

March 2-4, 2009

Our Lady of Grace Catholic School

Findings from the Onsite Report of the Team from the Minnesota Nonpublic School Accrediting Association (MNSAA)

In our work of verifying the Self Study and examining the indicators of compliance with the MNSAA standards the team conducted over 300 interviews with students, teachers, staff, board members, parents, and others. The team also read and examined the provided documents, visited every classroom at least once, walked throughout the building and the grounds outside, and discussed the school with everyone we met.

Our Lady of Grace is a large school, yet that size did not diminish the warmth and friendliness which the staff and the students showed to the team members. The students greeted team members in the hallways and classrooms, the faculty went out of their way to talk with us and to welcome us to the school, parents were interested in our work and willingly shared their enthusiasm for the school. The team members often remarked on the sense of community and openness that they observed at Our Lady of Grace.

Our Lady of Grace School has superb facilities, a national reputation for academic excellence, an enthusiastic and well-qualified staff, and parents who strongly support the education their children receive. Our Lady of Grace School also remains committed to its Catholic identity and its mission statement to be a Catholic community.

In our conversations with the children we heard words such as "opportunity," "faith," and "caring." These words, probably better than anything this report contains, characterize Our Lady of Grace School.

Most Significant Areas of Strength:

A highly professional and dedicated administrative team, faculty, and staff who all work collaboratively to meet the mission of the school

A strong parent involvement, including an impressive number of volunteers, which provides valuable support for the teachers and the school

The curriculum, professional teacher development, and differentiated instruction foster a strong emphasis on academic excellence which, in turn, is shown in the students' commitment to learning.

A commendable investment in current technology that supports the curriculum and enhances instruction and communication

A warm, welcoming school climate that shows students and staff living their Catholic Identity

Commendations:

The team commends the school for basing their teacher goals for the 08-09 school year on the mission and philosophy of the school.

The school used the mission statement to structure the parent survey and on the basis of this survey affirmed the school mission.

The team affirms the school's inclusion of objective two in the school's strategic plan which includes an update to their curriculum review plan

The team compliments Our Lady of Grace for their concerted effort to further the school's mission of providing differentiated instruction in every classroom.

The team commends the school's record keeping regarding the curriculum evaluation process, including meeting minutes and evidence of research based practices.

The team compliments the school on their use of technology, particularly the extensive integration of that technology in the curriculum.

The team commends the school for having a written process for identifying students with special needs and advanced learners.

The team affirms the decision by the school to study and review school-wide assessment especially in light of the progress made in differentiation and performance learning.

The Responsive Classroom/Developmental Design practice (where students greet visitors and others and briefly explain activities in the classroom) creates a warm and friendly atmosphere.

The team commends Our Lady of Grace School for its efficient use of space and we recognize that the school is at maximum capacity.

The team commends Our Lady of Grace for the commitment and enthusiasm of the parent organizations (PSO, School Board, Men's Club) in support of the mission of the school.

The team commends Our Lady of Grace for having a majority of its teachers holding a master's degree.

The team commends Our Lady of Grace for their diligence and care in ensuring that background checks are carried out for the many volunteers at the school and having careful records that document those background checks.

The team commends Our Lady of Grace on their thorough evaluation process of teachers as it relates to formal and informal observation, teacher goals, weekly reflections and walk-throughs.

Our Lady of Grace has a clear plan in place for individual and whole school development based on the mission and philosophy of the school.

The team commends the strong leadership of the school administrative team in the day-to-day management and in the long-term vision for the school.

The team commends Our Lady of Grace's commitment to providing its instructional staff with a competitive compensation package.

Insights:

The team notes that the self study included a challenge which was also given in the strategic plan that "a priority plan is necessary to address maintenance/building needs (health, safety, and leaks) and our technology infrastructure in regard to the availability of monies from the parish's capital campaign." The team concurs with the school's challenge that "ongoing attention will be needed in order to maintain an up-to-date building infrastructure for technology."

In its interviews with a cross-section of stakeholders, the team identified the challenge of balancing financial support for the school's vision with the overall resources of the parish, as well as the need for collaboration to resolve these difficult financial issues.

Most Significant Challenges:

The team recommends that Our Lady of Grace examine the student safety issues regarding car-pool pick-up procedures and its before-school entrance policy.

The team recommends that Our Lady of Grace review their new staff orientation procedures. The team also notes that the strategic plan addresses this (Objective 3, Strategy 2).

The team recommends that Our Lady of Grace develop a formal written marketing plan. The team also notes that the strategic plan addresses this (Objective 4, Strategy 3).

The team recommends that Our Lady of Grace review the timeline for the action steps in the Strategic Plan and more specifically define which administrative position is responsible for the action steps noted as "administration."