

Saint Mary School Community – State of the School - 2023

Foreword: In a recent workshop meeting with Bernadette Dougherty, the Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools in the Office of Catholic Education, the Saint Mary Catholic School community was encouraged to publish an annual STATE OF THE SCHOOL statement. The objective is to provide information and insight on the current programs, plans, and provisions being made on behalf of the students and their families. The hope is that this message will better inform the stakeholders of the successes and the areas for growth which the school and community are experiencing.

Catholic Identity:

As part of the school mission statement, the school commits to embedding into the daily life of the school an acknowledgment and expression of our Catholic beliefs and values. We do this in myriad ways, but our adherence to this mission is visible in:

- A commitment to daily prayer – with student-led prayers in the morning, before and after lunch and recess, and before dismissal. In addition, teachers incorporate prayer and ritual into their classroom practices.
- School attendance at Mass – students attend 9:00 am. Mass at least twice each month, with school-wide attendance for student recognition (Light of Christ) and upper and lower school Masses in those months where there is no holy day of obligation.
- Student participation in solemn events such as the Christmas Pageant, Living Stations, Living Rosary, May Procession, and Reconciliation Services prior to the Christmas and Easter holidays.

Middle States Accreditation: In the spring of 2022, Saint Mary completed a Middle States Accreditation process, with the visiting team making a recommendation that Saint Mary receive accreditation. In the fall of 2022, that announcement was made and the process completed. The adopted goals of the Middle States Accreditation Team included those mentioned below.

- **Safety (medical emergency and first aid)** was one of the goals adopted by the MSA committee in the fall of 2019, before the pandemic. In light of the change of environment and circumstances, the team made some modifications to the original plan, adopting First Aid, CPR, and AED training to the list of items that may address preparedness.
 - In the fall of 2022, **all** staff members received First Aid, CPR, and AED training through an accredited Red Cross training program.
 - At present, all teachers and most staff members have active First Aid certifications.
 - A “Stop the Bleed” element of the training was of special note.
- **Campus Safety and Security** was also adopted as a focal point for Middle States.
 - In the fall of 2021, the school was able to acquire a PA Safe School Grant to improve the school access and surveillance capabilities, as well as to continue/upgrade emergency response notification.

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- In the Fall of 2022, Alertus installed a 911 Response Button in the main office. This device replaces the discontinued CLASS system device.
 - The Alertus button notifies county first responders, and
 - Also notifies local first responders in the event of an emergency.
- In the Spring of 2023, the Reliant/Verkada team installed three surveillance cameras at the main door (Stairway A), the performing arts entrance (Stairway B), and the main Cafeteria entrance.
 - *The cafeteria entrance does not have remote access at this time, as the door needs modifications to allow it to function via remote signal.*
 - *The Stairway B door is functional, but the door itself needs mechanical work.*
 - *Stairway A has been in operation for the 3rd trimester.*
 - *All staff members have been issued fobs which provide remote electronic access to the building.*
 - *All cameras are fully functional and in use.*
 - *In addition to a Knox Box at the school entrance, local police and fire personnel have been issued remote access fobs for their professional use in the event of emergency.*
- Phase 2 of the safety and security plan will include remote monitoring of interior doorways, as well as additional surveillance cameras.
- Matthew Roberto, School Safety Coordinator with the County, presented a training to all staff prior to the opening of school in 2022. This training was meant to emphasize preparedness, and to keep safety practices top of mind for the teachers and staff members.
- Mr. Roberto also completed an inspection of the campus and facilities.
- This report was shared with the facilities personnel for the school and parish. Some of the suggested corrections or modifications have been addressed already.

• Preparedness and Practice

- In concert with Mr. Roberto's presentation, the staff reaffirmed its commitment to best practices in terms of building supervision and student supervision.
 - Teachers keep all door handles locked, even when doors are propped open, to make a lockdown or lockout more efficient and expedient.
 - Students travel in pairs in any instance where they need to travel on campus, or between floors of the building without adult supervision.
 - Students on campus grounds to run errands or complete 'tasks' will always have a student 'buddy' with them.
- Also supported by Mr. Roberto's review was the current practice of emergency drills which the students and staff have conducted.
 - Drills are conducted monthly.
 - We have conducted fire drills, lockout drills, and piggy-back drills, where one type of response is followed by another.
 - We have had teachers discuss and/or simulate what students would do in the event of a severe weather drill, or in the event of a threat inside the building.
- All class rooms have an emergency binder.

