



*faith. family. foundation.*

STRATEGIC PLAN  
2022



## *faith.*

Nurturing, faith-filled academic program; universal, inclusive, and values-based culture of empathy, kindness and service.

## *family.*

Each student's family is an integral part of our community and are welcome in the school. A sense of belonging, you are known and encouraged by faculty, other families and students.

## *foundation.*

Essential education rooted in 100 years of foundational teaching, community engagement, and academic excellence and development.





## OUR MISSION

*St. Thomas Aquinas School community strives for academic excellence in a faith-filled Catholic environment that encourages children to reach their full potential and to become lifelong learners. By word and example, we teach our students to model Christ's message of love.*

## CORE VALUES AND BELIEFS

**We believe** in the development of the whole person, including the spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional and physical aspects of one's being. Commitment to academic excellence and affordable access are integral parts of our identity as a Catholic school.

**We believe** that students learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process, and when each student has appropriate opportunities for success.

**We believe** that student self-esteem is enhanced by positive relationships and mutual respect among and between students and faculty; that students and faculty thrive in a supportive yet stimulating environment which affirms the dignity of all, creates a sense of belonging, and provides safe opportunities for personal development.

**We believe** that by empowering students with a strong foundation in education, faith and values, we are preparing students to lead, learn and serve.

**We believe** our success depends in no small part on the strength of our relationships with our families, faculty and community at large.

**We believe** that in order to be great, we must also be good.


## ENVISIONING OUR NEXT CENTURY

*St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School* (“St. Thomas”) will be the school of first choice for a population of approximately 350 students and their families who seek a rigorous curriculum and who wish to share in a rich community emboldened by our values-based culture, our Catholic mission and our long-standing traditions. We seek to be an exceptional, student-centered learning environment in which students:

- experience a distinctively Catholic education where they know and live their values, are informed by their faith, think critically and globally, exercise leadership and serve others;
- are challenged by a rigorous program of study rooted in foundational subject areas which maximizes the potential of each individual, in preparation for secondary education and lifelong learning;
- develop positive and sustaining connections with faculty, other students and other families that are supportive, encouraging and confidence-building;
- understand expectations of being a moral and just citizen, earnest student and positive influence in society; and
- fulfill their responsibilities to the broader community.

We will continue to play a leading role for Catholic schools in the Diocese of Bridgeport, in the Fairfield County area, and in the nation.

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School will excel in delivering academic, spiritual, social, civic, and physical development, focusing on programmatic excellence at all levels. Our students will know the Catholic faith and choose to live its values, collaborating with those they serve in responding to the broader needs of the community. As creative, critical thinkers our graduates will be prepared to meet the demands of a changing world as self-confident, aware young men and women of faith and values.



Our **academic program** will provide a challenging foundational curriculum and appropriate support for all students that enable them to pursue excellence in all academic areas. It will encourage integration of the curriculum across subject areas and integration of technology across the curriculum. It will encourage critical thinking and intellectual formation throughout the educational journey. Through consistent expectations and rigor rooted in 100 years of experience, St. Thomas will prepare students to compete successfully at the high school of their choice.

Our **extracurricular program** will maintain and enhance our comprehensive sports and arts programs as well as our academic and service opportunities that promote integrity, personal development, generosity, and sportsmanship. We seek to maximize student participation in extracurricular programs and will continue to build, strengthen and develop school activities to promote spirit and pride throughout the St. Thomas community.

St. Thomas will be staffed by **faith-filled administrators, faculty and staff** who study, reflect and respond proactively to trends in education, society and the Church. Our staff will provide curriculum offerings and will utilize instructional strategies that support excellence in education for all students. As models of Christian values, they will create a challenging yet nurturing environment which empowers young men and women to recognize, appreciate and develop their unique talents and capabilities.

We will be a **welcoming community** with actively engaged parents who participate fully in the advancement of the school's mission. Strong financial stewardship and vigorous resource development will generate increasing sources of funding to secure the financial future of the school.



St. Thomas will strive to achieve a high-quality, affirming yet challenging experience for our students, delivering excellent academic and co-curricular programs in a manner that creates long-lasting, positive connections with every student, and provides the best values-based high school preparatory education in the area. Doing so requires creating an environment that is consistent, supportive and intellectually stimulating.

