

VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

For

Saint Francis of Assisi School

San Diego, CA

February 19, 20, 21, 2008

The views expressed in the following report represent those of the entire evaluation team. The Committee wishes to thank the principal, the faculty, and staff for the hospitality shown the team members. The committee wishes to express appreciation for all those persons who, using The Procedures for Appraising the Catholic Elementary School, 2006 Edition as a guide, completed the WCEA/WASC at Saint Francis of Assisi School.

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The Report of the Visiting Committee

St. Francis of Assisi Parish School
525 West Vista Way
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WESTERN CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION
AND
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

PROCESS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
FEBRUARY 19, 20, 21, 2008

Preface

We, the Visiting Committee, wish to commend the Pastor, the administration, faculty, staff, parents and student body of St. Francis of Assisi Parish School for working together to make the school such a loving, caring and learning environment. The school exemplifies the essence of their philosophy, "Excellence in Catholic education." A genuine Catholicity, in the words and actions, was visible in the students, communicated by the parents, and modeled by an outstanding, cohesive faculty. We commend the work you have completed and the goals you have set forth for the future of St. Francis of Assisi Parish School.

The Team found our three days at St. Francis of Assisi Parish School professionally rich and personally rewarding. We experienced a community that provides a Catholic environment with quality education for the entire student body. The essential Catholic nature of your school was evident in every aspect of education. It is a significant strength which graces St. Francis of Assisi Parish School and the parish community.

We wish to thank all of you for your warm and gracious hospitality that we received on our first day here in January and for the past three days.

May the Christ you serve bless you with every success.

Part I: Context of the School

School/ Community Profile

To what extent has the school compiled and analyzed data (cultural, demographic, financial, survey, interview) that identifies major changes or trends since the last Self-Study?

St. Francis of Assisi Parish School has effectively compiled and reported data reflecting the make-up and character of their student body, parental and family backgrounds, and various committee groups and membership within the school and the Parish community. Data also included ITBS testing scores by grade level for the last five years.

The school has had a stable and consistent number of students in the last six years, ranging from 325 students (2007-2008) to 345 students and is culturally diverse. .

It has an experienced, qualified faculty where over 55% of the teachers have been at St. Francis Parish School for 11 years or longer. The stability of the staff as well as several parent organizations contribute to the effective communication between parents, staff and the parish and support the successful operation and governance of the school.

The essential Catholic nature of St. Francis Parish School is a commitment of which is evident to a highly effective degree. The Roman Catholic faith is integrated into all aspects of the school and is extended to the students' families and the Parish community at large. Religious instruction and prayer are daily components of the school as is integrating religious principles into the lives of the students and relevant core curriculum. The staff is provided with continuing educational opportunities for strengthening their own spiritual understanding and growth.

With the tabulation of the surveys, it became clear that the students, parents and faculty truly believe that St. Francis School is an academically strong school and the programs that are offered prepare the students to do well in both public and Catholic high schools.

The school works well with the parish and together provide many outreach programs for the less fortunate in the area. There is a strong interaction between the two entities and both administration and teachers belong and are active in many of the activities of the parish. As a result, the school and parish have an outstanding relationship and work well for the betterment of each.

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 has established a clear statement of philosophy and mission that reflects a commitment to Catholic identity, thoroughness of instruction, a focus on the needs of the

whole person, parents as primary educators, teachers as facilitators of learning and recognition of the dignity of all members of the school community.

St. Francis of Assisi Parish School's philosophy and mission statements reflect a commitment to Catholic identity by naming faith, worship, and stewardship as parts of its educational foundation, as well as setting the goal of a lifelong commitment to peace, justice, equality, and respect for life. Thoroughness of instruction and a focus on the needs of the whole person are emphasized in a call "to provide a nurturing environment where students can grow spiritually, socially, psychologically, and physically." Parents are recognized as primary educators and teachers as facilitators of learning through mention of the school-home-parish partnership. The dignity of all school community members is addressed in the goal of imparting knowledge, values and life skills according to the needs and abilities of each child.

Catholicity is of great importance to all of the stakeholders of the school and parish. It permeates all the activities and programs that take place throughout the year at the school. The faculty and administration truly believe that teaching and working with the young is a ministry and hold it in great esteem. They provide many religious opportunities for the students to pray together as a class and as a school community and to do Christian Service projects in the Parish and greater surrounding community.