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- The emergency manual binder contains information on how teachers should manage each of the four main responses to safety threats:
 - Evacuation
 - Shelter in Place
 - Lockout
 - Lockdown
- In addition, each manual has contact information for each student in the building.
- Contact information for staff members is also included.
- Each manual has a red/green alert page; teachers will hold up the green page when all students are safe and accounted for. Red pages will signal a missing student, an 'extra' student who was separated from his/her class, or other emergency.

• Language Arts – ELA

- **Writing** was adopted as a goal by the MSA team for Saint Mary's in the fall of 2021, and initial steps undertaken to make improvements.
- Currently, the teachers in Grades 1-8 are formally adopting and codifying the range and scope of writing assignments.
- By the end of the school year, grades K-8 will have gathered materials to show the range and scope of the writing assignments that will be included in each trimester.
- **The Next Step** for the 2023-2024 school year will be to select Anchor Papers that will serve as Exemplars for the range of writing expectations for each grade level. Included in this process will be the articulation of domains that will be used to assess the writing itself, e.g. Organization, Development, Style, Mechanics, Focus, Conventions, etc.
 - Naturally, the expectations for the primary grades will reflect their developmental status in regard to written expression.
 - Domains will become the focus in the middle grades to a much larger extent than in the early grades.

• Science – STREAM

- Development of the **Science** program was one of the goals of the 2016 Middle States Accreditation application. Unfortunately, a number of factors impeded the progress of this action plan, including the suspension of the science lab program in response to the COVID 19 precautions, and changes in staff.
- Consequently, the Science program is again the focus in the 2022 MSA plan.
- By 2028 – the time of the next MSA process - the goal is to have implemented a more clear and comprehensive description of how science standards are managed throughout grades K-8.
- In the **2022-2023** school year, the following focal points have been addressed.
 - The Science Lab has been returned to active duty, with the adoption of a NGSS program

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- Science tables have been added to the lab room, with an improved capacity to conduct legitimate experiments and inquiry.
- Equipment has been purchased, including hardware such as test tubes, slides, and microscopes, to support next year's lab-oriented program.
- Students have been trained in the use of interactive notebooks which provide the opportunity to harness scientific methodology in their daily lives.
- The students prepared and presented **Science Expo** projects for the second year in a row, after an extended period where the various types of science fairs were not held.
- The plan for 2023-2024 is to expand the scope and range of STREAM projects, with an expanded range of projects and objectives. Many of these projects may be undertaken by the classroom teachers in their own classrooms. Support will be provided through the STREAM coordinator at the local and Archdiocesan level.

• Academic Program

- Some of the academic program enhancements have been included in the report on the MSA goals. There are, however, other mechanisms beyond those adopted as part of the Middle States process.
- Students in grade K-5 have gradually adopted the combination of the Fountas and Pinnell leveled Reading program, in addition to Wilson Language resources. For 2023-2024, grades 1-3 plans to use the global/basal reading series that is part of the Fountas-Pinnell program. Currently, only 2nd grade is using the basal program, though ALL grades, K-5, are using the leveled reading program materials.
- In the ELA resource program, all materials have been updated to use the latest or most recent series by the respective publishers.
- In the upper school, all the grades have added to the list of trade books from which teachers may be able to choose a broader range and more current set of materials. These additional resources have been added in the past two years.
- **Educational Technology:** As of the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, all students will be able to operate in a 1:1 environment.
 - Students in grades 3-8 have been issued Chromebooks, which they are able to use to maximize their learning opportunities in a multitude of subjects.
 - Students in grade 5-8 are able to use their machines at home and at school, and are responsible for maintaining the devices in a fully-charged and viable operation.
 - Students in grades 3-4 have access to their own devices, which are kept on-site in a charging cart. Devices are accessed at the discretion of the teacher and are used primarily for specific academic exercises.
 - Students in K-2 will be using Apple iPads in 2023-2024. **Machines were delivered in late winter, but the software and charging stations necessary to make them operational has still not all arrived.*
- **Educational Technology:** During this past year, Saint Mary has been able to replace SMART technology with **Promethean Boards**, the latest, state-of-the-art presentation

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board in use. All classrooms have been outfitted with a presentation board, expanding the ability of teachers and students to engage in collaborative and cooperative learning activities.

