

REPORT OF FINDINGS

ST. FRANCIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

2500 K STREET

SACRAMENTO, CA 95816

DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO



WCEA *Western Catholic
Educational Association*

AND

WASC

PROCESS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

JANUARY 27 -29, 2010

REPORT OF FINDINGS

St. Francis of Assisi Elementary School

2500 K Street

Sacramento, CA 95816

(916) 442-5494

Chairperson

Kay Purcell, Assistant Supt.
Archdiocese of Seattle
710 9th St.
Seattle, WA 98104-2017

Team Member

Antoinette Perez, Teacher gr. 8 & V.P.
Holy Trinity School
3115 Tierra de Dios Dr
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762

Team Member

John Rieschick, Principal
St. Patrick School
5945 Franklin Blvd.
Sacramento, CA 95824

Team Member

Cassandra Pearce, Teacher gr. 1
Notre Dame School
435 Hazel Street
Chico, CA 95928

Team Member

Jamie Zalud, Teacher gr. 4
St. Joseph School
11610 Atwood Road
Auburn, CA 95603

Preface

We, the visiting team, commend the pastor, principal, faculty and staff, parents and parishioners of St. Francis School for providing a culture of care that supports the academic growth and faith development of the students of the school. Our hope is that the self study process has enriched the school and will provide direction for future school improvement.

We are impressed with the sense of dedication and commitment that permeates the school and the joy reflected in the students that we encountered. It is clear that this is a strong school community rooted in its Catholic faith that celebrates diversity and provides a welcoming environment for all.

The visiting team is grateful for the hospitality we have experienced and the opportunity to briefly be a part of this richly blessed school community. We have grown professionally and personally by our visit to St. Francis School.

Part1: Context of the School

➤ School/Community Profile

Reference:

- School Self Study Chapter 1 (School Community Profile)

Comment on:

To what extent has the school identified and analyzed the major changes or trends since the last Self Study?

St. Francis School has done a thorough review of the demographics of the school community. A comprehensive breakdown of the school population by Catholicity, gender and ethnicity is included in the self-study, with an indication that they have remained steady since the prior accreditation.

The school surveys were done on Zoommerang. All stakeholders had input: students, families, staff and clergy. The students had a high rate of participation with positive responses. Sixty-nine families responded to the survey and their very positive comments particularly uplift the leadership change that has occurred since the last accreditation. It is clear that the survey results have been reviewed and reflected on by the school leadership.

Student achievement at St. Francis School is measured by the Diocesan Standards, which meet or exceed the California State standards. A variety of age appropriate assessments are used to assess student performance. Student progress is regularly reported online with mandatory student teacher conferences, and parent and teacher communication as needed.

St. Francis School has tracked post graduation high school placement, with the vast majority of students attending Sacramento area Catholic High Schools, although some decline, due to external factors, has been noted in recent years.

The staff of St. Francis School has varied levels of experience and a great range in age but share a strong sense of commitment to the school and belief in their school and the leadership. The number of staff who have children enrolled at St. Francis (18) speaks to their belief in the school as a quality source of education for students.

The student-teacher ratio at St. Francis School has remained stable with a class size of 32 in grades 1 – 8. A full or part time classroom aide assists each teacher.

At St. Francis School, discipline is an important part of educating the whole child. Since the last accreditation the new principal has created a culture where students report being treated with respect and parents value the safe environment of the school. Both the new Schoolwide Learning Expectations and the implementation of the “Acts of Courtesy” have enriched the school community.

The facility creates its own challenges. The 1923 building and the limitations of the school and parish grounds have both positives and negatives. Since the last accreditation new technology has been added to increase capacity for students and teachers. Also, the heating system was replaced in 2005. Surveys from parents, students and staff express concerns about the playground and lack of air conditioning.

Since the last accreditation there has been a marked increase in parent involvement. The pastor and the parents cite the principal's welcoming and inclusive attitude as the primary reason for the change.

The school participates in federal programs through Title II and IV. These provide services for staff development and technology. In conversation the principal noted that the new state of the art facility at a neighboring parish school could create some challenges for recruiting new families for St. Francis School.

Comment on:

To what extent is the Catholic identity of the school prominent including fostering healthy interactions among teachers, students, parents, stakeholders and the greater community?

St. Francis School is **highly effective** in developing Catholic Identity based on a multitude of factors. The mission and philosophy of St. Francis School speak to the integration of Catholic values and traditions as well as the connection to their Franciscan charism. The driving goal is an environment that "serves the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social and physical needs" of the students. The school has regular, meaningful opportunities to experience prayer, liturgy, and the sacraments. Each week begins with a schoolwide prayer service in the church. Students participate in a variety of prayer forms, such as Taize, Stations of the Cross, Alfombras, and the Rosary. The celebration of the Sacraments, Eucharist and Reconciliation, are important contributions to the students' spiritual development. The active engagement of the pastor with staff and students creates a strong connection between the school and parish.

All classroom teachers have their basic Catechist certification and catechetical training is a priority for the principal. Ninety-one percent of the staff feels that "religion certification and renewal is essential for every teacher." The staff values the importance of the spiritual dimension of the school.

