that undermines Christian development, he or she will be corrected by teachers and staff members. The student will be given an appropriate consequence for misbehavior, time to reflect on his or her choices, and the opportunity to make amends. We share with parents the critically important task of guiding students to an awareness of the importance of good character and the understanding of virtue, and we ask in turn that parents support STA policies and mission.

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy strives to teach and foster self-discipline for the well-being of both the student and the school community and for the creation of a Christian atmosphere for learning. Certain kinds of behavior are not tolerated at STA and will result in immediate disciplinary action, such as exclusion from certain privileges, the issuance of a detention, and/or suspension from school. Such infractions include, but are not limited to:

- Disruptive behavior in the classroom, multipurpose room, or other areas of the school campus, including shouting out, excessive talking
- Rudeness or insolent behavior toward a teacher or others
- Verbal harassment (name calling, taunting, teasing, etc.)
- Failure to comply with the direction of a teacher or other staff member
- Throwing food or other objects
- Unsafe behaviors, such as running or playing on stairways and participating in games deemed to be dangerous
- The use of foul, vulgar, or improper language– oral, written, or gestures
- Eating outside of the multipurpose room without permission from a teacher or staff member
- Presence in unauthorized areas of the school campus
- Unsafe behavior during a fire or other emergency drill
- Repeated infractions of classroom rules.

The following behaviors are serious and may result in suspension (in or out of school), or expulsion. Such infractions may include, but are not limited to:

- Fighting/physical assault
- Bullying
- Vandalizing school property or the property of teachers, parents, students, clergy, visitors or others (restitution must be made before a suspension will be lifted)
- Stealing
- Sexual harassment**
- Possession of harmful objects such as pocket knives, paring knives, or any sharp object that could be interpreted as a weapon
- Continued disrespect shown toward a teacher, staff member, or classmate
- Leaving the school grounds without permission
- Unauthorized use of a cell phone (students may not bring electronic devices of any kind to school, including, but not limited to cell phones and smart watches)
- Smoking
- Other inappropriate behavior considered egregious by the administration
- Repeated infractions of the Code of Student Conduct.

**Sexual harassment includes unwanted or unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that interferes with a student's right to learn, study, work, achieve or participate in school activities in a comfortable and supportive environment. This type of negative behavior is under federal and state laws and policies. This is illegal and is prohibited in school settings.

Disciplinary Actions and Procedures

The below disciplinary actions generally follow in a gradually escalating series of consequences; however, the administration retains the authority to adjust the disciplinary consequences with respect to the degree of the infraction. These disciplinary actions may occur in parallel or subsequent to disciplinary procedures implemented by faculty during class.

Step 1: Detention is the time a student is kept during lunch/recess periods or before/after school. During this time students are given a written reflection assignment.

Step 2: Suspension is removal of the student from the classroom and other activities for a period of one to five school days. Suspensions are served in school or away from school at the discretion of the administration for serious violations of school rules and policies. If an out-of-school suspension is given, parents or guardians must meet with the Head of School before a student can be reinstated. Reinstatement is not possible until the Head of School and the student's teachers are satisfied that the reason for the misconduct has been eliminated.

Step 3: Probation places a student on conditional enrollment during a trial period. If there is no noticeable, positive change in a student's behavior after a probationary period, parents will be asked to remove the child from school. Responsibility for placing a student on probation rests with the Head of School.

Step 4: Expulsion is permanent removal of the student from the school community. It is a serious action that results when it is determined that a student's behavior threatens the safety and well-being of the school community, or that a student's best interests would be served in another environment, or both. The parent/guardian is notified and a conference is held immediately. Such infractions may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Continued and willful defiance or disobedience of authority
- Physical assault
- The use or possession of a weapon
- Possession or use of drugs, tobacco, vaping, or alcohol
- Any acts that threaten the health and/or safety of others, such as bullying, harassment and intimidation.

Public Displays of Affection

Young men and women should be friends during their time at STA. We encourage their socializing together and the development of healthy relationships among them. On the other hand, we resist the development of one-on-one romantic relationships. This absorption is a direct challenge to focusing their consciousness on learning and thinking. This is why STA prohibits activity like holding hands, kissing, and other overt forms of romantic behavior among students while on campus and at school-related events. This is also why we want to foster the kind of friendship proper to a community of Catholic learners.

The Code of Parent Conduct on Which Continued Enrollment Depends

- Parents' cooperation with the teacher's and/or administration's recommendation regarding referrals to the professional evaluators deemed necessary for a more thorough evaluation of the child.
- Parents' compliance with school policies, including but not limited to not posting disparaging comments publicly online directed at the school, staff, faculty, students, and parish community.
- Parents' truthful representation of records or pertinent information regarding the child's past physical, emotional, or academic difficulties.
- Parents' consistent fulfillment of tuition obligations and fees as detailed in their agreement. Parents who are unable to meet tuition obligations need to contact the Head of School.

