

REPORT OF FINDINGS

E275 - ST. FRANCIS DE SALES CATHOLIC SCHOOL
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DIOCESE OF LAS VEGAS



IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING 2012

**A SELF STUDY PROCESS
FOR CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

JANUARY 21-23, 2014

REPORT OF FINDINGS

for
E275 – St. Francis de Sales Catholic School

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PREFACE

We, the Visiting Committee, wish to commend you, the pastor, administration, faculty, staff, parents, and student body of St. Francis de Sales Catholic School for working together to make the school a loving, caring and learning environment. We pray that the good work that you have done and the plans that you have made for the future will help you become an even better school.

The team found our three days at St. Francis de Sales Catholic School professionally rich and personally rewarding. We experienced a community where everyone is striving to provide a Catholic environment where quality education is a priority.

We wish to thank all of you, pastor, principal, faculty, staff, parents and students for your warm and gracious hospitality.

May the Christ we serve bless you with every success as you journey into your future.

Chapter 1: Introduction

A. How the Self Study was Conducted

The Visiting Committee observed that the Self Study process of St. Francis de Sales School occurred in an environment of collaboration among the administration and faculty and was completed over the timeframe of fourteen months. A Leadership Team was developed and chairs were assigned to various chapters of the Self Study. An electronic data survey form was utilized to better facilitate parent input. Parents and School Advisory Board members served appropriately on Self Study committees. Analysis of collected data was ongoing throughout the process.

There were no obstacles encountered in completing the Self Study. The school recognized that the process fostered a dialogue between and among staff members and shareholders of the school, which led them in developing a document focused on improving student learning.

B. Involvement and Collaboration of Shareholders in Completing the Self Study

Accreditation Factor #1: *The school involves all shareholders in data review, analysis and dialogue about perceived accomplishments in the area of student learning, and in developing, implementing and monitoring goals for improvements in student learning.*

The Visiting Committee observed that collaboration occurred within an environment of shared responsibility during the Self Study process and the entire process was considered to be highly effective. Besides administration and faculty members, additional members from the school community, including parents, students, school board and parish were appropriately involved in all phases of the process. The Visiting Committee is confident that shareholders will be kept informed throughout its upcoming six-year cycle.

Chapter 2: Context of the School

A. School Profile

The Visiting Committee observed that over the past six years the school has had stable demographics and is close to full enrollment, with only two fluctuations in enrollment. Therefore, no new trends were recognized in this area. Academically, there is consistent growth from year to year in each quartile of the quartiles of the *Terra Nova 3*, the national normed reference standardized assessment used by the Diocese of Las Vegas.

Parents, through Self Study findings and interviews, reflect very positive feedback and a genuine appreciation for all aspects of the school community. Parents feel that St. Francis de Sales graduates are very well prepared for high school. Student surveys and interviews confirm that they feel their teachers make learning fun and challenging and they appreciate that their teachers provide a great deal of individual assistance.

B. Use of Prior Accreditation Findings to Support High Achievement of All Students

Accreditation Factor #2: *The school has used the prior accreditation findings, both those discovered by the school and those identified by the Visiting Committee, and other pertinent data to ensure high achievement of all students and to drive school improvement.*

St. Francis de Sales School has been highly effective in responding to the results of the previous accreditation process in accomplishing identified actions of both the school and previous visiting committee. This has led to growth in student learning especially in the area of data analysis. Ongoing systemic data analysis to enhance student learning permeates the school's culture and clearly drives student learning within a strong faith environment.

The Visiting Committee observed that a cyclical maintenance plan has been established, which has already had a positive impact on the school budget with a 62% decrease in utility costs. The school has reduced the dependability on a parish subsidy. The principal models and nurtures leadership among the staff, school and parish.

Additionally, student learning has improved through the continued improvements in writing across the curriculum, as well as the ongoing development of technology. Over the past four years, the addition of the *My Access* writing program, use of *Thinking Maps*, increased use of technology, and a new Language Arts series have had a positive impact on the school's writing scores. Ongoing development of technology has occurred through continued staff development and funding to meet the needs of students. The school has developed a long range plan for the renovation of the present Church into a gymnasium, but due to the current economy, no set date for construction has been set.