The partnership with parents is visible in many ways. Eighty-eight percent of parents responded outstanding or good to the statement that the school recognizes parents as the primary educators. There are active efforts to encourage parent engagement in both the academic and spiritual development of their students.

From the mural of St. Francis School that greets you as you enter the school to the prayer intention book that is available at the school office entrance there are many and varied religious symbols that express the deep commitment of St. Francis School to teaching the faith and traditions of the church. Each classroom has religious symbols that reflect the Catholic Identity of the school.

➤ Progress Report

References:

- School Self Study Chapter 2: Progress Report
- Criterion #11: Use of Prior Accreditation Findings

Comment on:

To what extent have the prior accreditation findings and other pertinent data been used to ensure achievement of all students and have driven school improvement?

St. Francis School has been **highly effective** in addressing the areas of growth from their previous accreditation process.

Since the last accreditation visit St. Francis School has successfully built a stronger relationship with the parish. The pastor is actively engaged in the school. The students greatly value his contribution to their education. The principal has built a firm relationship with the parish and the parish staff. She participates in parish meetings and communicates with both staff and the parish about school events. Students and families are increasingly involved in parish life.

In the area of resource management, growth has occurred in involving more outside resources in the financial planning for the school. The creation of an alumni database as well as increased outreach through enhanced development programs like the newsletter and annual fund have addressed this area for growth. The school has been able to use fundraiser proceeds for special projects or needs instead of being included in the general operating budget, and this speaks to the advancement of financial planning.

Teachers have continued their religious certification through a variety of options from online and university coursework to retreats and videos provided by the school. There is strong administrative support for continued religious coursework.

Teachers and administration have worked to articulate the curriculum by collaborating on grade level standards to address the concern about curriculum articulation. This along with checklists to review curricular accomplishments keeps the principal informed of material covered in each classroom.

The last area for growth addressed the integration of the Schoolwide Learning Expectations into the lives of the students. This has been an area of success. The SLEs are recognized by the school community as the focus of the school. Students are recognized at SLE assemblies, the SLEs are visible throughout the school. Eighth graders culminate their career at St. Francis with an SLE project.

Students and staff use the SLEs to reflect on their practice. Moving forward there is an identified need to formalize ways to measure the achievement of the SLEs. St. Francis should be proud of the work that has been done to bring the SLEs alive in the school community.

Part II: Self Study Process

➤ Involvement and Collaboration in Self Study Process

References:

- School Self Study Introduction (Self-Study Process)
- Accreditation Criterion #1 (Involvement and Collaboration of Stakeholders)
- Key Outcome #1 (Involvement and Collaboration of School Community Members)

Comment on:

To what extent has there been involvement and collaboration of stakeholders in the school's Self Study process?

St. Francis School has been **effective** with the involvement and collaboration of stakeholders in the school's Self Study process.

Stakeholders were involved in a variety of ways in the self-study process. Committees of the staff were formed and they worked during the 2008-09 school year. Faculty, staff, and the parent community were asked for input to review the document in draft stages. The Advisory Commission and the Parents Club officers were given written and electronic drafts for input. All parents were welcome, through the family envelope to read and offer suggestions. Students were given an opportunity through the Student Council for input. Input from all sources was seriously considered and revisions were made in fall 2009.

Similar involvement existed in the process to review the Schoolwide Learning Expectations. That process began in 2006 with new leadership creating grade level teams to review the SLEs. When a draft of changes was available, it was presented to stakeholders for their review. The stakeholders included parents, students, school administration, and the pastor. Once approved by the school the revised SLEs were implemented but then revised again to better meet the needs of the school community.

The visiting team has noted that St. Francis School is working toward greater accountability of the school improvement process.

➤ Schoolwide Learning Expectations

References:

- Self Study Chapter 3 (Schoolwide Learning Expectations)
- Self Study Chapter 4 (Self Study Findings)
- Accreditation Criterion #2 (Defining the School's Purpose)
- Key Outcome #2 (Clarification Of School's Mission, Philosophy and SLEs)

Comment on:

- *Are the Schoolwide Learning Expectations an articulation of the school's mission and philosophy?*
- *How and to what extent are the SLEs integrated into the total reality of the school?*
- *How and to what extent are the SLEs and academic standards measured?*

St. Francis School is **highly effective** in defining the school’s purpose through the Schoolwide Learning Expectations and academic standards.

The SLEs artfully reflect their mission and philosophy. The SLEs are present throughout the school and there is strong evidence that the students have internalized these attributes. Staff understands the importance of the SLEs and their integral relationship to the academic standards. The visiting team observed multiple examples of the staff and students’ dedication to the SLEs.

The philosophy speaks of meeting the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social and physical needs of the students while the Schoolwide Learning Expectations present students as spiritual, academic, respectful, confident and responsible. The Schoolwide Learning Expectations are present throughout the school and are evident in the practice of both teachers and students.

The SLEs are measured and recognized in a variety of ways. The use of Mass Response Journals and the formal use of a culminating SLE project for eighth graders are commendable. The recognition of students by staff with both the Friday morning “SLE Awards Ceremony” and the “I Caught You Demonstrating a SLE” certificate keep the students aware and focused on the SLEs as the driving force of the school, as the visiting team observed.