ACADEMY SECURITY & SAFETY

School Closures

The safety and well-being of our students, faculty, and staff is always our top priority. Our location, campus, and other potential circumstances may necessitate temporary school closures. Administration will ensure families receive needed information regarding closures and reopening due to severe weather, facilities issues, and other unforeseen events.

Campus Security

The STA entrance gate will be locked at all times while students are on campus. When you arrive to campus during school hours or during after-school care hours, you will need to ring the bell and wait for a staff member to grant you entrance to the school. You will then need to report to the office to sign your children out if they are leaving for the day, or sign-in and receive a volunteer badge if you are staying on campus to volunteer. When leaving campus, please be sure to close the gate tightly behind you to ensure the safety of all of our children.

STA actively collaborates with local police and emergency services to refine and update our emergency response strategies, ensuring alignment with local safety protocols and best practices. Staff will receive ongoing training on campus emergency procedures, including participation in drills and educational sessions on recognizing and reporting potential security threats.

Communication with Families

In the event of a campus emergency, the Head of School, or appointed staff member, will send an automated phone call and/or text message, via FACTS, to all documented student emergency contacts, notifying them of general campus-wide emergency.

Students will be released to their legal guardians as soon as the situation is resolved and/or deemed safe by local law enforcement.

Additional communications will be sent as soon as possible following a campus emergency by email, phone, and/or text message with relevant information and next steps to return to standard academy operations.

Mandatory Reporting

The safety and well-being of our students are of the utmost importance. In alignment with our commitment to provide a safe, nurturing environment and in adherence to Florida state laws, all staff members are required to be vigilant and proactive in the protection of our students.

Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse includes physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, as well as neglect. It is our collective duty to ensure the safety of children in our care by identifying and reporting any signs of abuse or neglect.

Legal Obligations in Florida

In Florida, individuals in certain professions, including educators, are legally designated as mandatory reporters of child abuse. This means that if you suspect or have knowledge of potential child abuse or neglect, you are required by law to report this to the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Reporting Abuse

1. **Immediate Reporting**: If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, you must report it immediately to the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873). Reports can also be made online through the DCF website or by fax.
2. **Documentation**: While maintaining confidentiality, document the details that led to the suspicion of abuse or neglect. Include dates, times, specific observations, and any relevant communications.
3. **Notification**: After making a report to DCF, promptly inform the school administration. This step is crucial for ensuring the school can take appropriate internal actions and provide support to the student and staff involved.
4. **Confidentiality**: All reports and information related to suspected abuse must be treated with the utmost confidentiality to protect the privacy and rights of all individuals involved.

Our collective responsibility is to safeguard the welfare of every student, acting within the framework of our faith and the law. By adhering to these mandatory reporting guidelines, we affirm our commitment to the protection and well-being of the children in our care.

Reporting Misconduct

All instructional personnel, educational support employees, and school administrators have an obligation to report misconduct by instructional personnel, educational support employees and school administrators which affects the health, safety, or welfare of a student. Examples of misconduct include obscene language, drug and alcohol use, disparaging comments, prejudice or bigotry, sexual innuendo, cheating or testing violations, physical aggression, and accepting or offering favors. Reports of misconduct of employees should be made to the Head of School. Reports of misconduct committed by administrators should be made to the President of the Board of Directors. Legally sufficient allegations of misconduct by Florida certified educators will be reported to the Office of Professional Practices Services.

Administering Medications

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy does not have a licensed nurse onsite. To ensure the safety and well-being of our students, STA has established the following policy for the administration of medications during school hours:

Prescription Medications

All prescription medications must be provided in the original container with the pharmacy label, which includes the student's name, the prescribing physician's name, the medication name, and the dosage instructions.

A Medication Administration Form, completed and signed by the parent/guardian and the prescribing physician, must be submitted to the school office. This form outlines the necessity for the medication and authorizes the school to administer it as prescribed.

Over-the-Counter Medications

Over-the-counter (OTC) medications require a completed Medication Administration Form signed by the parent/guardian. The form should specify the medication name, dosage, and circumstances under which it should be administered. OTC medications must be provided in their original packaging.

Storage and Administration

All medications, whether prescription or OTC, will be stored securely in the school office. Medications will be administered by a designated school staff member. Students are not permitted to carry medication on their person, except for emergency medications like asthma inhalers and epinephrine auto-injectors, with appropriate documentation and approval.

Emergency Medications

For students requiring emergency medications (e.g., inhalers, epinephrine auto-injectors), an Emergency Action Plan completed by the prescribing physician and signed by the parent/guardian must be on file. Students may carry and self-administer these medications only with explicit authorization from both the prescribing physician and the school, in accordance with the Emergency Action Plan.

Nut Allergies and Dietary Restrictions

Understanding the increasing prevalence of nut allergies and other dietary restrictions, STA strives to create a safe and inclusive environment for all students. We ask families to be mindful of these concerns when preparing snacks or meals for school-related events.

Any known severe allergies will be communicated to families by the classroom teacher.