The faculty models the Catholic identity to their students and is involved in many of the Parish groups and activities. All the teachers hold a catechetical certificate and provide their students with behavioral expectations that show compassion.

Progress Report

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

Effective ongoing systematic change is evident in the school. The principal, faculty, and stakeholders have been involved in addressing the three critical areas of growth that were identified during the previous accreditation process. Each year since the last visit the administration, faculty and stakeholders looked at each area and provided workable, viable solutions in order to generate the necessary changes that needed to take place.

In the area of Organization for Student Learning the administration, faculty and clusters researched vendors for age-appropriate materials to help them expand their Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program for all grades. They attended seminars and workshops for two years to help them in teaching conflict resolutions and character building activities. Added to that, the Librarian provides monthly instructional resources for teachers to use in their classrooms to further enhance the program. As a result, there has been a change in the students' behavior and attitudes.

During the past five years, the school, in the Curriculum and Instruction critical growth area identified in the last accreditation process, has completed the Subject/Grade Learning Expectations in the areas of Math, Science, Fine Arts, Computer and PE. Each year the school wrote the required In-depth Study and aligned the curriculum to meet both California State Standards and Diocesan Subject/Grade Learning Expectations. These hands-on documents are used by each faculty member as a tool in instructing students. Added to that, the faculty and administration updated their disaster preparedness program after the vice principal attended a SEMS workshop. Their preparedness plan is now based on the SEMS terminology and procedures. This year the faculty and staff have modernized their teaching styles by using online textbooks in the middle school which has energized their program. They are presently working on correlating the Catechism of the Catholic Church with their Religion Learning Expectations to help students develop a deeper understanding of their faith.

In the Support for Student Personal, Spiritual and Academic Growth area identified, the school has hired a psycho-educational evaluator who works with the students. A psychologist is used as a referral to do further testing and evaluation. She provides instructional strategies to help better meet the needs of the students. A juvenile probation officer is also a resource for the school in addressing student behavioral problems, responsibility and making wise choices.

The school is commended for having addressed these areas and for their on-going evaluation of all of their programs and for the implementation of making needed changes to ensure that student growth and well-being are being addressed by all the stakeholders of St. Francis of Assisi Parish School.

Part II: Self Study Process

Involvement and Collaboration in Self Study Process

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

St. Francis of Assisi Parish School has been involved and collaborated through the process of their Self Study. This is evidenced in extensive communication of stakeholders within the entire school community. The pastor, principal, faculty, parish, parents and students are involved in communicating and collaborating to seek the best way to implement the self study process to have it effective and timely. Their use of meetings, dialogue and survey information has demonstrated a thorough evaluation of information. Through these means they have pinpointed areas of strength, such as their Catholic faith and identity and articulation and analysis of curriculum. They have also clarified areas of desired improvement such as an increase in technology. The open door policies of the principal and pastor promote awareness by stakeholders of the collaborative attitude of all concerned for the improvement of their school.

Schoolwide Learning Expectations

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?

The SLEs are an articulation of the St. Francis of Assisi Parish School's mission and philosophy. This is evidenced by a strong connection of faith based goals within the SLEs. Stewardship, Faith and Worship, and Scholastic Achievement are ways to demonstrate through measurable indicators that the mission and philosophy goals are being attained. The school has identified these as their educational foundation. The activities of the school, parish and home are based on the integration of the mission and philosophy statements and the SLEs.

The SLEs are integrated in the reality of St. Francis of Assisi Parish School. This is evidenced by their stewardship, classroom instruction, assemblies, retreats, school Masses, liturgical celebrations, prayer services, daily prayer, and extra-curricular activities. There is a strong sense of connectivity between the SLEs and what goes on everyday at St. Francis. The students are required to demonstrate their achievement of the SLEs through their service to the extended community. The parents have also demonstrated that they embrace the SLEs as well through their service and involvement at the school. Stewardship, Faith and Worship and Scholastic Achievement are goals that are evident within the school community.

Academic standards are thoroughly measured by teacher evaluations, tests, quizzes, reports, ITBS scores, ACRE scores and observations. These evaluations cover the academic components of the school. The measurement of SLEs is done through participation in school activities, hours of service and achievement of the goals that are outlined by them. This achievement seems to be best measured through observation, as it is participatory in nature. The faculty can observe the integration of the SLEs as they (the SLEs) become part of the make-up of the individual student. The student, through participation in the many opportunities the school has provided, can demonstrate ownership of the SLEs and achievement of the school goals.