The staff continues to move toward more measurement and reporting of the SLEs. Under discussion are grade level rubrics and personalizing report cards to reflect student achievement of the SLEs. These goals are reflected in the school’s Action Plan.

➤ **Assessment Process**

References:

- Self Study Report
- Accreditation Criterion #3 (Professionally Acceptable Assessment Process)
- Key Outcome #2 (Clarification of the Mission, Philosophy, SLEs)
- Key Outcome #3: (Assessment of the Actual Student Program and its Impact on Student Learning and Spiritual Development)

Comment on:

To what extent is a professionally acceptable assessment process used to collect, disaggregate and analyze student performance data to improve student achievement of the SLEs and academic standards?

St. Francis School is **effective** in using professionally acceptable assessment processes. Assessment results are the basis for regular evaluation and improvement of curriculum and instruction. Use of the ITBS and Diocesan standardized religion and math tests annually provides a report of student progress. The principal is to be commended for working with the faculty using the ITBS computer data (iRMS) to analyze data, identify curriculum weaknesses and spot trends. The principal works with whole faculty use of this data to support students.

Decisions about student placement, progress toward mastering the SLEs, progress toward diocesan standards, the allocation of resources for diagnostic testing, enrichment or support materials as well as new instructional materials, software, teacher training and supplemental materials are made based on assessment information. Information from assessment is also used for individual student adjustments of testing, assignments or special accommodations based on the recommendation of the Student Success Team.

At St. Francis School it is evident, that the faculty uses a variety of methodologies to assess student progress. These include both formal and informal testing, in addition to oral presentations, multimedia presentations, projects, reports, homework, class work, teacher observation, and peer observation. These assessments are used to target areas of intervention and enrichment. Twice a year, each student's reading comprehension is assessed. In addition, assessment measures, such as prior knowledge and multiple intelligence preference, are used to assist teachers in the desired grouping of students, this includes homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings.

The staff collaborates in using assessments to meet the needs of the students and to communicate student progress to parents. It is clear that assessment is ongoing and used to monitor and adjust program placement for students as well as the effectiveness of instruction and materials. The visiting team recommends continued training of staff in the systematic and strategic use of assessment data.

Part III: Quality of School Program

References:

- School Self Study
- Accreditation Criterion 4 (Student Progress Toward defined SLEs)
- Key Outcome #2 (Clarification of the Mission, Philosophy, SLEs)
- Key Outcome #3 (Assessment of the Actual Student Program and its Impact on Student Learning and Spiritual Development)

Comment on:

*To what extent is there evidence of acceptable progress by **all** students to attain SLEs, academic standards and other institutional and/or governing authority expectations?*

St Francis School is **highly effective** in meeting the needs of all subgroups of students. They identify and analyze multiple measures to keep current on student progress and student placement in programs. The school leadership provides training to the staff in analyzing student scores on the ITBS. Math and reading are tested twice yearly to check progress toward diocesan standards. The resource teacher works with teachers to identify areas of need for individual students. Students are placed in groups based on testing information for math and language arts at the middle school level. These groups are adjusted based upon on-going student assessment.

Longitudinal tracking of ITBS scores is present in core subject areas for the last three years. Commendable student growth is evident. School leadership compares the school's information to the diocesan achievement information. The school tracks the growth level of students to insure that they maintain expected development.

Comment on:

To what extent does the school act as an instrument for evangelization where the Gospel message is a lived reality throughout the total school experience?

St. Francis is **highly effective** as an instrument for evangelization where the Gospel message is a lived reality throughout the total school experience. Every member of the visiting team has observed evangelization as an expectation and product of the school community.

The religion in-depth report clearly demonstrates that throughout the entire year the students are steeped in rich, relevant, community and faith-building experiences. These encompass regular Mass participation, a variety of personal and community prayer experiences, active expressions of gospel values in Christian service projects, and formal study of the Catholic faith with the religion textbook and scripture studies.

St. Francis School provides a highly effective religion curriculum. It is deeply challenging, strongly coherent, relevant and meets the needs of all students. Further, a variety of assessment tools are used to measure the progress of all students toward educational standards, diocesan standards, and the SLEs. There is evidence throughout the Self-Study narrative and the surveys that the religion curriculum has a strong and positive impact on the students' spiritual development. The school challenges students to grow in faith, self-awareness, and community awareness through a wide variety of personal, partnered, school and parish activities. The school provides a coherent curriculum that addresses the educational needs of the students through writing, reading, speaking, reflection, dramatizations, and artistic creations. In particular, the numerous community-wide experiences enable all students to participate actively in their faith experiences in a coherent and vibrant manner.

The religion curriculum is fully relevant by addressing a variety of learning styles, with its process of connecting students to parish worship in the Mass Reflection Journals, and through the use of diocesan standards. There is abundant evidence in the student, parent and staff surveys demonstrating that the religion curriculum is fully integrated throughout the school and made relevant to students' lives. Further, many comments and survey responses support the fact that the school reaches all students and works toward their individual and corporate achievement of standard curricular goals and the SLEs.