• **Enrichment/Learning Support Programs/Student Services**

- Saint Mary has run an Accelerated Math program for the eligible Math students for many years. Students in Grades 5-8 may qualify for inclusion through teacher recommendation, terra nova achievement scores, and grade level report card achievements.
- Saint Mary's Media Arts program has long supported a student-produced Yearbook through their media arts special class. Students learn related skills during the first trimester, then help to compile the pages that comprise the annual publication
- Saint Mary is fortunate to have an extensive **Learning Support Program** to serve the needs of students with IEPs, 504s, or a screen-identified need for learning support. This program is largely a pull-out program where identified students receive additional support to address learning gaps.
- The school employs a **full-time, dedicated Learning Support teacher** to provide group and individual supports to classroom teachers. The LST works primarily with Reading and Math skills, but also provides support for all subjects when warranted.
- In addition, Saint Mary collaborates with the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit to provide learning support in Reading and Math to all students identified by an opening-of-school and mid-year screening.
 - Saint Mary currently serves more than 30 students in the **LST** program. These students meet with the LST in small groups, or in one-on-one situations where possible or necessary.
 - More than 30 students are also served by the MCIU support teacher. These students receive support in **Reading and/or Math** at levels commensurate with their screening results. Progress is monitored at the semester mark, with services adjusted where necessary or possible.
 - The MCIU provides **Speech therapy** on a weekly schedule, with more than 20 students receiving services as needed.
 - The MCIU also contracts with Saint Mary for **student counseling**, with caseloads fluctuating throughout the year. The counselor holds group sessions with classes as requested, and also meets with some students weekly. A number of students have requested access on an as-needed basis.
 - Saint Mary also has an MCIU **nurse** who provides oversight on a weekly basis. The nurse maintains official records of physicals, eye examinations, immunization compliance, and periodic state-required screenings for height, weight, and hearing.

• **Co-curricular/Extracurricular Activities**

- Students participate in a variety of CYO sports, with volleyball, basketball, and track being the most widely chosen sports.

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- Depending upon availability, students may also select teams in soccer, field hockey, cross country, lacrosse, and others as interest dictates.
- Saint Mary has a vibrant and popular performing arts program. Among the annual opportunities for theater arts are the following:
 - 7th Grade Play – this presentation is usually scheduled in December, and may involve students in other grades if necessary.
 - Seraphim Choirs performs a Christmas concert at Saint Philip Neri each winter in support of their senior program.
 - Both the Seraphim and Cherubim Choirs participate at the Upper Salford Christmas Tree Lighting each winter.
 - The choir also performs at school masses throughout the school year.
 - The choir contributes each year to the Memorial Day celebration.
 - Christmas Pageant – this is scheduled in the days leading up to Christmas, usually the final day of school for Christmas break.
 - Spring Musical – this is an extensive production with three weekend performances and a school-wide rehearsal. It is usually scheduled for the end of April.
 - Dinner Theater is a performance involving upper grade students.
 - Living Stations is a liturgical rendering of the Stations of the Cross, with 8th grade students serving as the primary performers.
 - In addition to these formal shows, students are also encouraged to participate in the Talent Show at the end of Catholic Schools Week.
 - Each spring, the music department and the art department also hold a Student Showcase that highlights student artwork throughout the building, as well as a recital/performance of instrumental and vocal performances.
 - For the Christmas Bazaar each year, classes are scheduled for musical performances that are part of the entertainment for patrons of the bazaar in Hedge Hall.
 - Parades?
- Student Government/Student Council hosts school dances three times per year, and also supports school spirit activities throughout. Student council takes an active role in seasonal celebrations and orchestrates food drives, clothing drives, and other charitable service projects as they are presented.
- In the past two years, students have participated in Saint Mary's own Religion Bee during Catholic Schools Week, with the upper school representative competing in the AOP Religion Bee in March.
- Mrs. Cornely, Ms. Pastorius, and Mrs. Fox are all happy to report the return of the Saint Mary Book Fair just a few weeks ago. Mrs. Fox is excited to expand the library catalog after the community raised more than \$2500 in our recent Book Fair.
- **Chess Club and The School Newspaper Club and Library Club were born this past year.** At the request of students and parents, the clubs were very successful, building excitement and adding members through the school year.