Chapter 3: Quality of the School Program

A. Assessment of the School's Catholic Identity

Accreditation Factor #3: *The school is Catholic, approved by the Local Ordinary (Canon 803), providing opportunities for community worship and participation in the Sacraments, and promoting evangelization and service to the community.*

The Visiting Committee observed that the total school community is highly effective in their support of evangelization through the integration of the Roman Catholic Faith. The school is involved in prayer experiences and the reception of the Sacraments on a regularly scheduled basis. St. Francis de Sales is currently working to infuse Catholic values and principles of social teaching into all subjects using the Common Core Standards, through the Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative and *Ethics Across the Curriculum*. The adoption of *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* in grades K-2, nurtures the bond between God and the child through age-appropriate themes. The school plans on continuing the program, a grade level per year, until it is incorporated into all grades.

All teachers at St. Francis de Sales are certified catechists. Teachers regularly attend religious in-services and workshops through the Diocese and various parishes. Teachers are an integral part of all the religious activities, and ethical and social teachings that take place throughout the school year. St. Francis de Sales School is highly involved in community service. All classes and organizations are committed to a number of community outreach programs, which helps foster the Catholic Identity in the school. The primary mission of St. Francis de Sales is to be a community of faith that proclaims the Gospel. The principal's open door policy and support in all aspects of the school's religious activities shows the school as a true Catholic community.

St. Francis de Sales School recognizes that it needs to complete the training in The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Program and the need to infuse Catholic values and principles of social teaching into all subjects using Common Core Catholic Identity initiative.

B. Defining the School's Purpose

Accreditation Factor #4: *The school's purpose is defined through the school's mission statement, philosophy, measurable Schoolwide Learning Expectations, Arch/diocesan curriculum standards (local curriculum standards where Arch/diocesan standards don't exist), and other governing authority expectations.*

The Visiting Committee observed that St. Francis de Sales School is highly effective in defining the school's purpose. The school's mission, philosophy, and SLEs are reflected in the Catholic nature of the school. They address Catholic leadership, provide spiritual welfare and model the teachings of Jesus as well as reflecting a commitment to Catholic identity. All shareholders are encouraged to read and review the revised Mission Statement, Philosophy, and SLEs and offer comments and recommendations.

The Parish and school work together on the Catholic formation of the students through Sacramental formation, weekly Masses, prayer services, Faith Family activities, community events, and a strong service ministry. The Schoolwide Learning Expectations flow from the mission and philosophy and the parish and school work in unison to support each entity's role as a ministry to the Catholic community. The SLEs are clearly displayed in all learning locations in the school. The overall consensus among the faculty and staff is that the SLEs are strongly reflected in documents and lived out among the students and staff of the school.

C. Organization for Student Learning to Support High Achievement of All Students

Accreditation Factor #5: *The organizational structures of the school focus on high achievement of all students, and communicate student progress to all shareholders.*

The Visiting Committee observed that the administration and staff of St. Francis de Sales School is highly effective in maintaining organizational structures that are understood by all shareholders. The school focuses its organizational structures on student learning, through the collaborative efforts of the faculty, staff, pastor, School Advisory Council, principal, and parents. An open door policy, weekly prayer meetings, and monthly staff meetings provide teachers with opportunities to communicate with regard to curriculum, student progress, and teaching methods. The staff has a good working relationship and is generous in sharing teaching strategies and providing help to one another.

D. Data Analysis and Action to Support High Achievement of All Students

Accreditation Factor #6: *The school uses educationally sound assessment processes to collect data. The school disaggregates and analyzes student performance data and uses the analysis as a basis for instructional/curricular improvement.*

The Visiting Committee observed that St. Francis de Sales School is highly effective in the use of educationally sound assessment processes to collect, disaggregate and analyze student performance data. The staff disaggregates, analyzes, and generates reports on a variety of student assessments throughout the year. Informal and formal assessments are used to adjust the pacing and content of lessons. Summative assessments check for mastery of standards. If assessments, observations, or teacher recommendations indicate that students are struggling/excelling in a particular area, then differentiated instruction, leveled reading and math grouping, and modified instruction are utilized.