Immunization Policy

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy adheres to Florida state laws and public health guidelines regarding student immunizations. Florida state law requires children attending school to be vaccinated against certain diseases.

Proof of immunization must be provided in the form of the Florida Certification of Immunization, which can be obtained from your healthcare provider or local health department. This form must be completed and submitted to the STA office before the first day of school attendance. Students will not be allowed to attend classes without appropriate records submitted. Any questions regarding this policy can be directed to the Head of School.

ENROLLMENT & TUITION

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy is passionate about providing a classical Catholic education rooted in the liberal arts to the families and students of Tampa and building a community of learners around a shared vision. By engaging in the admissions process, parents and students are committing to embrace and uphold the vision, mission, culture, academic philosophy, and educational policies of St. Thomas Aquinas Academy.

Families applying to STA should be prepared to devote the time, resources, and effort required to successfully support their children spiritually, logistically, academically, and in all the ways necessary for their development and success in a challenging academic program. On the part of the student this will require active participation and engagement in classes and coursework. On the part of the parent/guardian this will require consistent on-time attendance, a space at home conducive to learning, a supportive and structured set of routines at home, and regular engagement and communication with STA teachers and staff.

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy seeks to serve students with exceptional needs to the extent we are able. Upon applying, families must fully disclose the nature and known extent of the student's needs, including but not limited to documented IEPs or 504 plans. However, given the limited resources to accommodate all exceptional students may recommend educational alternatives that are better suited to provide services in the best interest of the student. No student shall be denied enrollment to STA due to a disability unless the disability seriously impairs the student's ability to successfully complete the prescribed academic program or the school cannot provide the appropriate, necessary, and sufficient care and accommodation for the student.

Additionally, parents must be forthright in providing any adverse reasons for withdrawing from or seeking transfer from a previous school such as the student's academic or disciplinary record. Families shall not be denied enrollment solely based on an academic or disciplinary record unless it presents a significant obstacle to successful completion or the potential for significant disruption to the learning environment of other students.

Enrollment at St. Thomas Aquinas Academy is limited by class size and building capacity. All decisions for admission to STA are at the discretion of the Head of School and the Board of Directors. Should your student(s) be admitted to St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, he or she will be required to attend religious education classes and daily Mass, engage in prayer and observances of faith as appropriate to their age and disposition, and participate in school activities.

Re-enrollment is not automatic from year-to-year. As parents are the primary educators of their children, St. Thomas Aquinas Academy can only build upon and support the formation provided by the family. Should it appear that a family and the Academy are not sufficiently aligned to allow a fruitful partnership in formation, Administration will discuss this with the family. Depending upon the circumstances of each unique situation, Administration will determine whether continued enrollment at STA is appropriate.

Enrollment Commitment

In planning for each academic year, St. Thomas Aquinas Academy makes significant financial commitments on behalf of each student who enrolls, including hiring of needed personnel, purchasing of curricular materials, as well preparation and allocation of facilities. For the ongoing financial and operational health of St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, each student's enrollment must be considered a serious commitment.

Tuition Policy

Beginning with the first day of school, a student who is withdrawn for any reason still retains their obligation for the tuition and fees both for the remainder of the current term/quarter and through the end of the subsequent term/quarter. The vast majority of independent private schools require families to pay the entire year of tuition and fees in similar circumstances.

> *I understand each family is liable for the tuition, fees, and applicable incidental expenses as liquidated damages (and not a penalty) even if my child is withdrawn, absent, or is involuntarily separated from St. Thomas Aquinas Academy* unless *I withdraw in strict accordance with the termination procedures set forth in the next section. If my child is withdrawn, absent, or involuntarily separated, for any reason, including without limitation, change of residence, health, or withdrawal, before the end of the current Term, there will be no refund or reduction of fees or tuition, and families shall be liable for all tuition and fees remaining for that Term and for the Term immediately following (the "Remaining Tuition"). Such Remaining Tuition may, at St. Thomas Aquinas Academy's election, become immediately due and payable.*

Enrollment Termination Procedure

A student's enrollment may be terminated by submitting a written Termination Notice to the St. Thomas Aquinas Academy Head of School. The Termination Notice must (a) be dated, (b) state the student's name, and (c) provide a reason for the termination of the enrollment. The date used to determine the amount of tuition due shall be the date such Termination Notice is received by the Head of School.

After-School Care

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy will have aftercare available to families from 3:00 PM - 5:30 PM daily. The daily drop-in rate is $25 per day. The weekly rate is $95.

Enrollment Requirements

PK4

For admission to the PK4 program, a child must be 4 on or before September 1st of that academic year. All students must be fully toilet trained.

Kindergarten

For admission to Kindergarten, and for consideration to advance to Grade 1 the following year, a child must be 5 years of age and toilet trained on or before September 1st of that academic year.

Full-Time Classical Program

For admission to the full-time classical program, a child must be at least 6 years of age on or before September 1st of that academic year. Grade placement shall depend on age, prior coursework, and student readiness.