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- The Chess Club formed in September and grew in popularity throughout the year. The students were excited to hold an end-of year tournament in the spring.
- The School Newspaper set a goal of publishing one issue per trimester, with articles, pictures, and execution carried out exclusively by students, with oversight by the club advisor.
- The Library Club was created at the request of students, and has operated during the recess period on an advisor-directed basis.
- The **Zumba Club** ran again this Spring, thanks to Mrs. Wizimirski.
- Enrollment/Marketing/Advancement/Finances
 - **Enrollment** - For the majority of the 2022-2023 school year, Saint Mary maintained a K-12 enrollment of 176-180 students. Those numbers were fluid, as there were students who were added throughout the year, as well as students who withdrew in circumstances where the family relocated.
 - The Agnus Dei Academy has seen an increase in enrollment this year, with the PK 3 and PK 4 programs maintaining an enrollment of 37 students for the majority of the school year.
 - The latest projections for the 2023-2024 School Year are 181- K-8, and 40 -ADA.
 - ***Kindergarten currently maintains a commitment of 25 students, with as many as 12 students uncommitted or assigned to a waiting list.***
 - ***ADA maintains a waiting list at the PK 4 level.***
 - The Office of Enrollment and Advancement has expanded its reach this year, maintaining active engagement on multiple social media platforms.
 - In addition, Mrs. Giampa is currently determining how to best use FACTS, our student information system platform and the billing and tuition platform to most effective and efficient use.
 - **FACTS** has been the platform in place for tuition and billing for a number of years, but the recent migration from Option C to FACTS for student management will allow for a greater facility with integration.
 - **FACTS** will allow a central portal for school communications, with components in place to post announcements, updates, flyers, etc.
 - **Marketing** – In addition to the added exposure provided by social media accounts, the Office for Enrollment and Advancement has also partnered with local print and digital platforms, such as the Mercury, The Sanatoga Post, and other news sources to cover the events that serve as signature moments for the community. Saint Mary's has garnered feature articles in the regional Education Guide during the past two years.
 - The Office for Enrollment and Advancement has also been involved in the Harleysville County Fair Days Parade, the Memorial Weekend Flea Market and Food Truck Festival.
 - Families throughout the community have also generously participated in promoting Saint Mary through yard signs within their communities.
 - **Advancement** – The Parish and the Office for Advancement and Enrollment have each pursued an expansion of the BLOCS and EITC support that is available for financial aid. With the help of Kevin Kelly from the Foundation for Catholic Education, the Parish and School have embarked on a plan to make Saint Mary attractive and affordable to a wider

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range of families. Presentations after Masses, and a Wine and Cheese event in February were each successful in recruiting participants in the EITC, OSTC, or SPE programs. ***All families are encouraged to complete applications for financial aid when they register/re-enroll for the upcoming school year.***

- **Finances** – In the fall of 2019, the School and Parish undertook the formation and development of a Board of Limited Jurisdiction. This board has been instrumental in helping to develop the operational budget for the school. In concert with the Parish Business Office, and overseen by the Pastor, a Board of Limited Jurisdiction undertakes a mission to ensure that the school is financially viable, and that the operation is sustainable over time.
- For the 2022-2023 School year, the school finance committee has set its **fundraising goal at \$100,000.**

It is important to note that this amount is the projected difference between the tuition revenue and the operational costs. Tuition itself DOES NOT cover the cost of running the school.