There is inconsistent evidence, perhaps worthy of further review, to indicate the faculty regularly uses assessment data to improve the religion curriculum. The staff indicates the need to develop a rubric for the Mass Response Journal to measure student achievement of curricular goals and SLEs and to develop the continuum of learning in this schoolwide project. The visiting team recommends the staff pursue this goal to enhance the use of the diocesan religion assessment. This would provide more formal assessment data that could be used to plan improvements to the curriculum and to plan staff development.

The Catholic Identity of the school is evident in the students' commitment to the SLEs and the "Acts of Courtesy." The visiting team experienced students who positively and enthusiastically spoke and wrote about their spiritual growth. Parents value the strong Catholic Identity of the school. The commitment to faith formation and social justice is part of the fabric of the school. Teachers speak of the positive impact of the class-directed Monday morning prayer service.

The school and parish have improved the relationship and are moving toward a stronger one since the arrival of the principal. Even though some of the school families are connected to other parishes some shared that they participate at St. Francis for many school and parish related activities and liturgies. A substantial effort has been made to invite the parish to school events and build the relationship.

➤ **Organization for Student Learning**

References:

- School Self Study Chapter 4A (Organization for Student Learning)
- Accreditation Criterion #4 (Student Progress Toward defined SLEs)
- Accreditation Criteria #5 (Organization for Student Learning)
- Key Outcome #2 (Clarification of the Mission, Philosophy, SLEs)
- Key Outcome #3 (Assessment of the Actual Student Program and its Impact on Student Learning and Spiritual Development)

Comment on:

*To what extent do all structures of the school's organization (leadership, governance, staff and environment) focus on facilitating achievement for **all** students?*

St. Francis is **highly effective** in that all structures of the school's organization focus on facilitating achievement for all students. There is strong evidence that the leadership has made a substantial difference in curriculum and staff development to better meet the needs of all students. The improved relationship between the parish and other governing bodies has also enriched this process. All the staff, from teachers to the aides and the extended care staff is focused on providing an environment that meets all the needs of the students. An indicator of this is the availability of many afterschool interest groups to develop student's areas of talent.

The staff is structured so that each grade level teacher has the support they need to provide a high quality educational program for their students. The use of classroom aides and specialists create a strong overall program for academic as well as social development. The school leadership has a clear commitment to providing for staff development in the area of faith formation and curriculum and instructional strategies. An indicator of the seriousness of the desire to meet the needs of all is a recent training provided to staff in differentiated instruction. The resource teacher, counselor, as well as specialists in music, PE, performing arts, foreign language, library and technology support the students to progress toward their goals. The effectiveness of the support staff including office, cafeteria, extension and custodial staff enrich the school community.

The school has a strong relationship with the parish and the diocese. Diocesan standards as well as regular diocesan testing are a key part of the school instructional program. The principal participates in diocesan level meetings. The relationship with the parish has been an area of growth with much success. The parish and the parish staff have been fully engaged in the support of the school. The active role of the pastor is noted as a real strength of the school by students, staff and parents.

All of these factors come together to support an environment of student achievement. Students are challenged to reach their potential. Teachers are supported to continually improve in their delivery of instruction. Resources are provided to update curriculum and instructional materials.

St. Francis School has a positive, supportive and challenging atmosphere. All stakeholders express a shared vision of St. Francis as a community that builds strong student relationships as well as family connections. It is very evident that “all are welcome here.”

The school has an effective system of communicating with parents and stakeholders. The commitment to Edline, an online parent communication tool, and mandatory conferences as well as regular weekly updates and newsletters provide a variety of ways for people to keep informed about what is happening at the school.

St. Francis School demonstrates a very positive atmosphere with school improvement at its core. The success of the progress report and the manner in which numerous areas for improvement were addressed is commendable. It is clear that there exists a fervent desire to move the school forward and to attend to areas that can enrich the achievement of all students.

The school is committed to school improvement. The work of the last few years in the areas of curriculum, staff development, and the goals set as part of the accreditation process indicate the level of readiness of St. Francis School to move forward. Eighty-eight percent of parent surveys indicate that the school leadership seeks input and participation from the school community. Furthermore, the parent surveys show a high rating of outstanding/good in the school improvement process.

➤ Curriculum and Instruction

References:

- School Self Study Chapter 4B (Curriculum and Instruction)
- Accreditation Criterion #4 (Student Progress Toward defined SLEs)
- Accreditation Criteria #6 (Curriculum and Instruction)
- Key Outcome #2 (Clarification of the Mission, Philosophy, SLEs)
- Key Outcome #3 (Assessment of the Actual Student Program and its Impact on Student Learning and Spiritual Development)

Comment on:

*To what extent does the curricular content, methodology, instruction, and assessment support achievement for **all** students?*

St. Francis School is **highly effective** in providing a challenging, comprehensive, and relevant curriculum that utilizes a variety of teaching methods for all students. Multiple strategies are used at all grade levels. It is evident that some teachers use learning styles to separate the students into groups for more individualized learning in language arts and math. Other teachers may have an aide in their classroom to help with varying instruction.