Tuition & Financial Information

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy strives to make its education affordable for all families, taking into account the needs of its staff and its obligation to provide its full-time teachers with a living wage to the greatest extent possible. STA has carefully determined its tuition and fee structure based on these factors and has kept tuition in line with nearby parish schools, though St. Thomas Aquinas Academy receives no direct financial support from St. Patrick's Church or the Diocese of St. Petersburg. In other words, STA operates with no parish subsidy.

A summary of tuition and fees is below. All fees are per student.

CATEGORY	AMOUNT PER STUDENT
Tuition (all grades)	$10,700
Enrollment Fee	$500
Curriculum Fee	$300
Security & Facilities Fee	$200

Florida Family Empowerment Scholarships

St. Thomas Aquinas accepts three types of scholarships: FTC, FES-EO, and FES-UA.

Step Up For Students

Step Up For Students is a state-approved, nonprofit Scholarship Funding Organization (SFO) that facilitates several scholarship programs aimed at empowering Florida families. These scholarships provide families with the financial resources to choose the most appropriate educational settings for their children, whether it's in private schools, through different public schooling options, or personalized education programs tailored to the student's requirements.

Scholarship Programs Accepted:

1. Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Opportunities (FES-EO): This program is designed to support families by providing scholarships for enrollment in private schools or for transportation to public schools outside of their district.
2. Florida Tax Credit Scholarship (FTC): The FTC program offers scholarships based on financial need, providing support for private school tuition or transportation costs to a different public school.
3. Family Empowerment Scholarship for Unique Abilities (FES-UA): This program is designed for students with certain diagnoses connected to developmental or congenital disabilities.

Eligibility and Application Process:

- Eligibility for these scholarships is primarily based on residency in Florida and compliance with the specific age and grade level requirements.
- Interested families must apply through the Step Up For Students portal, providing all necessary documentation to demonstrate eligibility.
- Priority is given based on household income levels, with a tiered system ensuring that those with the most financial need receive assistance first.

Important Considerations:

- Families awarded more than one scholarship must choose which program to utilize for the academic year.
- It is essential to notify Step Up For Students of any changes in the student's school enrollment or if you decide to switch educational programs under the scholarship.
- SUFS requires that parents confirm enrollment at STA before any funds will be provided for a student.

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy encourages families to explore these scholarship opportunities as a means to access a high-quality, Catholic education. Our team is available to assist families in navigating the application process and to answer any questions related to applying for and using these scholarships at our academy.

For more detailed information on these scholarship programs, eligibility criteria, and application processes, please visit the Step Up For Students website or contact their customer service for personalized assistance.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN THE ACADEMY

The Parent's Indispensable Role in Education

"*The Church's clear teaching, constantly reiterated by the Holy See, affirms that parents are the first educators of their children. Parents have the original, primary, and inalienable right to educate their offspring in conformity with the family's moral and religious convictions. They are educators because they are parents… Parents – and not schools either of the state or the Church – have the primary moral responsibility of educating the children to adulthood. Like a good Mother, the Church offers help to families by establishing Catholic schools that ensure the integral formation of their children*." — The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools, 2006

We at St. Thomas Aquinas Academy consider it a privilege to work with parents in the education of children because we believe, with Mother Church, that parents are the primary educators of their children. Therefore, it is your right and your duty to be the primary role models for the development of your child's life—physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically.

Good example is the strongest teacher. Your personal relationship with God, with each other, and with the Church community will affect the way your child relates to God and others. The ideals taught at St. Thomas Aquinas Academy will effectively take root in the student when they are nurtured by the example of good Catholic conviction, Christian morality, and an authentic personal relationship with God in your family life.

At St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, we celebrate our partnership with you and trust you will uphold our shared commitment. During these formative years (Pre-K to 8), your child needs constant and consistent support from both parents and teachers in order to develop his moral, intellectual, social, cultural, and physical capacities. Goodwill must be joined to this common cause in order that our joint efforts complement and reinforce one another. Mutual support is essential; to undermine the authority of either the home or the school will teach disrespect of all authority. In the case of disagreement or conflicts it is acutely important that both parents and teachers conduct themselves with mutual respect. Evident cooperation, even in moments of disagreement, between parents and teachers will model mature behavior and relationships.

During these formative years, as students grow in habits of heart and mind, the lessons learned shape their thinking and their character. Ultimately, how and what they learn at school will chart the course for who these young people will be as adults. Sometimes, in the process of maturation, managing new and competing interests may create challenges for students to maintain focus. As a school, we are committed to providing both understanding and discipline. At times, a child may perceive discipline as restrictive. However, boundaries and limits provide a young person with both guidance and security.