St. Francis accommodates diverse learning styles through the use of technology and varied teaching strategies. Through the analysis of data and taking into account enrollment trends and finances, the administration is able to allocate resources, which meet student needs and impact student learning. St. Francis de Sales realizes the need to continue to utilize assessment data to address the needs of all students.

E. High Achievement by All Students Toward Clearly Defined SLEs and Curriculum Standards

Accreditation Factor #7: *All students make acceptable and measurable progress toward clearly defined Schoolwide Learning Expectations and challenging, comprehensive, and relevant curriculum standards.*

The Visiting Committee observed that the school is highly effective in their use of the Schoolwide Learning Expectations and standard-based curriculum to support high achievement of all students. This ensures progress by all students in the way they incorporate Catholic values with standard based curriculum.

The school has incorporated Catholic values into the curriculum and ties their SLEs to their instruction. The curriculum at St. Francis de Sales strives to be inclusive while challenging and motivating all learners. Through the use of technology and varied teaching strategies, the teachers at St. Francis de Sales plan and conduct classes that value diverse learning styles.

St. Francis de Sales has a set of clearly defined measured SLEs. Teachers document the SLEs and objectives taught within their lesson plans and they are displayed within the classroom environment. The SLEs at St. Francis support an environment which stimulates learning, promotes growth, and allows each child to attain his or her potential.

F. Instructional Methodology to Support High Achievement of All Students

Accreditation Factor #8: *The staff applies research-based knowledge about teaching and learning in the instructional process. Assessment is frequent and varied, integrated into the teaching/learning process, and informs curriculum planning.*

The Visiting Committee observed that St. Francis de Sales School is effective in utilizing a variety of teaching methodologies focusing on faith formation and academic achievement. There is adequate curricular planning and structure. Assessment is frequent and varied and is often used to modify teaching and learning. St. Francis has a curriculum that is guided by the goals and philosophy of its school and follows the curriculum guidelines adopted by the Diocese, *Teaching for the 21st Century*.

Students are given the opportunity to monitor their own progress through self-correcting assignments, participating in group activities, projects/assignments, reader's theater, drama ministry, publishing stories, proof-reading, playing games, working in learning centers, self-monitored reading, active listening, comprehension, and self-assessment activities. Many classes encourage peer tutoring and student led discussions. Each student spends time each week in the Technology Center to work on research, basic computing skills, or enrichment/reinforcement activities. Students in grades four through eight use technology to focus on the writing process through the My Access program.

G. Support for Student Spiritual, Personal, and Academic Growth

Accreditation Factor #9: *Within the school's community of faith, students have opportunities to participate in support services and activities to assist them in accessing the*

curricular and co-curricular programs to achieve the Schoolwide Learning Expectations, Arch/diocesan curriculum standards (local curriculum standards where Arch/diocesan standards don't exist), and other governing authority expectations.

The Visiting Committee observed St. Francis de Sales School highly effective in the support services and activities made available for their students. Saint Francis de Sales considers the mental and physical needs of all students. The school recognizes that the parents as the primary educators of their children. Through this joint collaboration with teachers and staff, the students are empowered to participate in the curricular and co-curricular programs of the school.

Through these activities students learn the importance of commitment, responsibility, and working cooperatively with others. Academic competitions among students and with other schools highlight and encourage students to do their very best while acknowledging their scholastic abilities and accomplishments. Technology and innovation have been incorporated into the school curriculum and activities.

H. Resource Management and Development to Support High Achievement of All Students

Accreditation Factor #10: *The pastor, principal, and school board develop, implement, and monitor resources and plans to ensure and support high achievement of all students of the Schoolwide Learning Expectations, Arch/diocesan curriculum standards (local curriculum standards where Arch/diocesan standards don't exist), and other governing authority expectations.*

The Visiting Committee observed that the pastor, principal and finance committee of St. Francis de Sales School are highly effective in the financial planning for the school. The school mission, philosophy, and School wide Learning Expectations are the groundwork by which the school population determines its needs and develops programs to support high achievement of all students.

