

Insights from the Review

The Engagement Review Team engaged in professional discussions and deliberations about the processes, programs, and practices within the institution to arrive at the findings of the team. These findings are organized around themes guided by the evidence, with examples of programs and practices, and suggestions for the institution's continuous improvement efforts. The Insights from the Review narrative should provide contextualized information from the team's deliberations and analysis of the practices, processes, and programs of the institution organized by the levels of Initiate, Improve, and Impact. The narrative also provides the next steps to guide the institution's improvement journey in its efforts to improve the quality of educational opportunities for all learners. The findings are aligned to research-based criteria designed to improve student learning and organizational effectiveness. The feedback provided in the Accreditation Engagement Review Report will assist the institution in reflecting on its current improvement efforts and to adapt and adjust their plans to continuously strive for improvement.

The Engagement Review Team (team) identified themes that will present strengths and opportunities to help guide Saint Stephen the Martyr in the continuous improvement journey. The most powerful theme to emerge, which is the school's greatest strength, is that the school is a mission-guided school whose stakeholders share a strong sense of commitment and passion through a shared vision and core values. The leadership provides a level of unprecedented support to the school community and celebrates a dedicated and engaged staff. As the leadership team is new to the building, time is needed to continue building and developing a data culture to enable the school to collect and use longitudinal data that gauges the effectiveness of school and academic programs.

The school is mission-guided, with stakeholders sharing a strong sense of commitment and passion through a shared vision and core values. The school is guided by the mission statement and its faith traditions; these are ingrained in the school's culture and operations. Evidence indicated a high degree of embeddedness among all stakeholder groups. A review of the handbooks, school website, school improvement and leadership team reports, focus group interviews, and surveys/inventories validated this finding. The theme as mission-driven was easily apparent. Staff and students recite the mission statement daily; written correspondence sent from the school office includes the mission statement. Decisions are made through the lens of the school's mission and guiding beliefs.

All stakeholder groups touted a collaborative environment. Parents feel like they are partners in the process of educating their children. They stated that there are many opportunities to be involved and support the school, and the percentage of involved families is high. Teachers indicated support was strong from leadership and other colleagues. A mentor program is in place, and there are formal meetings with the mentor, new teacher, and administration.

All stakeholder groups celebrated strong faith traditions present in the school. School Mass, rosaries, and chaplets brought staff and students together to celebrate their Catholic faith. Parents noted that Eucharistic adoration was available on the First Fridays of the month and were happy that the priests were involved in the school. Survey results indicated the school provides the opportunity for the faith formation of the faculty and staff.

The parish has a set procedure for working through the budget annually. The finance committee works directly with the school to determine needs and set the budget. The parish has recently hired a development director to draw a new revenue stream to support the school. The Engagement Review

Team encourages school leaders and staff to celebrate and continue to nurture this deeply embedded culture of faith, tradition, and mission.

The leadership provides a level of unprecedented support to the school community.

Stakeholder interviews overwhelmingly showed support and appreciation for the leadership of the school and parish. The pastor's vision was to create an advisory board for each parish ministry. These boards understand their roles in supporting the ministry and uniting as one parish family. The school staff and parents noted that the pastor was instrumental in setting a vision and making necessary school leadership changes just over two years ago. They identify him as the spiritual leader of the community. There is an active school board working under a set code of ethics. They work from a policy book created by the Archdiocese of Omaha. Survey data from parents, teachers, and students reveal that the pastor and his boards work in collaboration with the school, and they take responsibility for monitoring that the school is faithful to its mission, is academically excellent, and sound in its business decisions.

The school leadership team, now starting year three, developed the principal and assistant principal job descriptions. Teachers feel there is clarity in the roles and stated that the leaders balanced one another.

Parents told the Engagement Review Team that they felt comfortable talking with the administration and teachers about any concerns. They are grateful for the new leadership team and noted that they are visible, open, and present. Parents indicated that the administrative team worked diligently to communicate with them, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. They expressed gratitude and confidence in the direction of the school. One of the parents stated, "they brought the joy back to our school."