**This strategic objective focuses on:**

- All faculty, staff and students embracing the mission, values and traditions of the school.
- Reaffirming our commitment to academic excellence and intellectual formation.
- Ensuring that key metrics and benchmarking around academic and student experiences are implemented and measured.
- Recruiting and retaining the very best leadership, faculty and staff.
- Maintaining and enhancing our Catholic identity.
- Selectively expanding co-curricular sports, educational and after-school programs to enhance the overall student experience and foster positive relationships.
- Creating partnerships with the local and global community for co-curricular programs, particularly in the areas of service and citizenship.
- Engaging the broader school family of parents, alumni and parishioners in ways that meaningfully support the experience of current students and their families.

The following initiatives support the Student Experience objective:

### **1. EXCELLENCE IN ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING**

Identify existing and potential programs that do or can create competitive distinction. Review the school's current curriculum against various external and internal standards and reform it, as appropriate, to be collaborative, creative, interdisciplinary, technology rich and forward-thinking while being student-centered. Invest in the foundational subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic while finding pathways for superior performance in all subject matters. Further embrace and expand student access to personalized learning initiatives so each individual student can reach their full potential. Connect with our high-school educational partners to close any gaps in performance by our students. Foster professional development opportunities for our faculty that support this initiative and their own knowledge development.

## **2. POSITIVE STUDENT INTERACTIONS**

Deliberate professional development action plans will be designed to implement changes as it relates to positive learning and classroom management, with the intent to create an environment of “predictability and support” that celebrates success. We will build supports and reinforcements to foster social and emotional growth, a positive, connected community and consistent expectations for our faculty and students.

## **3. WELL-ROUNDED STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

In line with our values-based education, we are committed to exploring opportunities for service in action for our school community. We will engage students to be compassionate, considerate and active citizens in the local and global community. In addition, we will continue to find ways to increase our after-school programming in sports, arts and education that fosters both individual talents as well as teamwork, leadership, and social development while improving the overall health and well-being of the students we serve.

### **ACTION STEPS**

- Create a leadership position focused on curriculum development and success.
- Further enrich our Catholic identity including the adoption of new Diocesan initiatives and successful integration of the School Chaplain role.
- Continue to refine our math programming and resource allocation to create multiple student pathways.
- Innovate our science curriculum to be more interactive and student-centered.
- Fully embrace and evaluate the recently introduced personalized learning initiative as well as the new elementary reading program.
- Explore more innovative in-school programming in technology, arts, theater and public speaking to demonstrate flexibility and advancement in our educational offerings.
- Evaluate scheduling to create more opportunities for unique classroom offerings and deeper focus in foundational subject areas.
- Develop an intentional service calendar with designated leadership with active, age-appropriate opportunities for our community - including refocusing of Catholic Schools Week to be on service.
- Revisit the school handbook to update the policy and procedures related to social and emotional conduct and growth.
- Ensure the continued promotion, support and expansion of St. Thomas sports programs.
- Provide a technology-rich environment integrated throughout the St. Thomas experience, forming a responsible and technologically advanced learning community.
- Promote the St. Thomas Spring Musical and expand the “Beyond the Bell” and other afterschool programs including opportunities in music instrumentation, STEM, high-school test preparatory, art and competition clubs.

St. Thomas will strive to create an environment of purpose, collaboration and excellence for our faculty and staff. This will obligate us to deliver opportunities for intellectual advancement and career progression for our faculty as well as create an ecosystem where the faculty feels rewarded and valued. This will lead to competitive advantages in hiring and retaining our faculty and staff as well as foster positivity and consistency to the benefit of the entire school community.

**This strategic objective focuses on:**

- Recruiting and retaining the very best leadership, faculty and staff.
- Creating opportunities for effective and purposeful professional growth and advancement.
- Ensuring that evaluations of and feedback on faculty performance are consistent, timely and value enhancing with corresponding action plans for improvement, if needed.
- Promoting collaboration among faculty members.
- Creating multiple layers of support for our faculty to enhance their overall teaching experience.

The following initiatives support the Faculty objective:

**1. REDESIGN OF FACULTY SALARIES**

Beginning in 2022-23 school year, St. Thomas will have implemented phase 1 of its initiative to restructure faculty compensation. This phase will provide for a substantive increase in faculty base salaries to be more competitive to the area public school system while acknowledging the mission of St. Thomas. Additional financial reward for our faculty will result from the design and subsequent implementation of a Merit Pay Program. The Merit Pay Program will incentivize teachers to grow, innovate and improve, and financially reward and recognize exceptional performance of our educators. Development of this program will require input from the faculty, administration and Diocese to determine expectations, metrics, mastery levels and process for performance evaluations.