Teachers use a variety of assessments to continually check the progress of the students on SLEs and diocesan standards. These assessments led to the hiring of a resource teacher who helps with intervention and enrichment of curriculum. The faculty uses a variety of methodologies to assess student progress. These include both formal and informal testing. These include oral presentations, multimedia presentations, projects, reports, homework, class work, teacher observation, and peer observation. These assessments are used to target areas of intervention and enrichment.

Twice a year, each student's reading and math comprehension and religion content (diocesan assessments) are assessed. In addition, assessment measures such as prior knowledge and multiple intelligence preference are used to assist teachers in the desired grouping of students. This includes homogeneous groups used to determine the most appropriate placement in math and heterogeneous grouping of science class lab groups and writing groups for peer editing.

While there is evidence of a sequential curriculum that is aligned to diocesan and state standards, the staff sees the need for further time devoted to grade level meetings and curriculum articulation. The staff has expressed an interest in having educational opportunities to enrich curriculum methods and provide new strategies and tools for instruction. The visiting team strongly affirms the school's target goal (Action Plan #2) to accomplish this end.

The staff acknowledges that technology is not consistently embedded in the curriculum. In addition, the staff believes that integration of technology needs to take place throughout the grades. There is recognition that a technology plan is needed to address this. The visiting team strongly supports the implementation of their Action Plan #3 in this area.

In-depth Studies

St. Francis School provides a highly effective religion curriculum. It is deeply challenging, strongly coherent, fully relevant and meets the needs of all students. Further, a variety of assessment tools are used to measure the progress of all students toward educational standards, diocesan standards, and the SLEs. There is evidence throughout the Self-Study narrative and the surveys that it has a strong and positive impact on the students' spiritual development.

Religion is infused throughout the curriculum. The diocesan guidelines, the textbooks, and community projects are used to provide the students with a well-balanced understanding of the Catholic faith. Religion is taught in each classroom and throughout the school. The students prepare a prayer service for the school, attend a monthly mass, and write about their experiences in a mass journal. Religion is assessed in a variety of ways. These ways include skits, reciting prayers, art, essays, responses in journals, discussions, and open and closed textbook exams. Students demonstrate the SLEs and are asked to note ways in which the SLEs are present or lacking in historical, current, and global events, in literature, and even in homilies. The religion program has a strong impact on the spiritual development of the students.

The science curriculum is highly effective in supporting the achievement of all students. The school provides learning experiences that are challenging, coherent and relevant, that meet diocesan and state educational standards, and drive pupils toward becoming SLE students. Many skills are developed through a variety of learning experiences. There is an emphasis on skill development and the real-life application of those skills. Faith-based values are integrated into the learning experiences and the many community experiences that focus on God's creation provide a continuum of learning. Faculty collaboration and a science standards checklist further enhance the continuum of learning. The wide variety of learning, application, and assessment experiences in science ensure that the needs of all students are met. Further, assessment results from a variety of sources are used to improve teaching and learning. In addition, ITBS scores for 2009 show at least a 4.33 year growth in grade equivalency for the 8th grade students.

➤ Support for Personal, Spiritual and Academic Growth

References:

- School Self Study Chapter 4C (Support for Personal, Spiritual and Academic Growth)
- Accreditation Criterion 4 (Student Progress Toward defined SLEs)
- Accreditation Criteria 7 (Support for Personal, Spiritual and Academic Growth)
- Key Outcome #2 (Clarification of the Mission, Philosophy, SLEs)
- Key Outcome #3: Assessment of the Actual Student Program and its Impact on Student Learning and Spiritual Development

Comment on:

*To what extent is there support for student personal, spiritual and academic growth that supports achievement for **all** students?*

The St. Francis School community has a **highly effective** program that engages parental and community involvement in support of student personal, spiritual and academic growth, and achievement. Utilizing a variety of excellent support systems, the school focuses on the development of the “whole child”. The pastor is an active member of the school community, visits classrooms weekly, celebrates masses and holds seasonal Reconciliation services with them. He meets with the principal on a weekly basis and both report an excellent rapport. He allows the principal to set the tone for the school. He attends monthly CSAC meetings, supports the development goals of the school and was involved in the finalization of the school’s strategic plan. The pastor is present at school functions and believes the school mission, philosophy, and schoolwide learning expectations are being lived and demonstrated among the administration, faculty, staff, and students.

Students have the opportunity to participate in various extra-curricular activities such as volleyball, basketball and *Little Dribblers*, which is incorporated through the Parochial Athletic League. A “no cut” policy is enforced. Co-curricular activities and clubs that challenge and engage students involve the Academic Decathlon, Speech Club, Drama Club, Religion and Math Decathlons, school performances, the art show and choir. The Student Council includes students in grades 3-8 and is responsible for organizing rallies, meetings, announcements, and fundraisers for various charities. “The St. Francis News and Media Team” allow students to produce, direct, and broadcast news within the school.

