



A Note from Principal Marquis November 13, 2020

Good afternoon, STA Families-

As principal of St. Thomas Aquinas, I am the school's designated COVID-19 Coordinator. This position is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for all schools. I know there likely have been many questions over the past week and I'd like to take a moment to offer some explanations and reflections.

STA's Unwavering Commitment: We remain committed to our entire community- students, families, faculty, and staff. We don't ever take for granted that you choose to send your children to St. Thomas Aquinas High School and that you place your trust in us every day. We know that you expect your children to receive a quality education and encounter experiences that will help them grow in faith and service. Additionally, they will receive all of this in a place where they are safe and cared for.

Our thoughts and prayers are with those who have tested positive for the coronavirus. We provide them and their families our continual support and understand that they "didn't sign up for this." As we continue to see spikes in cases in NH and across the country, we understand that even with the most detailed and quality planning, no one is immune from potential exposure. Our conversations with the state of New Hampshire remain ongoing; their feedback and guidance have helped us manage through the many unknowns. We feel we're becoming more efficient with our procedures and sincerely thank you for your patience and understanding as we navigate through these rough waters. Our goal is to always provide you with the most information we can, devoid of rumors, confidential and thorough, and in a timely manner. We are committed to following guidelines, procedures, and policies, both our own and those outlined by state agencies.

Confirmed Cases and Contact Tracing: We have eight confirmed positive cases in our school community. Each time we are notified that someone has tested positive, we quickly initiate procedures to determine what effect it may have on our campus. Our medical staff initiates a conversation with the individual to gather important information about the test, to assess the potential exposure location and date, and to collect all relevant details. Our contact tracing and deep cleaning then begins.

Each faculty member's attendance logs, seating charts, and sign out sheets are analyzed. Every classroom is entered and measurements are taken. Because the NH Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS) requires that we provide notice to the state and to the individual of anyone who has been closer than 6 feet for longer than 10 minutes, we measure a radius around where the person with the positive test has been. This includes measuring from all sides and angles: front, behind, to the side, diagonally. Everyone in the potential radius is considered to be "in close contact."

We then check to see if there was movement to the restroom and confirm that there was no overlap with any other classes on that floor at that time. All teachers receive personal phone calls to determine if the seating charts deviated in any way on the date(s) of potential exposure - was there movement in the classroom, did a lab or group work take place, did anything happen out of the ordinary?

After our contact trace in the building concludes and those conversations with all teachers/staff are finished, increased communication with our medical team begins. We confirm that the information we received from the infected individual and the trace match up. If there are any conflicts, we dig deeper to determine any additional issues. We then send all of the information to the NH DHHS and notify community members who have been deemed in close contact and advise them to begin quarantine. Depending on the availability of everyone involved in contact tracing, the process typically takes several hours. Every case demands the same detailed application of process with the same level of importance; there are no shortcuts, the stakes are too high. Notifications of close contact have been staggered due to individuals testing at different times and receiving test results on different days. That said, our team has been providing close contact notifications within hours of receiving word of a positive COVID test result.

Again, we share that we have identified eight (8) positive cases of COVID. We know the number may seem alarming, but every indication points to our policies, procedures, and efforts having been successful. Their efficacy has allowed us to remain in-person for several months and have contained all eight cases within a very tight cluster. We have no information to suggest that the virus is spreading through St. Thomas; we feel quite confident that it was/has been contained. We understand that rumors may be circulating. We hope that this information will help curb them and explain the amount of care, attention, and thoroughness that is involved in every step. We feel we have done things to the best of our ability and with the entire community in mind. As prudent stewards of our community's health, we will continue to learn and adapt.

We are so appreciative of the patience and understanding of everyone and are reminded daily that ***together we will*** get through this.

God Bless our entire St. Thomas Aquinas family.

Paul C. Marquis
Principal