- **Annual Fundraisers:**
 - **Race for Education** – is the first of the annual fundraisers. Set in the fall, and initiated near the opening of school, the RFE has generally reached its goal of \$33,000 through the broad support of the student body and their families.
 - **Lucky Lottery Calendar** – is the 2nd fundraising drive of the year. In concert with the PA Daily Lottery, the parish and school community seek to ‘purchase’ 1000 3-digit numbers, awarding prizes for daily matches, and special prizes selectively assigned to random dates. These ‘extra’ prizes are sometimes big-ticket items, such as electronics. The Lucky Lottery goal is also \$33,000.
 - **Beach Bash Bonanza Raffle** - is an end-of-year community party, centered upon a beach theme. For the past two years, BLJ member Chip Panico has donated food and drink for the event, and participants have prepared desserts for the gathering. Families and friends reserve tables, and enjoy a FREE night of fun, music, food, and conviviality in Father Hedge Hall. The sale of \$50 raffle tickets, with a chance to win thousands of dollars in prizes, generate the proceeds that help to reach the \$33,000 goal.
 - **Saint Mary Golf Outing** – is a summer event intended to add to the Budget Revenue on a somewhat smaller scale. Proceeds run from \$5,000 to \$10,000 each year. The Golf Outing is followed by a Dinner opportunity where the entire community is invited to participate.

Fundraising goals target the projected difference between the tuition revenue and the operational costs. Tuition itself DOES NOT cover the cost of running the school. Families are asked to sell sponsorships, calendars, and raffle tickets beyond the scope of the Saint Mary Community.

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- **Community Events:**

- Saint Mary hosts a Saint Mary Feast in the Fall. The weekend features The School celebrates our local Veterans and pays tribute to the those who have served as part of our annual Memorial Day Celebration.
- HASA, our Home and School Association, also organizes and oversees school community events such as Movie Nights, Trunk or Treat, Father-Daughter Dance, Mother-Son Golf, Mother-Daughter Tea, and other 'new' events as selected each year. In addition, HASA provides support for celebrations and support of the teachers, as well as grade-level celebrations throughout the school year.

- **Looking Ahead to the 2023-2024 School Year.**

- **CARES** – Saint Mary is planning to revive a CARES program for the 2023-2024 School Year. The Indian Valley YMCA is collaborating with the school to provide help and support for before and after school hours.

Details will be provided before the end of the school year.

- **Proposed CARES Services** will run from 7:00 am. to 8:30 am., and from 3:15 pm. to 5:30 pm.
- Prospective sites for services will be Hedge Hall and the Cafeteria.
- *The viability of the program will be dependent upon family use of the services. Families will be asked to select a numbers of days per week each month (either 3 or 5), as well as choosing the time slot – am. or pm.*
- *If possible, in accordance with staffing requirements, families will be able to arrange for 'drop-in' CARES services on a daily basis, with a daily rate due at time of service.*
- *The YMCA is a licensed child care facility, so all state-mandated regulations will be in place.*

- **DHS Licensing**

- At the directive of the State and subsequent requirement of the AOP, the Agnus Dei Academy has begun the process of gaining licensing as an Early Childhood Learning Center.
- The prospective schedule is for the ADA to submit its application for licensing at the start of the 2024-2025 School Year.
- That process, when completed, will provoke a need for a Director of the ADA Early Childhood program.

- **Staffing and Personnel**

- Saint Mary is currently searching for two staff positions through the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.
- Projected staff needs include a Full-time ELA teacher, grades 5-8.

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- Projected staff needs also include a part-time Math teacher, 5-8.

- **Facilities**

- In addition to the recently-completed repairs to the electricity lines on the campus, as well as the repairs to the waste water system, the Parish, School, and BLJ have been making plans to address other facilities issues.
- Plans and remediation efforts are on the table for roof repairs and upgrades. Built into the operating budget are long-range capital projects for the school, including upgrade or repair of the HVAC system, and eventual replacement of the roof.
- In a Safety Report from Matthew Roberto referenced earlier in this document, a recommendation for back-fill and other sidewalk/parking lot repairs are discussed. Some of these issues have been attended to during the recent repairs to electric and waste water lines already mentioned.

Postword: This document is an attempt to report on the current state of affairs for the Saint Mary Catholic School and Community. In no regard is this document intended to be a comprehensive, detailed, and full description of all areas or all operations. Rather, the hope is that an annual report of the state of the school will help parents and stakeholders to feel informed and included in the overall status of the school. It is hoped that this information may provoke a more thorough understanding of the elements and components that are part of the life of the school. In addition, the hope is that parents and community members will be **encouraged and inspired to offer their time, their talents, and the expertise in helping the school to remain vibrant, strong, and financially sustainable for another 60 years.**