

St. John the Baptist Diocesan High School Eastern Bus Service Continues to Expand

Jean-Paul Sartre is credited with saying *“Commitment is an act, not a word”*. In the spirit of showing their commitment to the Catholic families on the east end of Long Island, St. John the Baptist High School and the Diocese of Rockville Centre have not only continued, but have expanded the free bus service offered to students from eastern Long Island who attend St. John’s.

As a result, students from the East end have become one of the fastest growing groups of students at St. John the Baptist Diocesan High School. They are strong in number and growing thanks to a system of buses that the Diocese put into place to assure families from the East End of the continuity of their Catholic education. As Dr. Kathleen Walsh, Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese, noted: “Choosing St. John the Baptist for high school assures a robust program of outstanding academics, competitive sports, interesting extracurricular activities, and a rich spiritual life that can be best delivered with the large student population and the abundant resources St. John’s has to work with in West Islip.”

The bus service is provided by Montauk Bus, a family-run company owned by former Catholic school students. Working with the Diocese, Montauk Bus safely transports over 150 students to and from St. John the Baptist Diocesan High School. “The bus service provided by the Diocese was a really big deal for families from the east end.” said Karen Campisi, parent of one graduate and one current student. “We believe in the value of an education that focused on academics, character building, and the regular celebration of our faith. St. John the Baptist High School excels in all of these areas.”

In order to maintain the level of safety and security the Diocese was comfortable with, the pick-ups and drop-offs for these students are being done at Diocesan properties, including churches and schools. The Pastors of these churches have been very supportive. Fr. Jose Jacob, Pastor at Sts. Peter & Paul Church in Manorville, one of nine parishes that serve as bus stop locations said, “We were happy to provide support for this outstanding program that allows the children from our community to continue their Catholic education at the secondary level.” For Pastors of parishes with elementary schools, like Fr. John Sureau, Pastor of St. John the Evangelist Church in Center Moriches, this was even more important. “The express buses run right out of the parking lot we share with Our Lady Queen of Apostles Regional Elementary School.” said Fr. Sureau. “The free bus offered by the Diocese means that we can deliver the complete Nursery through 12th Grade experience for the children of our parishioners, providing the continuity in education and faith that our families desire.”

Since we are interested in making our students as safe on their trip to school as they are in school, the Diocese implemented another level of security to assure the safety and convenience of our riders. Site Coordinators – a group of caring parents, parishioners, and members of Catholic community service groups like the Knights of Columbus, were designated at each stop to provide an adult presence at the stop, to keep an eye out for any threats to our children, and now, to perform important tasks during this COVID-influenced time like help to monitor the temperature of students as they board the bus. “We provide more than just a set of eyes and ears at each stop.” said Gene Johann, Grand Knight of the Rocky Point Chapter of the Knights of Columbus. “We’re there to assure that every student is healthy when they board, and that they get picked up at the end of their day so we never leave anyone stranded.” continued Johann.

Needless-to-say, hiring a fleet of Wi-Fi equipped, air-conditioned buses represents a significant expense to St. John the Baptist Diocesan High School and the Diocese. When asked about the expense, Tom Doodian, Chief Financial Officer for the Diocese of Rockville Centre, commented, “Our primary interest here is supporting our Catholic families and their children, and continuing to make their choice of Catholic education the best decision they make as parents.”

Parents have been very receptive to the prospect of continuing their children’s education at a world-class high school like St. John’s. “The decision to provide the free bus service makes it easy to choose a quality Catholic education.”, said Melissa DiMaria, parent of two Seniors at St. John’s. “The bus is clean and comfortable, it allows the kids to study, to rest and to be with their friends.” continued DiMaria.

Currently there are three lines, identified by color, that start in Southampton, Riverhead and Wading River. The express service makes the 40+ mile trip in 90 minutes or less for the most distant students. During the first trimester St John’s is running an alternating day schedule that keeps the number of students on any one bus limited to allow for social distancing. Students are digitally scanned to assure they don’t have a fever before boarding, masks are a requirement, and special loading procedures help keep everyone healthy. The Diocese anticipates adding a new line in January if health restrictions allow the school to resume a full 5-day, all-students program.

“The eastern Long Island bus service continues to grow, serving 15 to 20% more students each year since it was introduced three years ago.” stated St. John’s Principal, Mr. Biagio Arpino. “The rapid growth of students from the East End is testimony to the continued demand for the great Catholic secondary education we provide at St. John’s.” continued Arpino. “As stewards of Catholic education, we educate our students in the faith, we worship as believers, and we live our Catholic social values. But before we do any of that, you’ve got to get here, and the free bus service makes that attainable for everyone.”

Information on St. John the Baptist Diocesan High School and on the Eastern Bus Program can be found on St. John’s web site: <https://stjohnthebaptistdhs.net>