The school has a set budgeting procedure that follows Diocesan and Parish directives. The school budget is program driven through responsible planning. It takes into account individual pupil cost, projected enrollment, hiring and retaining of well-qualified staff, and student needs.

Chapter 4: The Action Plan

A. Design and Alignment of the Action Plan with the Self Study Findings

Accreditation Factor #11 (*The Action Plan addresses the school's critical goals to enhance student learning that supports high achievement of all students of the Schoolwide Learning Expectations, Arch/diocesan curriculum standards (local curriculum standards where Arch/diocesan standards don't exist), and other institutional and/or governing authority expectations.*)

Schoolwide Lists of Significant Accomplishments and Critical Goals

Schoolwide Significant Accomplishments (the eight most significant determined by the VC)

1. Supportive and dedicated pastor, principal, faculty, staff, and School Advisory Council who ensure high achievement of all students.
2. Catholic Identity is alive and strengthened by *The Catechesis of The Good Shepherd* program.
3. SLEs are a lived reality and permeate the school and school community.
4. Excellent communication between the school and all shareholders.
5. Strong parent involvement which enhances curricular and co-curricular activities.
6. Challenging curriculum provides well-defined goals, fulfilling the school's Mission and SLEs.
7. Sound financial practices, planning, and stable enrollment sustain the school's programs.
8. Technology is integrated across the curriculum.

Critical Goals (identified by school)

1. Complete training in *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* program
2. Provide professional development to implement the Common Core in Mathematics and Language Arts
3. Incorporate 21st Century best practices and hands on opportunities to improve Science curriculum
4. Analyze effectiveness of SLE rubrics and student progress in achievement of SLEs
5. Infuse Catholic values and principles of social teaching into all subjects using Common Core Catholic Identity initiative

The Visiting Committee has observed that St. Francis de Sales School, because of its ongoing focus on high student achievement, is an exceptionally strong school for reasons cited in this Visiting Committee Report of Findings. The school is highly effective in aligning the Action plan to address the school's critical goals. There is analysis of all appropriate data/information about student achievement. The school's operations and programs support the identified critical goals.

Currently, there is a strong commitment to faith formation and high academic achievement. In relation to the school's first identified Critical Goal, complete training in *The Catechesis of The Good Shepherd* program, it is to be noted that the Visiting Committee concurs that this is one of the strengths of St. Francis de Sales School.

Per discussions throughout the accreditation visit, and to the credit of the school to ongoing school improvement, the principal and faculty have already begun working on their Action Plan. The school is required to revise its Action Plan and timeline within 45 days of the visit.

OPTION A: *Modification of a critical goal:*

NA

OPTION B: *Critical Goal Identified by the Visiting Committee:*

NA

B. Capacity to Implement and Monitor the Action Plan

Accreditation Factor #12: *The school demonstrates the capacity to implement and monitor an Action Plan that ensures high achievement of all students of the Schoolwide Learning Expectations, Arch/diocesan curriculum standards (local curriculum standards where Arch/diocesan standards don't exist), and other governing authority expectations.*

The Visiting Committee observed that St. Francis de Sales School is highly effective in the monitoring processes that are incorporated into the Action Plan. The goals and strategies of the Action Plan include ongoing and methodical assessment of the goals and strategies. Goals will be evaluated annually. The school staff and shareholders will monitor progress of the Action Plan. Shareholders are aware and appropriately involved in implementation of the goals and strategies. Evaluation results will be used to identify priorities and further actions for improvement. The Visiting Committee believes there are currently no impediments that would hinder the accomplishment of the Action Plan.

Visiting Committee Summary Thoughts:

The Visiting Committee observed, as indicated in this Report of Findings, that St. Francis de Sales School is exceptional with many blessings—an extremely supportive pastor; a principal that provides strong leadership; a dedicated and competent faculty and staff; committed parents; and eager students. These attributes, along with a solid financial base and quality programming, provides an educational environment in which maximum growth in relation to faith formation and academic achievement occurs for each student. Moving forward with strategic planning and action will only enhance the quality of this school.