## **2. EXPANDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

This initiative focuses on a detailed analysis and schedule of short-term and long-term professional development goals. This will include department related training as well as school-wide training in classroom management and social-emotional learning. We will also seek to create a pool of funds for specific training opportunities both sought out by and suggested for individual faculty members.

## **3. RECONFIGURE FACULTY SPACES**

In order to achieve our objective for effective collaboration, we need to create more spaces conducive to conversation and small group meetings. As part of the Master Facility Plan, we will include a renovation of the current faculty lounge as well as create additional settings in both the middle and elementary school areas to promote work efficiency, collaboration and reprieve.

## **4. EVALUATION OF FACULTY TOOLS**

To achieve our goals for the Faculty initiative and academic excellence for our students, St Thomas must remain committed to continually evaluating the best soft and hard tools for an enhanced classroom experience. This includes technology, teaching materials and access to substitute teachers.

## **ACTION STEPS**

- Establish a committee led by faculty to devise, adopt and roll-out a Merit Pay Program.
- Complete the design, in concert with the faculty, of effective spaces for faculty engagement.
- Actively expand the substitute program as well as volunteer opportunities for specific skill building and coverage in case of faculty absences.
- Fulfill the professional development goals funded by EANS and create a priority matrix for additional PD resources.
- Research and adopt a formalized faculty annual review process.
- Roll-out and complete the faculty desktop replacement program.
- Systemically improve the classroom experience with upgrades to desks, cabinets and other classroom equipment and tools.



St. Thomas will implement a marketing and public relations effort that helps promote the school's identity within its target markets and core constituencies – current and prospective students and their families, alumni, parents of alumni and community leaders.

**This strategic objective focuses on:**

- Promoting the mission and vision of the school.
- Creating and achieving the school's desired brand identity and awareness in its target markets through public relations and marketing.
- Maintaining two classes per grade.
- Growing enrollment.
- Further establishing and leaning into our physical location.

The following initiative supports the Marketing objective:

**1. MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PLANNING**

We will create a comprehensive public relations and marketing plan that includes items to be implemented and communicated to students, faculty and alumni. Our plan will include both internal and external ideas with an emphasis to maintain and increase enrollment and funding.

## ACTION STEPS

- Hire a part-time marketing and development professional or external service provider.
- Focus on maintaining current enrollment, with keen attention on grades K-5.
- Develop updated marketing materials to include “St. Thomas at a Glance” and quick facts about programming and academics.
- Expand school enrollment, marketing and retention programs.
- Develop the school’s planned calendar of events.
- Continue to update the school website as well as other social media platforms (Instagram/Facebook) to connect with current families and alumni.
- Promote developments in current curriculum, extracurricular, and student life activities and inform parents/community of any new programs and student/alumni achievements.
- Create more opportunities to get potential families on-site, specifically targeting students during key transition years.
- Increase enrollment through effective communication to target markets and personally following up with families that show interest in enrolling.
- Create a standard protocol for recruiting/gathering information from prospective families.
- Improve the admission and onboarding processes.
- Review mission statement.
- Enhance internal communication with our families on our goals, pathways, etc.
- Seek and inform sources of third party validation.
- Coordinate efforts with development team.



St. Thomas will ensure that all programs are resourced appropriately to achieve the highest standards of excellence. Resources include appropriate operating budgets, faculty, space, technology and leadership commitment.

**This strategic objective focuses on:**

- Properly managing operating costs.
- Refining, communicating, and implementing long-term fiscal and physical master plans that prioritize components for maintenance, upgrades, technological innovation and new construction based upon student learning needs, allowing for flexible phasing.
- Implementing an annual review process to reassess urgent priorities, realigning plans as necessary.
- Implementing a process for approving and reallocating resources to the most urgent priorities.

The following initiatives support the Resources objective:

### **1. FACILITY RENOVATION**

A comprehensive Master Facility Plan will be developed in concert with the landlord of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School. The Plan will be developed in order to assess space configuration and utilization, in line with future needs and programmatic plans. An aggressive timeline based upon realistic funding plans will be established to methodically execute the initiatives identified in rank order by priority. In addition, a standard maintenance schedule, including improvements to the school's health and safety profile, will be developed to improve the appearance and functionality of certain spaces and integrated into the annual operating budget.