All aspects of the Safe Environment program are successfully utilized. All faculty, staff, and volunteers are required to complete the *Shield the Vulnerable* program and have received fingerprint clearance. Students are informed of their personal space and safety through the diocesan mandated *VIRTUS* program. A mandatory internet safety presentation by the police department was provided to students and parents in grades 6-8.

The school provides a safe learning environment. It initiated a closed-door policy in which all individuals must enter through a key-coded front door. All visitors must wear badges and adult supervision is maintained during all school activities.

St. Francis School provides services to support the health and physical well-being of each student. A visiting school nurse conducts yearly vision, hearing, and scoliosis screenings. Immunization records are monitored and all classrooms are supplied with first aid kits. Faculty and staff get re-certified for CPR/First Aid every two years.

The *Emergency Disaster Plan* hangs next to the doorway of classrooms and all areas where students and staff are present. The school disaster plan is reviewed with all students and staff and the school has regular fire, code-red, and earthquake drills.

Leadership opportunities exist for all students through curricular and co-curricular activities. This is evident in programs such as math buddies, peer editing, academic decathlon, spiritual leadership, student council, service opportunities and local and global outreach.

Counseling support services are provided one day a week by a counselor. Teachers are provided with consultation regarding how to deal with learning accommodations, behavioral problems, and parent-teacher communication. In addition, in order to provide positive relationships among students, Friendship Groups are formed at most grade levels and a Newcomer's Group have been formed where students are welcomed and helped to assimilate in their new school.

A large portion of families enrolled in St. Francis School participate in the on-site Extended Day-Care Program that operates from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. every day. It offers a homework lab, book club, art, Lego Club, baking, crochet, craft projects, games, and educational computer programs. The rooms utilized for this program are most creative and conducive to learning. The visiting team highly commends the school for its support of this exemplary program for its students and families.

Teachers are committed to meeting the needs of all students and have accommodated those students with limited learning challenges in the classrooms. The visiting team witnessed examples of accommodations made by the school to enhance student learning. The school is not able to serve students with severe learning disabilities and students who require additional assistance are referred to their local public school, Mercy Education Resource Center or other educational agencies. They employ a Part-time Resource Teacher and hold SST and IEP meetings when necessary. The Resource Teacher works with classroom teachers to support gifted and advanced students as well.

St. Francis School offers opportunities for spiritual growth through prayer services prepared by the students. Many students are directly involved with school masses and the Student Council Religious Commissioner and two Sergeant at Arms lead morning prayer and pledge of allegiance daily. Seventh and Eighth grade students are available to serve as honor guards at funerals and special masses.

Teachers are available for tutoring upon request. The after school/computer lab is available to students in grades three through eight for homework and tutoring. Other resources for students include peer tutoring and resource groups. As needed, special needs students are referred to their local public school districts or private psychologists for testing and appropriate services. Frequently, these services are in conjunction with a *Student Success Team* that includes the student, parent or guardian, teachers and principal.

To what extent is there an understanding of Church Doctrine and Catholic Social Teaching, and service encouraged and valued?

St. Francis School is **highly effective** in establishing and promoting Catholic Identity. The entire staff models and promotes moral and spiritual development and the pastor feels they are doing a “great job” in teaching the Catholic Faith. Church doctrine is taught incorporating a variety of experiences such as liturgies, prayer services, and religion classes. The school strives to create a Franciscan environment and follows liturgical seasons and plans activities and liturgies accordingly. Students, faculty and staff participate in the Sacraments, Stations of the Cross, and other religious services and celebrations according to the liturgical season. When writing in their Mass Response Journals, junior high students often refer to the student learning expectation that was evident in the homily or gospel message. St. Francis School provides many opportunities for parents and guardians to be actively involved in the sacramental life of their children. School masses, programs, adult education especially related to family life and many other activities all assist in the faith development of the entire family. Parents are recognized as the primary educators of their children and for the fact that spirituality begins in the home. Parents, as the primary educators of their children, actively support the efforts of the school in the spiritual formation of children and constitute the “domestic church.”

St. Francis School is **highly effective** at instilling a sense of social justice among its students. Students focus on social justice issues throughout the curriculum and during conflict resolution. A wide range of activities are encouraged and students are actively involved in the *Sacramento Food Bank, Loaves and Fishes, Save the Manatee Club, World Wildlife Fund* to name just a few.

To what extent is Christian service active and visible?

St. Francis School is **highly effective** in its involvement in Christian service. In fact, it is alive, vibrant and delightfully visible among the students at St. Francis School. The school is highly commended for the strong spiritual focus within not only the school community but the metropolitan community as well. During the accreditation visit the team members witnessed the results of a spontaneous student outreach to Haiti. There are over twenty community service recipients, which indicate to the visiting team that service projects are indeed a vital part of the school identity. Such unique opportunities such as *Children with Cancer Foundation, Francis House, Ronald McDonald House, Shriner's Hospital, UNICEF, and Wellsping* provide visible support for the correlating schoolwide learning expectations. Efforts to develop the “whole child” and to instill within children the foundations and teachings of the Catholic Church are very evident. Parents and guardians, students, faculty and staff, and administration continually use words such as proud, faith-filled, family, community, and service.