In our efforts to prepare students for lifelong learning (and living well!), we recognize that it is essential that a child take responsibility for the act of learning itself. Naturally, this is a progressive responsibility, but over time we expect students to recognize their accountability for homework, long-term assignments, preparation for tests and quizzes, and all other assignments. Sometimes, a failure in managing these responsibilities is an effective instrument of instruction. Please know that precisely because we want students to mature into self-motivated, capable, and responsible young adults, our measurement of success extends well beyond quantitative measurements of academic performance. Everything that we do is ordered toward preparing our students to becoming successful scholars, athletes, artists, neighbors, citizens, and (by God's grace) saints. Accordingly, we expect parents to cooperate with and reinforce these lessons in increasing responsibility, but we do not expect parents to assume the responsibility on behalf of the student. In fact, our expectation is quite the contrary. Assignments that are only completed because of the careful monitoring and policing of parents can be less effective instruments to teach the most important lesson than an early experience with the consequences of poor time management or irresponsibility.

At St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, your child will receive an excellent education that will prepare her for success in all areas of future study. More importantly, however, we will provide our students with the tools for success in all areas of life. Together, we share a commitment to partnership as we support one another in helping your child to become the best person he is capable of becoming.

Parents as Partners

As partners in the educational process at St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, we ask parents:

- To set rules, times, and limits to ensure that your child:
    - Gets to bed early on school nights;
    - Eats a healthy breakfast before school;
    - Arrives at school and is picked up on time;
    - Is dressed according to the school uniform;
    - Completes assignments on time;
    - Eats a healthy lunch every day.
- To participate actively in school activities such as Parent-Teacher Conferences;
- To notify the school with a written note when the student has been absent or tardy;
- To notify the school office of any changes of address or important phone numbers;
- To meet all financial obligations to the school;
- To inform the school of any special situation regarding the student's wellbeing, safety, and health;
- To complete and return to the school promptly any requested information;
- To read school notes and newsletters and to show interest in the student's total education;
- To support the religious and educational goals of the school;
- To attend Mass and teach the Catholic faith by word and example;
- To support and cooperate with the discipline policy of the school;
- To treat teachers with respect and courtesy in discussing student problems;
- To refrain from gossip about members of the school community.

VOLUNTEERS

Parents/guardians are enthusiastically encouraged to volunteer at STA. We believe that education must involve the student, the teacher, and the parent/guardian. At the request of the teacher, they are welcome to come into the classroom to read, tutor, or help with clerical duties. They may also offer to help in other areas of the school.

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy encourages every adult—parents/guardians, stepparents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and community members—to take a special interest in the lives of our students, to act as mentors and tutors, and to instill in every student a love of learning. Volunteers work in conjunction with the faculty to ensure the most effective education possible for their students. To this end, volunteers are responsible for knowing and understanding the contents of this family handbook and are encouraged, but not required, to participate on school committees and provide other volunteer services. Volunteering is a privilege. The privilege of volunteering may be restricted by the Head of School in the best interest of the school.

Safe Environment Certification

Each and every volunteer who has contact with students must have an up-to-date Safe Environment Certification from the Diocese of St. Petersburg. This includes a mandatory background check and fingerprinting. Please follow the steps below to obtain your Safe Environment certification and Level II background check:

- Log on to: http://www.virtus.org/
- Create an account and follow the instructions found in the Family Dashboard under Resources as "VIRTUS Online Registration Instructions"

If you already have a Safe Environment Certification and/or Level II Clearance, please notify the Head of School.

Volunteer Confidentiality Policy

Volunteers often inadvertently have access to sensitive information. Any information about students, grades, faculty, etc. is to remain confidential. Volunteers may observe situations of a sensitive nature. These are also to remain confidential. If a volunteer has a concern involving something that is witnessed, observed, or overheard it may only be discussed with the faculty member, Head of School, or a member of the Governing Board of Directors. If a volunteer disregards this policy, the privilege of volunteering may be revoked.

We ask that volunteers not post pictures taken in the classroom on social media without the express consent of all of the students' parents and/or guardians in the picture or blurring/blocking faces.

UNIFORM POLICY

The St. Thomas Aquinas Academy dress code is designed to set students apart as students, young people who treat their vocation with gratitude and respect. Just as an athlete wears the uniform of his team or a doctor wears the uniform of his profession, a student wears the uniform of his or her vocation.

The school's goal is to set a dress code that:

1. creates an atmosphere conducive to diligent study,
2. teaches the student to dress with care and dignity,
3. affirms the God-ordained differences between men and women,
4. is easy for parents to obtain, and
5. is easy for teachers and staff to enforce.

Parents should teach their children to not only wear the appropriate dress code items, but also to wear them well. The general principle is not, "What can I get away with?" but instead, "How can I honor the school, my teachers, and my fellow students with my clothing?" Teaching your children how to press their white button-down is a gift of respect the child can give to others.

Please write your name clearly inside each uniform piece, especially in outerwear.

PURCHASING GUIDELINES

GIRLS:

Lands' End: Girls' P.E. shorts should be purchased from Lands' End, however they are also available on Amazon.

Educational Outfitters: All girls' uniform items (except for P.E. shorts) should be purchased from Educational Outfitters (EO), a local uniform store in Tampa. Our school plaid is the Blue Gold Plaid.