### **2. TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

A Technology Plan will be developed and adopted to ensure that St. Thomas' technological infrastructure remains current with orderly replacements and upgrades funded from the operating budget. In addition, a technology committee of the Student Advisory Board (SAB) will be charged with staying current on the latest educational developments and incorporating them into the long-term updates to the Technology Plan.



## **ACTION STEPS**

- Commission a Master Facility Plan to assess space configuration and utilization in line with future needs and programmatic plans.
- Develop a 3-year Technology Plan that schedules the replacement of student and classroom technology on an orderly basis.
- Decommission the current server technology and ensure implementation of new teacher desktops to improve the Wi-Fi experience throughout the building.
- Create a partnership with a technology services company to assist with annual needs and help desk support.
- Source an experienced leader in technology to join the SAB and lead the technology assessment committee consisting of internal and external parties with responsibility for the Technology Plan.
- Provide increased training for faculty on technology and software, including that related to personalized learning and new SmartBoard technology.
- Finalize lease agreement between the Diocese of Bridgeport, the school and St. Thomas Aquinas Parish.



St. Thomas will develop sufficient funding for the long-term viability of the school.

**This strategic objective focuses on:**

- Executing a student recruitment plan to achieve target enrollment.
- Proactively managing student retention.
- Maximizing philanthropic giving from all constituencies.
- Achieving forecasted tuition pricing levels.
- Establishing an endowment.

The following initiatives support the Funding objective:

**1. DEVELOPMENT**

St. Thomas will seek to achieve significant growth in annual giving while simultaneously achieving major gift objectives sufficient to fund the Master Facility Plan and expand sources of financial assistance. Of particular importance will be an increase in the allocation of time devoted to development at the SAB, Home School Association (HSA) and administrative levels combined with a realignment of tactics and processes required to deepen and broaden donor relationships, access grant opportunities and maximize major gift successes. A core element will be defined alumni, grandparent and community involvement and engagement strategies.

**2. STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

This initiative focuses on multiple pathways to achieve planned enrollment objectives. Included in this initiative are student recruitment plans, student retention strategies, keen assessment of the changing feeder system and the various options and opportunities that could help to achieve enrollment objectives. The broader concept also includes the identification of additional personnel, programs, space and technology needed for appropriately supporting students who excel academically as well as those who may require more support.



### **3. PRUDENT TUITION MANAGEMENT**

In order to achieve our Student Experience and Faculty objectives, St. Thomas will undertake a formal review of its tuition to determine appropriate pricing to maintain modest operating income on an annual basis. Although we remain committed to offering a highly affordable tuition rate, and access to a Catholic education for all those who seek it, we expect that these objectives will require above average tuition increases (5-8%) over the next 1-3 years. Once we have right-sized the tuition to account for our enhanced faculty compensation including the Merit Pay Program, we expect go-forward tuition increases to be in line with historical standards of less than 5% annually in order to adjust for inflation, and provide for improved programming.

### **4. ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ENDOWMENT**

A plan will be developed for the establishment of an endowment fund to support the growing need for financial assistance as well as to supplement other areas of the operating budget.

### **ACTION STEPS**

- Realign the time spent from existing resources on the SAB, HSA and administrative office around a stronger major gift relationship management approach to advancement.
- Develop and implement an ongoing special gifts program (including planned giving) to build a culture of philanthropy, including a program that begins upon student graduation from St. Thomas.
- Develop a grandparent program to deepen their involvement, and relationship with the school.
- Complete a detailed analysis of tuition increases required over the next 1-3 years to support the recent narrowing of the salary gap between St. Thomas' faculty and their public school peers and implement the Merit Pay Program while understanding the school's competitive position in the market; communicate planned increases to the school community.
- Expand engagement opportunities such as an Alumni basketball game and High School Senior graduating mass to reconnect alumni and their families to the school.

## CONCLUSION

*The five identified strategic priorities* will inform our school behaviors and activities over the next three years (2022-2025). They are the pillars for our core action items and should help us identify the right way for us, as a school community, to stay true to our mission and our preferred vision for the future. Specific plans, benchmarks, timelines and accountability for all school constituencies will be developed with these five pillars in mind, with our progress and the overall plan reviewed regularly by the Student Advisory Board over the next three years.



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