➤ Resource Management and Development

References:

- School Self Study Chapter 4D (Resource Management and Development)
- Accreditation Criterion #4 (Student Progress Toward defined SLEs)
- Accreditation Criterion #8 (Resource Management and Development)
- Key Outcome #2 (Clarification of the Mission, Philosophy, SLEs)
- Key Outcome #3 (Assessment of the Actual Student Program and its Impact on Student Learning and Spiritual Development)

Comment on

*To what extent do resource management and development sustain the school's programs and support achievement for **all** students?*

St. Francis School, with the assistance of St. Francis Parish, is **highly effective** in providing sufficient financial resources necessary to support and maintain a school program that offers students a quality education.

Through sound financial practices, a stewardship program encouraging parents and guardians to pay the full per student cost of education, supplemented by the Extended Care Program and scholarships for those unable to pay the full cost, the school is able to provide a curriculum that meets the academic, spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of all students. The School Advisory Commission with assistance from the Parish Finance Council oversees the direct financial operation of the school and works closely with the pastor, the principal and the full-time Finance Manager in developing and implementing an annual budget that enables the school to operate in a timely manner both effectively and efficiently. Financial reports are provided in a timely manner. The school and the parish work closely with one another to ensure sufficient funding, efficient operation and fulfillment of the schools mission, philosophy and SLEs.

In 2007, an Alumni Outreach Plan was developed and assists to build a solid base of alumni support. The St. Francis Elementary Annual Fund was initiated during the 2008-2009 school year which gives the larger parish community an opportunity to donate to the school in six areas: student scholarships, endowment fund, student learning, technology, building enhancements, and most needed. The goal is to have funding readily available, as well as to build reserves for long range planning.

St. Francis School tracks enrollment and retention data. Members of the School Advisory Commission note the benefit of stable enrollment in successful financial planning. Class enrollment reports are filed with the financial monthly, quarterly and year end reports. These detailed reports, from the Finance Manger, help with planning budgetary projections. Public relations, marketing, and recruitment efforts are targeted to address needs identified by the analysis of enrollment data, and to meet the school's goals for enrollment.

Admission policies and procedures are consistent with the school mission, philosophy, and Schoolwide Learning Expectations. The enrollment goal is to maintain optimal enrollment levels that ensure stability and consistency, and to maintain cultural and economic diversity. The enrollment process is reviewed and managed by the principal and a well qualified administrative staff. Families are introduced to the school via numerous ways and siblings of current students and participating St. Francis Parish parishioners are given special priority for placement.

To enhance enrollment, St. Francis School just recently began a Transitional Kindergarten Kickstart Program and admitted eight students. These students will promote to next year's kindergarten increasing next year's class enrollment.

The school has developed a Strategic Planning Committee that has implemented an on-going strategic plan. This plan of action addresses goals and objectives for financial stability and longevity, namely: Catholic identity, ownership/governance, enrollment, staffing, curriculum, finances, facilities, and marketing/development. This takes into account the detailed annual budget vs. actual income and expenses.

The school reports financial aid resources are limited in supporting lower income families. The parish grants an amount annually with the school utilizing a scholarship fund that was established in 1995. At this time, 6.06% of families receive financial assistance. Federally funded money (Title II-D) is utilized for staff development.

The financial status of St. Francis School is stable and current resources are adequate for present school operations. Immediate needs of the school are addressed by the annual budget. A strategic long-range plan addressing student enrollment, tuition, teacher salaries, and programs needs should be further developed and be updated annually. According to the Self-Study, although enrollment is at or near capacity, marketing to ensure numbers must be continual.

With regard to overall school advancement there are components in the Strategic Plan that address key advancement issues such as enrollment, corporate sponsorship, grant funding and cash reserves.

Part IV: Summary and Recommendations

References:

- School Self Study- Chapter 4, A-D (Analysis of School Program)
- School Self Study- Chapter 5 (School Improvement Action Plan)
- Accreditation Criterion #9 (The Alignment of a Long-Range Schoolwide Action Plan)
- Outcome #4 (The Development of a School Improvement Action Plan that addresses Identified Growth Needs based upon Critical Areas for follow-up)

Schoolwide Strengths/Critical Areas for Growth and Action Plan

These strengths are identified by the school and affirmed by the visiting team.

- St. Francis School has a strong Catholic identity that is clearly reflected in our mission, philosophy, and Schoolwide Learning Expectations
- The outstanding teachers and staff set high standards for student achievement and behavior by providing a rigorous, challenging, and standards based curriculum that prepares students to live out the SLEs
- St. Francis Elementary has a safe, supportive, positive, and nurturing environment for all stakeholders