Boys:

Lands' End: All polos, khakis (shorts & pants), and P.E. shorts should be purchased from Lands' End on our Lands' End School Page. Our school number is 900203472. For further instructions, use this document: How to Order Lands' End Uniforms. Our P.E. shorts are also available on Amazon.

Educational Outfitters: All other boys' uniform items including outerwear (fleeces & blazers), P.E. shirts, oxford shirts, and ties (Blue Gold Plaid) should be purchased from Educational Outfitters (EO).

Items from Lands' End must be ordered online through our Lands' End School Page. Educational Outfitters is a local uniform store located at 3904-D W Hillsborough Ave, Tampa, FL 33614.

DRESS UNIFORM STANDARDS

Dress Uniform is only for 5th-8th grade. PK-4th grade boys and girls do not have a dress uniform. Students are to follow the Dress Uniform Standards on days that are required. Dress Uniform Days will be on Holy Days of Obligations, certain Solemnities, and when we have special guests. Advance notice will be given.

Dress Uniform For Boys 5th-8th

Includes: Pants (no shorts), black dress shoes, black dress socks, long or short sleeve button down, tie, blazer, and belt.

Dress Uniform for Girls 5th-8th

Includes: Standard uniform plus a navy cardigan and dress shoes (mary janes ONLY).

PK - 4TH BOYS

Pants & Shorts
Color: Khaki
Requirements: Lands' End School Uniform Chino or Performance Pants & Shorts, woven fabric; no corduroy, cargo, knit, or jean. PreK/K may wear elastic pants/shorts not requiring a belt.

Polo
Color: Navy and White
Requirements: Lands' End Short & Long-sleeve Polo w/ STA logo; pique or performance. Must be tucked in.

Outerwear: Fleece
Color: Navy
Requirements: Educational Outfitters (EO) Full-Zip Fleece w/ STA logo.

5TH - 8TH BOYS

Pants & Shorts*
Color: Khaki
Requirements: Lands' End Uniform Chino or Performance Pants & Shorts, *for Dress Uniform; woven fabric; no corduroy, cargo, knit, or jean.

Shirts
Color: White
Requirements: EO Short or Long Sleeve Oxford Shirt w/STA logo. Must be tucked in.

Outerwear: Blazer & Fleece*
Color: Navy
Requirements: EO Boys' Navy Blazer, no logo, *for Dress Uniform; EO Full-Zip Fleece w/ STA logo Neck Tie Color: Blue Gold Plaid Requirements: EO Adjustable Plaid Tie; standard, no bow ties

BOYS ACCESSORIES

Belt
Color: Black
Requirements: Plain (Belt optional for PK/K)

Socks
Color: White (Black socks with dress shoes for Dress Uniform)
Requirements: No patterns, logos, or characters.

Shoes
Color: Black
Requirements: No patterns, logos, or characters. Athletic shoes (no high-tops) or dress shoes. Close-toed, conservative; no lights, wheels, ostentatious display; no sandals, Crocs-style, slip ons, etc. Black dress shoes required for 5th - 8th for Dress Uniform. If wearing dress shoes, student may change into sneakers for P.E. and recess.

Hair
Requirements: Neat and tidy, combed as needed, cut short enough to be out of eyes and off of ears and collar; no ponytails, man-buns, mohawks, mullets, "fad haircuts", etc. No unnatural hair colors. No hats.

Miscellaneous
Requirements: No piercings, nail polish, or makeup. One simple religious necklace (2 or fewer: crucifix/Miraculous medal/saint medal) and simple analog wristwatch with face no larger than a quarter in neutral, navy, or white permitted for students 1 grade and up (no digital display, alarm/beeping capabilities); no other jewelry. Underwear should be concealed by outer clothing. All clothing should be well-fitting, clean; without holes, stains, or unpleasant odors.

PK - 4TH GIRLS

Plaid Jumper
Color: Blue Gold Plaid
Requirements: Educational Outfitters (EO) Plaid Box Pleat Jumper; knee-length; must wear bike/undershorts (navy or black), or tights/leggings (navy, black, or white).

Shirts
Color: White
Requirements: EO Short or Long-sleeve Peter Pan Collar Shirt; no logo.

Outerwear: Cardigan & Fleece
Color: Navy
Requirements: EO Cardigan w/ STA logo; EO Full-Zip Fleece w/ STA logo.

5TH - 8TH GIRLS

Skirts
Color: Blue Gold Plaid
Requirements: EO Plaid Box Pleated Skirt, woven fabric; knee-length; must wear bike/undershorts (navy or black), or tights/leggings (navy, black, or white).

Shirts
Color: White
Requirements: EO Short or Long Sleeve Button-down Dress Shirt w/STA logo. Must be tucked in with skirt.

Neck Cross Tie
Color: Blue Gold Plaid
Requirements: EO Adjustable Plaid Cross Tie

Outerwear: Cardigan & Fleece
Color: Navy
Requirements: EO Cardigan w/ STA logo, *for Dress Uniform; EO Full-Zip Fleece w/ STA logo

GIRLS ACCESSORIES

Socks
Color: White
Requirements: Ankle socks or Crew socks folded over. No patterns, logos, or characters.

