

Strategic Plan for St. Thomas More Catholic School (2021-2026)

INTRODUCTION

*As Pope Francis spoke to the Congregation for Catholic Education he reflected that, “Education is directed at a changing generation and, therefore, every educator — and the entire Church who is the mother educator — is called “to change,” or know how to communicate with the young people before them.”*¹ In forming a strategic plan for the future health and vitality of St. Thomas More Catholic School, we continue to identify opportunities facing our school and meet them with faith and determination.

The purpose of the strategic plan is to realize this vision at St. Thomas More Catholic School with academic excellence. As a result of successful implementation of the strategic plan at STM, we envision the following for our 2021 -2026 school years.

Characteristics of a Distinctly Catholic School

1. St. Thomas More Catholic School is recognized as an integral part of the St. Thomas More parish and the Archdiocese of Atlanta.
2. A clear statement of its Catholic mission, including a focus on Jesus and an acknowledgement of the importance of spreading the Gospel, guides St. Thomas More Catholic School. The entire school community understands the mission and works to carry it out.
3. St. Thomas More Catholic School is an academic institution. Our students have frequent opportunities for prayer, worship and liturgical experiences. The environment is distinctly Catholic, with visible symbols throughout the school; a pervasive culture of service, with Gospel teachings and Jesuit values integrated throughout the curriculum.
4. The school culture is inclusive and accepting of diverse backgrounds.
5. St. Thomas More Catholic School is an effective vehicle of evangelization and on-going faith formation for students and their families.
6. St. Thomas More Church is sponsored by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit traditions are an integral part of our parish and school.
7. As a Catholic school in the Jesuit tradition we strive to educate the whole person: body, mind and spirit.
8. Parents are valued and involved as partners in the religious and academic education of their children.
9. St. Thomas More Catholic School has a qualified, competent principal who exercises effective spiritual and educational leadership.

¹ Address of Pope Francis to participants of the Congregation for Catholic Education, Plenary Session, 2014.

Characteristics of an Academically Excellent Catholic School

1. School leadership is visionary, skilled, professionally competent and deeply rooted in the Catholic faith.
2. Students are taught by qualified, certified teachers committed to the mission of the school and who are enthusiastic, life-long learners that use effective teaching methods.
3. St. Thomas More Catholic School is fully accredited and recognized in the community as an academically strong institution with a challenging, rigorous curriculum. This is verified by objective measures of student achievement and growth.
4. Students graduate with an appreciation for learning, a strong connection to their faith and the skills necessary for critical thinking, moral decision-making and teamwork.
5. Up-to-date technology and educational resources are a continued priority to enhance learning in an integrated manner throughout the curriculum.
6. The academic program is comprehensive in scope, including specials in Spanish language instruction, fine arts, and physical education, as well as resource strategies to ensure the success of all students.

Characteristics of a Fiscally Sound Catholic School

1. St. Thomas More Catholic School strives for affordability and accessibility.
2. St. Thomas More Catholic School maintains an average of 25 students per class, with two classes per grade. Lower grades classes are smaller, in most cases.
3. St. Thomas More Catholic School has effective marketing, development, recruitment and retention plans in place.
4. Endowment funds exist at school level to supplement funding for school programs and scholarships.
5. St. Thomas More Catholic School follows Archdiocesan policies to provide just compensation and benefits for employees.
6. St. Thomas More Catholic School follows ethical principles in its business activities and adheres to Archdiocesan policies regarding financial accounting.
7. The school facility is safe, attractive and in good repair.
8. The school will take advantage of funds available from state and federal sources as long as the mission of the school is not put at risk. St. Thomas More Catholic School actively promotes participation in the state GRACE Scholars program.

Saint Thomas More Catholic School Child Friendly Mission Statement

St. Thomas More Catholic School is a joyful learning community, reaching out to the world as the hands of Christ.

Saint Thomas More Catholic School
Faculty and Staff
Mission Statement

St. Thomas More Catholic School is a joyful learning community reaching out to the world as the hands of Christ. We use an integrated educational approach, along with the principles of Catholic teaching, to bring together faith and technology, body and mind, creativity and reason, science and religion. As we impart our lessons with kindness and high expectations, we nurture students into confident, life-long learners who can serve God and make moral decisions based on Gospel values.

OUR VALUES

- **Academic Excellence** Each and every student can realize their own level of excellence. St. Thomas More School uses a rigorous curriculum and a holistic approach that guides our students to reach their goals.
- **Catholic** Our Catholic identity is strong and evident in our students, staff, and curriculum.
- **Encouragement** Children are a gift from God. At St. Thomas More Catholic School, students feel loved and supported as they learn to their fullest potential -- about Christ, about the world and about themselves.
- **Responsibility** Our students are regularly called to work for and witness God through prayer, service projects and activities in our parish and throughout the wider community.
- **Whole Child Approach** God blesses each person with unique abilities. We help students discover their strengths and develop a base of self-assurance on which to build success.
- **Home & School Union** Faith and learning begin at home. St. Thomas More serves as a collaborative partner with parents to help children foster a life filled with learning and growth.
- **Inclusive Sanctuary** We are an open, caring community, in partnership with families and parishes, where everyone is welcomed. We celebrate diversity, embracing people of all cultures and faith traditions with kindness and respect. Our learning environment is a place where students feel accepted, safe and secure.

CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Goals and Strategies

1. **St. Thomas More Catholic School values its Catholic identity and strives to have a clearly articulated and widely understood mission statement which will be reflected in all policies, plans and efforts of the school community. The mission will be carried out by the pastor, principal, administrators, teachers, staff, parents and the school advisory council and will clearly identify the school as a Catholic school.**

Strategies

- The school mission statement will be understood by all stakeholders. This mission statement will be a keystone in driving the decisions, policy formation, and activities of the school community.
- The school's improvement plan will include opportunities to assist faculty and staff to deepen their own faith and increase their understanding of church teaching. Per Archdiocesan requirements, all teachers of religion will earn Basic Catechist Certification.
- All administrators will be active members of a Catholic parish and will effectively exercise their responsibility for spiritual leadership within the school.
- The school will always welcome families of other faiths without compromising its Catholic identity. School policy will inform the expectations regarding religion course requirements and attendance at religious activities with families of other faiths.
- The school community will understand the school's mission statement and regularly align on how it influences the policies, decisions and activities of the school and school personnel.

2. The teaching of the Catholic faith and its integration with daily living is a hallmark of St. Thomas More Catholic School.

Strategies

- St. Thomas More Catholic School will provide opportunities for daily prayer, regular participation in liturgy, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, retreats and other religious practices for students and staff.
- Administrators will ensure that teachers understand and follow the approved religion curriculum K-12. Religion will be taught by active, practicing Catholic teachers.
- Catholic teaching, virtues and values are integrated throughout the curriculum by each teacher through instruction and example. Resources and catechist training will be provided for teachers.
- All religion teachers are required to earn Basic Catechist Certification.
- Faculty will annually review the results of the Assessment of Catechesis/Religious Education (ACRE) test to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the religion program.
- The feasts of the liturgical year will be taught and celebrated. The lives of patron saints, especially those of the parish and other contemporary religious models will be presented as models of faith, courage, and gospel witness.

- o Students will be taught about vocations to the priesthood and religious life and will be encouraged to pray for vocations and consider if God is calling them to priesthood or religious life. Whenever possible, students will be given the opportunity to personally engage with St. Thomas More parish staff, priests and vowed religious role models.

3. St. Thomas More Catholic School will recognize and fulfill their responsibility to help carry out the ministry of Catholic schools. St. Thomas More Catholic School will work closely with St. Thomas More parish in the work of evangelization.

Strategies

- o Area clergy will be invited and encouraged to participate in the religious education and formation as well as the sacramental and spiritual life within the school. This includes clergy outside the St. Thomas More Catholic School parish – i.e., parishes where some students are parishioners.
- o The Pastor of St. Thomas More is expected to raise awareness among parishioners of the value of Catholic schools to the Church, the Archdiocese and the parishes, to inform parishioners of the activities of the school and to encourage parish families to consider enrolling their children.
- o St. Thomas More Catholic School will identify ways to maintain and strengthen a meaningful connection with area parishes, especially the home parishes of their students.
- o As a Catholic school in the Jesuit tradition we fully embrace Ignatian spirituality.
- o St. Thomas More Catholic School will actively communicate the invitation and expectation that parents participate in the faith formation of their children and the life of their parish or respective faith community.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Goals and Strategies

- 1. Academic Excellence and Catholic Identity is the unique characteristic and hallmark of St. Thomas More Catholic School, enabling the school to educate the whole child.**

Strategies

- o The unique combination of these two connected ideals will be clearly articulated to the community so that St. Thomas More Catholic School is distinguished as uniquely different and offering a more holistic education than public schools, charter schools, or other private schools. This will be integrated into the strategic marketing plan.

- 2. St. Thomas More Catholic School will demonstrate compliance with the Archdiocesan curriculum for each subject area; and measure student mastery of each subject, via assessed learning outcomes for each grade level.**

Strategies

- Learning outcomes for each subject and each grade level will be evaluated and reviewed with the faculty and parents throughout the school year.
- Individual student performance in all subject areas will be continuously monitored and addressed as needed.

- 3. St. Thomas More Catholic School teachers will use engaging teaching and learning strategies that support the diverse learning styles of students. Teachers utilize a variety of methods and materials, encourage higher order thinking and in-depth understanding, and maximize instructional time.**

Strategies

- St. Thomas More Catholic School leaders and faculty members will identify and share “best practice” instructional models that incorporate research-based, effective teaching and learning strategies and the experiences of a veteran staff.
- Opportunities will be provided for teachers to attend professional development workshops.
- St. Thomas More Catholic School will continually evaluate student learning styles and adjust and deliver instruction accordingly.