School leaders made adjustments to the Home and School organization by creating five pillars to guide their work, as special gifts/contributions, recruitment, community, volunteer, and alumni parish outreach. The pillars defined the work and allowed for the organization of the committee as a whole.

The teacher evaluation process at the school is well-defined and includes both formal observations and informal walk-throughs. Teachers were able to articulate the process and spoke to the level of support from the administrative team. Teachers noted that the administration publicly recognizes what is happening in the classrooms in weekly newsletters and stated that it is a community builder and fun to celebrate what is happening in other classrooms. The administration noted a desire to change the evaluation form to align more effectively with recent instructional and professional development changes as the staff works to use gradual release.

The Engagement Review Team heard loud and clear that the administrative team was making a difference and are the key to positive morale and culture. They are commended and encouraged to continue to provide that level of unprecedented support.

The staff is dedicated and engaged in the mission of the school. The staff has high expectations and works to deliver a curriculum that challenges students. Stakeholder groups interviewed were proud to share that many students earned academic scholarships to local Catholic high schools and noted that some students were automatically accepted into programs because they were graduates. In fact, in the 2019-2020 school year, 20% of the graduating class earned scholarships to local Catholic high schools. The administration noted that last year 42% of seventh-grade students and 35% of fifth grade-students scored above the 95th percentile on standardized testing. Survey results indicate a high level of satisfaction with student academic performance and teachers' instructional methods. Student interviews indicated that students love their teachers.

The administration noted that some fine-tuning was needed and trained the staff on the use of the Gradual Release of Responsibility model. The staff spent time in professional development and in professional learning community (PLC) work to learn and implement the methods effectively in the classroom. The teacher evaluation tool is being modified to share specific feedback with teachers during the observation process. Standards are created at the Archdiocesan level by a team of educators and include assessments that are both formative and summative. Teachers shared that they used Fountas and Pinnell, STAR testing, blended learning software, Archdiocesan assessments, and classroom formative and summative assessments to track student progress. Student writing is monitored over time through the use of rubrics. The staff's commitment and dedication are valued, and the staff takes pride in what they do each day.

The school has a continuous improvement process; however, it lacks a culture of longitudinal data and students engaged in tracking their learning. The new leadership has been in place for just over two years and intends to create a data culture to benefit all aspects of teaching and learning. A process of continuous improvement is evident and, with time, will yield great results for the school. There is a desire by leadership to continue gathering longitudinal data on the school's programs, academics, behavioral, and perceptual areas. It is evident that data have been emphasized these past two years, but longitudinal data does not exist as the leadership team created new procedures when they came on board.

Many stakeholder interviews illustrated the use of data. The administration talked about a specific example of using data to help teachers create goals around more effective use of the behavior card, issuing fewer demerits after their discussion. Teachers talked about using data to form groups for reading and math instruction as they use rotations, especially in the younger grades. It is unclear how other content areas are adjusted based on data collection. Parents talked about getting the results of standardized testing with an explanation to help them understand what they were reading.

In terms of program data, there are examples of data collected but not used longitudinally. For example, PLC minutes were taken but not used longitudinally. Teacher observation is another area where data are collected annually but not used beyond the current school year.

The school lacks consistency in what and how data are collected used, respectively. For example, SAT data collection and use are inconsistent. While some teachers could articulate and explain the process, others were not as familiar with the data collection. Student engagement in the collection, use, and reporting of their data was inconsistent as well. The review team encourages teachers to provide guidance for students to write goals and work to achieve them.

Continued work in collecting data to develop a data culture will benefit the school. A focus on using the data to examine longitudinal trends and make decisions will demonstrate progress. Creating a process with students engaged in goal setting and progress monitoring provides personal accountability for their performance. Students can color in apples at a young age for the number of sight words they know to show progress. Using familiar blended learning applications offers a way for students to track and share their personal growth.

St. Stephen the Martyr is encouraged to review the team's findings, insights, and suggestions for improvement as the school develops school goals and processes for the future during its continuous improvement journey.