Assessment Process

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

St. Francis of Assisi Parish School uses professionally acceptable assessment processes. Through the use of ITBS testing, ACRE testing, teacher observation and evaluation, report cards, progress reports and their curriculum guidelines, the faculty is able to assess the quality of each student's performance. The curriculum guidelines follow a class from grade to grade to show areas of growth and areas of need for the next teacher. Combined

with formal testing, there is a thorough analysis of each student and his or her ability to achieve. The faculty's use of professional articulation, both formal and informal, indicates a strong ability of the school to track student achievement of the SLEs and academic standards of the school.

Part III: Quality of School Program

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?

After discussion with the various stakeholders at St. Francis of Assisi Parish School, it became clear that open dialogue about student progress takes place among administration, faculty, parents and the larger parish community. The teachers are made aware in August meetings of their responsibility in reporting to parents when students are struggling in a subject. The regular Progress Reports and Report Cards are sent out quarterly to parents and conferences are held at the end of the First Quarter and whenever necessary during the remainder of the school year. After the disaggregation of data by the principal regarding the ITBS results and discussions with the faculty, parents are given the test results.

The ITBS results are also used as a tool for discussions in planning curriculum, providing remediation for students as well as for accelerated instruction for other students.

Parents are also kept apprised of their child's accomplishments through displays, open houses, students' daily work and various forms of assessment. Throughout the year, parents and members of the larger community visit classrooms, attend special events and programs and observe first hand the Schoolwide Learning Expectations in action.

During teacher in-service days and at monthly faculty meetings, communication among grade level teachers takes place to ensure that the faculty is meeting the goals and expectations that were established for the year. They also share techniques and strategies to better help them meet the needs of their students.

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 of Assisi Parish School uses a multi-faceted approach facilitating achievement for all students through leadership. Pastor, principal, faculty, staff and parents share in structuring activities, both curricular and extra-curricular, that demonstrate leadership in action. Through weekly professional interaction, faculty members focus on the issues that affect their students both academically and behaviorally. Communication with Parish, school and parents is through calendars, a weekly newsletter, family envelopes, websites and e-mail. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own education as well. Through religious activities, all are drawn into a comprehensive integration of faith-

based roles of leadership and community. The principal is actively involved in lesson plans, report cards and meetings with teachers. Professional growth is encouraged. The encouragement of everyone involved in the system to take part in leadership roles within the school is evidenced through the variety of structures in place. Their comprehensive approach allows everyone involved a variety of means to communicate concerns, praise or problems.

Organization for Student Learning

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

It is evident the pastor, principal and faculty are dedicated to promoting school improvement. This challenging process, driven by a plan of action, includes faith formation, quality instruction for every student, and community involvement from the school, Parish and greater community resources. St. Francis of Assisi Parish School gives evidence that the principal, faculty, and parents are committed in their partnership and unite to organize, support, and complete many school improvement projects. The administration and faculty facilitate an ongoing school improvement process, which regularly addresses school issues through weekly faculty bulletins, monthly meetings and cluster meetings. As needed, the principal confers with community professionals for background, support and information from which to formulate a well-informed plan of action. Their PTG meets bi-monthly and is a tremendous support to the total school program in an advisory capacity. The school and Parish community are dedicated to the challenge of building a new school and church facility. The school community is working toward this endeavor. Active involvement by the principal as a member of the Parish Staff, Education Commission, Pastoral Council, Stewardship Committee, Liturgy Commission, Finance Council, PTG Board and Building Planning and Development Committee, provides clear evidence of the established partnership of the parish and school community. The leadership of St. Francis of Assisi Parish School works collaboratively to create an environment where a community of Catholic faith and family is evident to all who enter the campus. The faculty maintains an awareness of the sensitive needs of each student. There is evidence they understand the uniqueness of each student's learning style and needs, and maintain teaching strategies that will benefit the individual student.

Faculty meetings, Administrative Team meetings, Education Commission, Stewardship Committee, Finance Council, Liturgy Commission, Pastoral Council, Building Campaign Committee and PTG all provide strong leadership. Surveys of the Community are used so they can evaluate their progress. Ambassadors for Christ and Student Council show the students' involvement. Policies and procedures, curriculum, discipline and hiring practices are based on Catholic vision, the Mission of the school and SLEs. The school leadership sets age-appropriate behavioral expectations and maintains discipline plans. Stewardship requirements of students and parents maintain strong involvement. Students

in K-5 are encouraged to do 10 hours of service. Students in 6-8 must complete 10 hours per quarter. Parents are asked to complete 40 hours.