- Teachers will continue to integrate technology in the teaching, learning and assessment process, as appropriate.
- **4. St. Thomas More Catholic School administrators and teachers will engage in ongoing professional development that enhances professional knowledge and skills, provides opportunities to dialogue about instructional practices, and is aligned with curricula and assessments.**

Strategies

- Year-long staff development goals related to school improvement and teacher effectiveness will be identified on an annual basis. Teachers will improve their practice based on new knowledge learned in staff development.

- o In addition to accomplishing the annual staff development goals, teachers are provided with information on curriculum content, technology integration and state and archdiocesan certification requirements.
 - o Professional development will increase awareness of current assessment theories and support appropriate assessment practices among teachers and administrative staff.
- 5. Student assessments will be used to evaluate mastery of topic and to help staff members adjust the instructional program on an ongoing basis.**

Strategies

- o Student progress toward learning outcomes will be included as one of the factors in the ongoing evaluation of principals and teachers.
- o St. Thomas More Catholic School will use multiple methods to measure student achievement on the learning outcomes, including formative and summative assessments, standardized tests, and other measures.
- o Professional development programs for staff will be aligned to achieve desired student learning outcomes.
- o Principals and teachers will review and interpret all test scores for trends and needs. This information will be utilized each year in developing the school's improvement plan.
- o The principal will ensure that test data is analyzed and appropriate curriculum/methodology changes made. This information will be shared with parents annually.

- 6. Use of technology will be integrated across all grade levels and all content areas in the school and evaluated on an ongoing basis.**

Strategies

- o St. Thomas More Catholic School has a written technology plan which addresses the use, acquisition, maintenance and upgrading of hardware and software.

- o Teachers will use technology as an instructional tool in all subject areas.
- o Students will be expected to use technology for classroom assignments and presentations, as appropriate.
- o The school budget will include an allocation for improvements in technology.

ENROLLMENT AND MARKETING

Goals and Strategies

- 1. St. Thomas More Catholic School will be marketed effectively to build a strong image in the community, to publicize the value and benefits of the school, to support/enhance advancement efforts, and to sustain/increase enrollment.**

Strategies

- o The archdiocesan marketing plan will be reviewed by the School Advisory Council Marketing Committee to ensure that St. Thomas More Catholic School aligns itself to that plan.
- o The marketing program will focus on the mission and value of Catholic schools.
- o An annual investment of funding will be made for the marketing efforts. Funding will be adequate to ensure that the plan has potential to have a positive impact on the public perception of STM School.
- o The marketing program will be coordinated, proactive and targeted.
- o The marketing program will have metrics as well as a long-term funding plan and a consistent long-term message, since the impact of an effective marketing program is likely to become evident only after two to four years of consistent communication about the value and benefits of Catholic school education.
- o A process/survey instrument is used to assist the schools in conducting an exit interview to track and respond to the reasons for student attrition.

HEALTH OPERATION

Goals and Strategies

1. St. Thomas More Catholic School will continue all efforts to maintain the health and safety of our STM community. STM will continue to implement COVID-19 prevention strategies for continuous in-person instruction as provided by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- o Distancing recommendations between students in classrooms and on campus.
- o Continued implementation and correct use of masks for all persons on campus
- o The School will follow continued cleaning, disinfection, and hand hygiene CDC guidelines

FACILITIES

Goals and Strategies

2. St. Thomas More Catholic School will be kept clean, attractive and in good repair.

Strategies

- o There is a capital reserve fund in place. These funds will be used exclusively for school costs related to the facility.
- o Support staff will understand the important role they fulfill in helping to make the school atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning.

3. St. Thomas More Catholic School will provide a safe and secure environment for students.

Strategies

- o Entrances to school buildings will be locked and monitored during the school day and access by unauthorized persons will be restricted.
- o All school personnel and volunteers will complete the appropriate training required by the Archdiocese of Atlanta.
- o The School will be in compliance with applicable state, municipal and archdiocesan safety codes and policies.

FINANCE

Goals and Strategies

- 1. St. Thomas More Catholic School will operate with a balanced budget which is based on realistic estimates of enrollment and expenses. This budget and year-end financial statements will be reviewed by the Parish Finance Council, the School Advisory Council, the Archdiocese.**

Strategies

- o St. Thomas More Catholic School will operate at a level of enrollment that promotes financial stability. Experience indicates this should be close to 90% capacity. At the elementary level, capacity should be based on an average class size of approximately 25 students.
- o Net income from after school programs will make a positive contribution to the operating budget.
- o Each year, an overview of the school budget and prior year end financial statement will be provided to parents and other stakeholders via advancement materials.
- o The school principal, the parish business manager, and the parish finance council will be directly involved in the budgeting process and have an active role in regularly monitoring income and expenses during the fiscal year. Accurate, consistent and timely reports will be provided to them quarterly.
 - o St. Thomas More Catholic School will fully utilize all funds available through state and federally funded programs when it is in the school's best interest.