



# ST. GABRIEL CATHOLIC SCHOOL

## Questions & Answers

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### **If I have enrolled already for next year at St. Gabe – what do I do?**

If you have already enrolled at St. Gabriel for next year, we will work with you to make sure that your child's application is processed for St. Thomas Aquinas, or another school. We will begin by contacting families who have enrolled. Additionally, all enrollment application fees will be waived.

### **If I have enrolled and changed my mind, what do I do?**

While we hope this is not the case and that you will consider staying within our network, the process would be the same as above in that we will contact you to discuss your options, answer questions, and help you find the best fit for your child. If that that time, you have changed your mind, then that is a decision we will respect and will remove your application from our system.

### **Will St. Gabriel's students be automatically accepted after applying or will they go on a waiting list? Should I apply now?**

If you are interested in applying, please apply now. St. Gabriel's students will be prioritized to attend St. Thomas Aquinas or any of the other schools in the network. But the decisions are not automatic, as we want to work with you to make sure that it is a good fit. The one on one conversations we have with all families will address enrollment and acceptance.

### **Why can't the children at St. Thomas come to St. Gabriel's?**

The St. Thomas community and building are stabilized and continue to have consistent enrollment, but with capacity to add more students. The St. Gabe's building has fewer students in a building that, even with students from both schools, would still have empty spaces with a cost to upkeep that would not be sustainable.

### **Will any of our St. Gabriel's teachers be teaching at St. Thomas? Wouldn't it make the transition easier for our students if teachers came with them?**

Right now, the St. Thomas teaching faculty is at full capacity. The future need for new teachers and classrooms at St. Thomas will depend entirely on enrollment. We have encouraged all teachers from St. Gabe's to apply to continue to teach in the network and to the extent that we add additional classes, or there are any openings at St. Thomas, St. Gabriel's teachers will have first opportunity to apply for that opening.

### **Is the neighborhood safe? What will be the safety plan of our children?**

We have not experienced any issues with any of our students in that neighborhood or with students that have been attending St. Thomas Aquinas. We do all we can, including work with local partners to ensure the safety of all of our students and we view that neighborhood as a safe option. We will continue to maintain strong relationships with local government officials, as well as our partners within the Philadelphia Police Department, so that we can proactively address issues relating to the safety of our school communities.

### **What will happen with students who have learning support services?**

As each student's needs are different, we would need more information about what services the students are already receiving, and will be able to address each student's situation in one-on-one conversations.



**It has been mentioned that the closing of the school was due to the competition. Where in South Philadelphia Grays Ferry community are our competitor catholic schools?**

We consistently conduct competitive research on schools in close proximity to St. Gabriel. Currently, there are 7 schools within a 1-mile radius (including St. Thomas), and 5 more schools when the radius is expanded to 2 miles. There are no other Catholic schools in Grays Ferry, however with St. Monica, St. Pio, Our Lady of Hope and St. Anthony of Padua Regional School approximately 2.1 miles away from St. Gabriel, there is an impact in terms of competition. Our enrollment is much lower than that of each of these 12 schools, and the amount at which we must subsidize tuition for families makes it impossible to sustain with regard to the costs of staffing and our facility.

**Can we wait until the pandemic is over to see if the school can survive with better enrollment?**

Unfortunately, declining enrollment has been a multi-year trend. This decision, in all likelihood, would have still been necessary even if COVID-19 was not a factor. The pandemic only solidified the need for action more immediately.

**Has COVID-19 influenced this decision?**

The uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic reinforced the need for action now. The pandemic has severely impacted enrollment due to increased economic hardships families are facing, beyond the downward trend we were already experiencing. Since last spring, we have made great efforts to support tuition by raising dollars for an emergency fund, however even this increased support has not been enough.

**Will this consolidation cause changes to occur during the current school year?**

The consolidation of students from St. Gabriel into St. Thomas Aquinas will not impact the current school year, which will continue on as planned, in line with health and safety recommendations related to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will be planning activities and opportunities for students from both schools to come together and begin to get to know one another.

**Why haven't the St. Gabriel School students and parents had a chance to hold and share a meeting in person to ask questions about the future of our students and staff?**

To keep students, staff, and families safe, and with many families choosing to remain in a virtual setting at this time, a virtual community meeting was the best option. It was important for us to speak to families as soon as the decision was announced, however, faculty and principals were also not aware of the information until the same day that families had learned. There will be opportunities in the next weeks and months for students and their families to meet, discuss, and even bring ideas to the table related to this transition and how it can be made easier for students. Principals of both schools are meeting now to plan these opportunities. Students and families can continue to submit questions which will be answered and posted to our website.

**How can we end this school year at ease and with peace and closure, knowing we have been heard?**

It is our intention, and in our planning, that you and your child will have every opportunity you need to feel closure, feel heard and know that every decision is the best one we can possibly make for our students, with all circumstances considered.

**If we cannot hold in-person meetings, can students have the opportunity to ask questions during a virtual meeting?**

There will be opportunities for meetings, both virtually and in person, for students and families with teachers and principals. At this moment, specific plans are being worked on by school leaders and teachers to ensure this is truly a collaborative process. As soon as there are answers to share, those meetings can take place.



### **Will our children meet the staff at St. Thomas?**

There will be an opportunity for children to meet the staff at St. Thomas. We want them to feel as comfortable as possible. The staff at St. Thomas are also very eager to meet your children. Additionally, teachers at St. Thomas will be working with their current students on the importance of welcoming new friends to build an even better community. As such, there will also be opportunities for the children to meet and interact with one another, virtually and potentially in-person throughout the remainder of the school year.

### **What services will be put in place to assist students with this transition?**

**Support services** – Assistance will be made available for any student or family who needs support in dealing with the changes and uncertainty that so often can cause anxiety or sadness. Our teachers will be closely monitoring students to identify anyone who might benefit from speaking with a trained professional and we welcome you to contact us if you identify a need and would like to discuss supporting your child(ren).

**Enrollment** - we will work with you to apply for an appropriate placement for your student(s) next school year and will begin to contact each family, starting with those who had already enrolled at St. Gabriel for next fall. Enrollment fees will be waived.

**Financial Aid** - We will provide eligible St. Gabriel students in need with financial aid, no matter which school in our system they choose to attend

**Transportation** - We will also work with families to explore options for bussing or other transportation needs for their children.

**Uniforms** - St. Gabriel's students who enroll at St. Thomas Aquinas or another school within our network will receive assistance for new uniforms so they are at no cost to families

**After-school care** – We are working to enhance programming at St. Thomas Aquinas, including Out-of-School Time (OST) services.

### **Will students continue receiving financial aid, scholarships, etc.?**

We will provide eligible St. Gabriel students in need with financial aid, no matter which school in our system they choose to attend, to ensure the transformative Catholic education we provide remains within reach. We will work with each family individually to find ways to best meet their needs.

### **Will bus transportation be provided for St. Gabriel's students?**

Separate transportation services will not be provided to St. Gabe's students to attend St. Thomas Aquinas. However, for students that fall within the radius and are eligible for busing, we will work with them and the School District.

If you have additional questions, you may submit them [here](#) at any time. We will continue to update this document and contact you if your question requires a one-on-one conversation.

Please know all of us at St. Gabriel, St. Thomas, and the IMS team are doing our very best to continue to have your child, and all children at our schools, at the very top of our minds in all decisions and plans. They are our greatest priority.