Shoes
Requirements: Black tennis shoes/sneakers, Mary-Jane style shoes (with strap required), or black and white traditional saddle shoes. Close-toed, conservative; no lights, wheels, high heels, ostentatious display; no sandals, Crocs-style shoes, slip ons, etc. Mary Janes or Saddle Shoes required for 5 - 8 Dress Uniform. If wearing non-sneakers, student may change into sneakers for P.E. and recess.

Hair
Item: Bows, Headbands, and Ribbons
Color: Navy, White, or STA Plaid
Requirements: Neat and tidy, out of eyes and not covering any part of the face, feminine in appearance. No unnatural colors. Hair accessories either neutral colors or school colors; not overly large or distracting as determined by faculty and staff. Hats are not part of uniform and in general should not be worn in building.

Miscellaneous
Requirements: One set of small and appropriate stud earrings, simple religious necklace (crucifix/Miraculous medal/saint medal), and a simple analog wristwatch with face no larger than a quarter in neutral, navy, or white permitted for students 1 grade and up (no digital display, alarm/beeping capabilities) is permitted. No bracelets or other jewelry. Make-up and nail polish are not permitted. Underwear, including bra straps and camisoles, should be completely concealed by outer clothing. All clothing should be well-fitting, clean; without holes, stains, or unpleasant odors.

Undergarments
Requirements: Girls requiring undergarments should wear nude colored undergarments under white shirts to minimize visibility.

Outerwear

Boys:

- EO Full-Zip Navy Fleece
- EO Blue Dress Blazer (5th - 8th only)

Girls:

- EO Full-Zip Navy Fleece
- EO Navy Blue Cardigan

On cold days, students are permitted to wear non-uniform winter coats outside. Winter coats must be removed when they are inside the building and at church.

P.E. Uniforms

All Grades:

- **Lands' End** - Girls/Boys Mesh Gym Shorts (Navy) - 5th - 8th Grade
  (Available on Amazon)

5th - 8th Grade:

- E**ducational Outfitters** - School P.E. Shirt w/ STA logo

COMMUNICATION AND PROBLEM SOLVING

In order to foster a 1) strong community and 2) positive and productive communication, members of the St. Thomas Aquinas Academy community are asked to:

- Speak with courtesy and charity (Colossians 4:6), recognizing that each person is made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27).
- "Avoid rash judgment… [being] careful to interpret insofar as possible his neighbor's thoughts, words, and deeds in a favorable way" (CCC 2478).
- Begin with direct communication to the person(s) involved. Questions, suggestions, and concerns related to a specific class or teacher should be addressed to the teacher. Schoolwide questions, suggestions, and concerns should be brought directly to the Head of School. If more support is needed, go to the next person in the chain of command. E.g. Speak with your child, then the teacher, and from there, if necessary, involve the Head of School (Matthew 18:15).
- Support and build up STA in the way we communicate with our students, faculty and staff, parents, as well as those in the broader community (Ephesians 4:29).
- Refrain from gossiping or complaining about other members of the STA community, school policies, etc. This includes public statements on social media or elsewhere. Instead, as mentioned above, directly address the person(s) concerned. (James 4:11).

Parent-Teacher Communication Norms

- Regular communication between parents and teachers occurs through email, FACTS, and phone (as appropriate). Meetings may be used as needed.
- Teachers will strive to respond to communication by the end of the next school day.
- In order to be present to your children and their teaching responsibilities, teachers are unable to conference with parents during carline or the school day (unless an appointment has been made).

Communication Roles

Student

Student capacity for communication will expand rapidly throughout their time at STA. Students are responsible for listening and following directions, including tracking assignments, and communicating honestly with their teachers and parents/guardians. Students are to treat each teacher with the respect properly accorded their role as an authority figure and leader. With this in mind, students should address teachers by their formal title, i.e. Mrs., Miss., Mr., Dr., and their last name.

Teacher

Teachers are responsible for clearly communicating student expectations. Teachers are also responsible for notifying parents/guardians when their student is struggling considerably with the material or is not performing as expected.

Parent/Guardian

Parents/guardians are responsible for clearly communicating with teachers any conditions that may affect their student's ability to learn and focus in class. Parents/guardians must conduct themselves in a civil manner—towards STA faculty, towards students, and towards each other.

Privacy Policy

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy (STA) is committed to upholding the highest standards of privacy and protection for all materials, curriculum, instructional content, and intellectual property associated with our educational offerings. This Privacy Policy outlines our practices concerning the handling, sharing, and protection of the aforementioned properties to ensure they are used in a manner that respects the integrity of our institution and the privacy rights of our community.

This policy applies to all educational materials, curriculum documents, instructional content, textbooks, assessments, and any other intellectual property developed, used, or shared by STA. All educational materials and intellectual property created by STA faculty or staff are considered confidential and are protected under applicable intellectual property laws. These materials shall not be reproduced, shared, or disseminated without explicit authorization from the Head of School or designated authority.