Curriculum and Instruction

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

St. Francis of Assisi Parish School provides a challenging, comprehensive and relevant curriculum that fulfills the school's mission and philosophy, strengthens Catholic identity and results in achievement of the Schoolwide Learning Expectations. Using the standards from the Diocese of San Diego and the State of California, St. Francis of Assisi Parish School provides an outstanding, comprehensive curriculum that challenges and makes sense to all students. Utilizing a "hands-on, minds-on" approach to all the subject areas enables the students to take an active role in their learning. Students are involved in activities in the classroom, on a school-wide level and in the community by being involved in various contests, fairs, physical fitness activities and multicultural events.

Teachers use the ITBS scores to help them identify the strengths and weaknesses of their students in various subject areas. They plan their lessons and their curriculum in order to provide ways to strengthen the curriculum to better meet the needs of the students and to help them progress at a faster rate.

The Religion curriculum, which is taught at each grade level, focuses on faith in action through sharing their "Time, Talent, and Treasure." It blends catechesis, prayer, Scripture, Sacramental preparation and service according to the developmental level of the student. The Catholic identity permeates all subjects through focus on God and respect for all life. St. Francis of Assisi Parish School provides ample opportunities for learning at the developmental level of each child in each subject area.

Support for Student Spiritual, Personal, and Academic Growth

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

St. Francis of Assisi Parish School offers extensive opportunities for students of all ages, interests and abilities to participate in and grow personally. These include after-school athletics, Safety Patrol, Friendship Circles, Fifth Grade Astro Camp, Sixth Grade Camp, Jog-a-thon, Student Council, Ambassadors for Christ, Kindergarten/Eighth Grade Buddies, talent shows and spirit assemblies.

A registered nurse and parent volunteers with medical and healthcare training provide medical support and health screening to students. The school nurse also acts as a "compassionate listener" for students or faculty who seek care or advice.

An after-school daycare program is provided under the direction of a full-time Childcare Director. Homework time is scheduled during care.

Before and after school tutoring is available for students by school faculty or by referral to outside sources of educational support. The school has a Resource Materials room and a Resource/Purchasing Director which provides enrichment and support materials for teachers and students. The Parish shares its instructional resources with the school.

To what extent is an understanding of Church doctrine and Catholic social teaching and service encouraged and valued?

St. Francis students have the opportunity to participate regularly in spiritual experiences. They prepare, lead and participate in school Masses, Reconciliation services, rosaries, Stations of the Cross, sacramental preparation, daily classroom prayer and other prayer experiences. Support, counseling, instruction, and spiritual formation are overseen by the Parish and school administration.

The St. Francis of Assisi Parish School and Parish community come together for weekly Mass and participate in Reconciliation services, rosaries, Stations of the Cross, and sacramental preparation. A variety of age-appropriate prayers and liturgical songs are used during student daily prayer and prayer services.

The Parish Liturgy Coordinator and Music Director work closely with the school to prepare school and sacramental liturgies. The school arranges training and instruction for non-Catholic students who wish to receive the sacraments. The Parish Religious Education program provides religious formation for students and families from preschool through high school.

The Pastor and other religious visit the classroom informally and give a formal lesson to enrich and supplement classroom instruction twice a semester. Parents are reminded of their responsibility of a sacramental life, including attending Mass and Reconciliation. Families are encouraged to attend special missions, retreats and parish programs.

To what extent is Christian service active and visible?

Students at St. Francis of Assisi Parish School participate in a wide variety of service and outreach programs for the Parish. They are altar servers and choir members. Ambassadors for Christ attend Parish funerals and serve as ushers, greeters, readers and help with the collections. They participate with their parents in Family Faith Formation, help serve soup to the homeless, and help the Knights of Columbus raise funds.

For the wider community, students are involved in charitable programs such as "Souper Bowl", Brother Benno's, "Get On the Bus", Birth Choice, Wounded Warriors, world-wide disaster relief efforts, get well cards for the ill, cards for local inmates, Thanksgiving placemats, service to senior citizen luncheons and participation in the City of Vista's annual Christmas parade.