- As a result of the positive and mutually supportive relationship between the pastor and principal, the pastor is actively involved and is a major supporter of the school
- The principal, faculty, and staff are cohesive and collaborate well
- The school community provides extensive opportunities for spiritual growth including community service and environmental projects that are geared towards creating contributing members of our society
- An open line of communication makes all stakeholders welcome participants in the decisions that affect the vision, mission, and direction of the school
- A variety of formal and informal assessments are part of the daily curriculum
- Faculty is sensitive to different learning modalities and differentiates instruction accordingly
- There is regular communication of student progress to parents and administration
- A lower student/teacher ratio is achieved via departmentalized instructors, classroom aides, volunteers, and resource teacher
- There is effective balance between textbook, teacher-created, and outside resources (including standards based field trips) for student learning
- Cross-curricular connections are integrated throughout daily instruction
- Counseling services are available for students, parents, teachers, and staff
- Resource program assists a variety of students
- Sound, stable, and consistent financial operations
- A variety of clubs/extracurricular activities meet the needs of student interests and talents
- Our after school library/computer lab provides opportunities for students to complete homework and research
- The school offers a quality Extension program with many elective opportunities
- Classroom aides support students and faculty in a variety of ways
- Parents and volunteers share their expertise and time reflecting their high level of support and involvement throughout all aspects of school life

- Bulletin boards throughout the school promote and reinforce the SLEs by displaying student work, providing supplementary information, and building community involvement
- Strategic Plan is being implemented

Schoolwide Areas of Strength (identified by Team)

- Extraordinarily supportive and actively involved pastor who promotes the school as an integral mission of the parish and engages the students on a regular basis in their spiritual development
- An inspiring and visionary principal who reflects and models the philosophy and mission and the Catholic identity of the school for all members of the community
- An extremely effective principal whose leadership and department empower the staff to strive for excellence in all areas
- A exceptionally dedicated and faith-filled faculty and staff who foster the formation of the whole child and the strong sense of family throughout the school
- A stellar support staff that daily makes a difference in the lives of students, faculty, administration and parent/guardian community
- A faith filled community that lives out the mission of St. Francis of Assisi
- A committed, proud, and supportive parent/guardian community who are willing to sacrifice in support of quality Catholic education for their children
- Confident, secure students who appreciate the value of a St. Francis education, are committed to the service of others, courteous, are conscientious stewards of the earth, who genuinely reflect the Schoolwide Learning Expectations: Spiritual, Academic, Respectful, Confident, and Responsible
- A full-time, professional and efficient Finance Manager
- Funds are allocated to secure qualified and dedicated staff
- A vibrant social justice and community service component that reflects the Franciscan charism

Critical Areas for Growth (identified by school)

- The school will continue to develop ways to assess and measure the students' mastery of the SLEs
- The staff will investigate and utilize opportunities that enrich curriculum methods and provide new strategies and tools for instruction
- The school will develop a technology plan

The visiting team fully supports and reaffirms all three areas of growth. The team strongly recommends that the school address these areas through the specific steps in the Action Plan. Furthermore in Action Plan #2, the specific steps are to include grade level meetings for the purpose of curriculum articulation and mapping.

Also in Action Plan #3, an updated phone and intercom system will be included in the technology plan. The staff will research the technology needs that will promote student learning. As technology is added appropriate staff development will occur to ensure effective integration with the curriculum.

Critical Areas for Growth (identified by Visiting Team)

No additional areas of growth were identified by the visiting team.

Schoolwide Strengths/Critical Areas for Growth and Action Plan

In this section the Visiting team shall:

- 1) Acknowledge, verify, and affirm Schoolwide Strengths and Critical Areas for Growth (**through a bulleted list**)
- 2) If necessary, give additional guidance to the school pertaining to its Critical Areas for Growth and Action Plan.

Comment on:

To what extent does the long-range Schoolwide Action plan align with and address the school's identified critical areas for growth in order to support high achievement of all students?

St. Francis School has been **highly effective** in its analysis of all appropriate data/information about student achievement, school operation and program to support the identified critical growth areas.

St. Francis School has developed realistic goals to address areas for growth and have a positive impact on school and student improvement. Their goals are attainable and a continuation of their history of focus on continuous improvement. The steps that they have identified will assist in effectively meeting the goals stated.

The school has identified a reasonable timeline and persons responsible for each goal with an accountability component reflected in progress reporting to the appropriate constituents. The action plan will provide substantive growth for the school across all areas of student learning and will further St. Francis School's goal of serving the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social and physical needs of students.

➤ **Implement and Monitor Schoolwide Action Plan**

References:

- Self Study Chapter 2 (Progress Report)
- School Self Study Chapter 5 (School Improvement Action Plan)
- School Self Study Chapter 6 (Implementation of School Improvement Action Plan)
- Accreditation Criteria #10 (Capacity to Implement and Monitor Schoolwide Action Plan)
- Accreditation Criteria #11 (Use of Prior Accreditation Findings)
- Key Outcome #4 (Development of a School Improvement Action Plan)
- Key Outcome #5 (Development and Implementation of an Accountability System)

Comment on:

- *To what extent does the school have the capacity to implement and monitor the Schoolwide Action Plan?*
- *What impediments, if any, must the school address in order to accomplish the Plan?*

St. Francis School is **highly effective** in its capacity to implement and monitor the action plan. The process includes on-going and methodical assessment of the plan. Stakeholders are aware and appropriately involved. There is evidence that actions will be evaluated in terms of impact on student achievement and that the results will be shared.

The commitment of the leadership, staff, parish and school community to continuous school improvement is evident and the visiting team is confident in their ability to move the school forward.