STA respects copyright laws and ensures all materials used within the curriculum comply with these laws. Any use of third-party materials is done under appropriate licenses or agreements, and proper attribution is given to the original creators.

Data Privacy and Security

STA is committed to protecting the privacy of student data in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and other applicable laws. Personal information of students will not be disclosed without consent or as legally required.

The creation and use of educational materials and intellectual property at STA respect the rights of creators and contributors. STA retains rights to educational content developed by its faculty and staff, except as otherwise agreed upon in writing.

For questions or concerns regarding this privacy policy, please contact the Head of School.

Definition of Harassment

Harassment constitutes unwelcome conduct based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected under applicable law. Harassment can include, but is not limited to:

- Verbal harassment, such as derogatory comments, jokes, or slurs.
- Physical harassment, including unwanted physical contact or intimidation.
- Visual harassment, such as derogatory posters, cartoons, or drawings.
- Sexual harassment, including unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- Cyberbullying or online harassment, including derogatory posts or messages on social media or other platforms.

Reporting Procedures

Individuals who believe they have been subjected to harassment are encouraged to report the incident immediately to a teacher, administrator, church staff member, or the Head of School. Upon receiving a report, STA will promptly and thoroughly investigate the matter, ensuring confidentiality to the extent possible. This process will respect the rights of all parties involved.

Violations of this policy will result in appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including expulsion for students, termination of employment for faculty and staff, and barring from school property for visitors and other members of the school community. Disciplinary measures will be determined based on the severity of the conduct and may include mediation, counseling, or other restorative practices in addition to or instead of punitive measures.

Non-Retaliation

STA prohibits retaliation against anyone who reports harassment or participates in an investigation of such a report. Acts of retaliation will be subject to disciplinary action, independent of the merits of the original harassment complaint.

Drug & Alcohol Use

The abuse of controlled substances or alcohol is an unsafe and counterproductive practice which is not tolerated by St. Thomas Aquinas Academy. The purpose of this policy is to facilitate a safe environment for students, employees and members of the community that is free from the effects of substance abuse,

In compliance with the drug free workplace policy mandated by state and federal laws, abuse of alcohol, drugs, and controlled substances is strictly prohibited. This includes working after the apparent use of marijuana, regardless of marijuana's legal status.

The unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensation, arrival under the influence, possession, or use of a controlled substance, including drugs or alcohol, on our premises, or while conducting any STA business, is strictly prohibited. Violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination or expulsion.

Smoke-Free Workplace

In keeping with our intent to provide a safe and healthy work environment, smoking is not allowed in company buildings, work areas, on school grounds, organization vehicles, or at off-campus school sponsored events. "Smoking" includes the use of any tobacco products, electronic smoking devices, vape devices and e-cigarettes.

Student Records

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy adheres to the Buckley Amendment (FERPA - Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) regarding access to student records. Records of students transferring to other schools will only be sent through the U.S. Mail. No records will be given to parents to transport to the new school. Students requesting records/transcripts/recommendations must make a five school-day request to the School Office. All forms should be submitted to the School Office for distribution. Completed forms will be sent via the U.S. Mail. Special handling will require that all postal fees be paid by the parents. No records of transferring students whose financial commitment is in arrears will be sent to receiving schools.

Media Policy

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy regularly photographs and records school activities, events, performances, liturgies, academic programs, athletics, and student life for educational, archival, community-building, and promotional purposes.

These images and recordings may be used in:

- School social media accounts
- The school website
- Marketing and admissions materials
- Newsletters and publications
- The yearbook
- Event programs and presentations
- Local news or diocesan publications

As part of enrollment in the school community, student participation in photography and video media related to normal school activities is considered a standard and expected aspect of school life.

Parents/guardians who do not wish for their child's image to be used must submit a **written Media Opt-Out Request** to the school administration annually prior to the start of the academic year.

Please note:

- The school will make reasonable efforts to honor written opt-out requests.
- Students with opt-out requests will not be featured in public facing media individually or small group photos (e.g. 2-3 students).
- However, St. Thomas Aquinas Academy cannot guarantee exclusion from appearance in class, team, or other group photographs, public events, performances, liturgies, or livestreamed activities.
- Opt-out requests may limit a student's inclusion in certain school activities so that a photograph or video may be taken for purposes of promoting or marketing the school.

The school does not publish confidential student information alongside photographs and exercises discretion and professionalism in all media usage.

Right to Amend the Handbook

Statements in this handbook are subject to amendment with or without notice. The school administrators will attempt to keep the school families informed of all changes as soon as practical. Some changes might have to be made immediately due to unforeseen circumstances.

Family Handbook Compliance form

Please click on the Family Handbook Compliance Form link in order to indicate that you have read and reviewed the family handbook and agree to comply with all the rules and regulations noted within.



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ACADEMY

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