St. Francis of Assisi Parish School is a "community of faith" as evidenced by the spirit of charity that is displayed in the relationships among all elements of the school and parish community. A "willingness to help others in prayer, works of charity, and a kindly spirit pervades words and deeds."

Resource Management and Development

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

St. Francis of Assisi has done an outstanding job in providing a strong curriculum program for the students. The principal, in collaboration with the Pastor, Parish Finance Council, Education Commission, Pastoral Council, and Parent Teacher Group, has maintained financial stability for the school and has also looked at maintaining it for the future. Sound financial practices are used to ensure that St Francis of Assisi Parish School will provide programs that will best meet the needs of the students and provide them with skills that will enable them to be accepted in academically strong high schools.

The school receives a generous Parish subsidy and the parents support annual fundraising events that continue to grow each year. In addition, generous donors generate funds for tuition assistance to those families in the parish who are experiencing financial difficulty. Through the efforts of the Development Director, additional funding for programs has increased through grant proposals, federal funding and fundraising. These funds are used to support professional development, technology and the needs of low achieving students.

The school has a great reputation in the area and is continually working on marketing practices to ensure continued growth. The school maintains its own website and updates it regularly. The stakeholders, Parish Finance Council and Parent Teacher Group are presently working on increasing the school's public relations efforts in order to remain competitive in the Catholic education market and ensure continued growth enrollment.

Current resources not only meet the needs of the budget, but also help to provide the extras to ensure that the needs of students and teachers are met. The pastor, administration, faculty and stakeholders are all involved in maintaining St. Francis of Assisi Parish School as an important part of the Parish and ensuring that the school continues to thrive and meet its mission.

Part IV: Summary and Recommendations

Schoolwide Strengths/Critical Areas for Growth and Action Plan

Schoolwide Strengths

- St. Francis of Assisi Parish School provides a Catholic atmosphere where religious instruction permeates the entire curriculum program.

- The pastor, principal, parishioners, faculty, parents, students and local community provide outstanding support to the school.
- The principal and faculty are dedicated, supportive and compassionate in their dealings with all members of the parish and school community.
- The SLEs are clearly understood and used throughout the school program.
- The faculty and staff work well together and are very cohesive.
- St. Francis of Assisi Parish School community exemplifies a friendly, close-knit family unit who respect and care for each other.
- All students participate in various service projects assigned to each grade level and have the opportunity to participate in a myriad of extra-curricular activities offered.
- The strong commitment on the part of the pastor, principal and various groups to maintain the stability of the school and plan for future growth is evident.
- The teachers provide creative lessons to best meet the needs of each individual student.
- The supportive parents help through their fundraising efforts and on daily school activities.

Critical Growth Areas

- St. Francis of Assisi Parish School is looking to enhance the curricular program by expanding the technological advances to all grade levels.
- The school plans to investigate ways to provide more hands-on resources in the area of Science at all grade levels to help enhance the curriculum.
- The school plans to expand conversational Spanish programs throughout all grades to better prepare the students for high school.

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?

The Visiting Committee finds the action plan proposed by St. Francis of Assisi Parish School to be directed toward total school achievement and having all students master the Schoolwide Learning Expectations. By putting the action plan in process and further developing it, the total school program will be greatly enhanced.

The school's identification of the following targeted areas for improvement has been studied and affirmed by the Visiting Committee.

- To further meet the needs of the students, by expanding use of SmartBoards and Starboards into the lower grade levels.
- To increase the amount of "hands-on, minds-on" instructional materials and resources at all grade levels in the area of Science.
- To provide a Foreign Language component to the curriculum at all grade levels.

In addition, the Visiting Committee supports the plans to increase the public relations efforts to remain competitive. By addressing these key issues, student learning will be enhanced and continuity of the school programs will be ensured.

The action plan outlines the specific learning expectations, provides a clear rationale, and lists the specific steps, time frames, persons responsible, resources needed and methods of assessing the progress made. The action plan and the timeframe set within the plan are aimed at improving student learning.

A dedicated principal, a supportive and committed faculty and staff, and parents who were involved, provided the foundation for continued improvement in the educational process as the action plan was developed and addressed.

Maintaining the practice of an annual written report on the progress of the plan would ensure ongoing documentation recognizing progress made and would assist in reviewing the focus for the following year.