

OUR LADY OF GRACE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Summary of 2008 Parent Survey Results

In May 2008, we asked all parents of OLG students to complete an online survey in order to solicit feedback regarding a variety of subjects, all of which relate directly to OLG School's mission and long term plan. Parents initially were given a two week period to complete the survey, and this time frame was later extended by a week in order to encourage additional responses.

Out of 382 families, 203 parents completed the survey. The results of the survey are summarized below.

1. Please identify OLG School's Top Three Strengths:

There was an amazing amount of consistency in identifying OLG School's strengths, and at least one-half of the parents cited each of the top three strengths. More than 60% of the parents identified the school's Catholicity and religious training as a top strength. As one parent noted, *"OLG provides a nurturing atmosphere where Catholic values are taught and demonstrated..."* OLG's faith formation training, service learning model and celebration of liturgies all were cited as significant assets of the school. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the school's healthy, community-focused environment was cited by nearly 40% of the parents as a top strength. While this falls just outside the top three strengths identified in the survey responses, it corresponds directly to those who experience the school's Catholicity as a primary and important characteristic of the school.

OLG School's academic program was identified as the second top strength. As one parent noted, *"OLG provides a strong academic program which incorporates state of the art technology and which challenges students of various abilities."* Appreciation for the strength of the school's education program is evident throughout the survey responses, with many parents also citing a particular appreciation for the school's ability to meet the needs of diverse learners as well as its ability to use technology successfully to deliver the curriculum.

The teachers, administration and staff (collectively "staff") were identified as the third top strength with adjectives like *"amazing," "great," "fabulous" and "talented and engaged"*. Both the excellent quality of the staff as well as their dedication and commitment were mentioned by parents who all appreciate the *"supportive, nurturing, challenging staff"* of OLG School. Clearly, the staff also is key to the healthy school environment identified by many as a school strength.

2. How can OLG School maintain and enhance our students' formation in the Catholic faith (i.e., education, understanding, sacrament preparation, celebration and service)?

Parent support and appreciation for the weekly school Mass was evident throughout the survey responses. In addition, a faith formation area which parents cited as worthy of further reflection was continuing to grow the school's model of "servant"/student. Further,

some parents questioned whether education about Catholic traditions and teachings is present throughout the grade levels and if so, could parents support this curriculum at home with additional communication from the school. One parent commented, “[t]he fact that our sons’ religious education doesn’t stop when he leaves for school in the morning is evident in the way he sees himself and treats others...,” and it is clear that parents value the Catholicity of their children’s education and want to see Bible study, use of the Catechism and the saints held up as role models. Finally, more than 30 parents expressed a desire to see the preparation and celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation moved to the school curriculum, with many opining that the current parish program does not offer a rich experience and others noting that the model of First Eucharist used by the parish and school has been so successful that it should be repeated for Confirmation. While the above areas were offered for reflection, the strength of the school’s faith formation program is clearly appreciated by parents (i.e., cited as the top school strength in question 1 above), and many parents indicated that the school should continue doing what it is doing: “[c]ontinue present course of interweaving faith in each class, and leading by parent and teachers examples of life and service.”

3. How can OLG School maintain and enhance its welcoming environment?

As noted above, the school’s environment is viewed by parents as a strength. However, there were two areas which were cited by a significant number of parents for additional focus and reflection. First, many believed that we could do a better job of welcoming new families to our community. A number of ideas were offered in this regard including student buddies/mentors, more new family events, increasing the number of simple social events to promote inclusiveness, and awareness of the needs of working parents. Clearly, most parents believed the school and parish community should make additional efforts to welcome new families to the community, including the increasing number of new families who start at grade levels other than kindergarten.

Second, many parents stated the need for further reflection on how we treat each other in our school community. As identified by one parent, it is important to “[c]ontinue to teach the kids the importance of respect for their school, teachers and others. Keeping families and kids involved in service and taking care of the school.” Obviously, the school’s new Responsive Classroom and Developmental Design programs are targeted at this area, but further reflection might be worthwhile given the desire by parents for vigilance in this area. In our treatment of others, we should review how to improve students’ attitude and actions toward other students, teachers and volunteers; staffs’ attitude and actions toward students, new teachers and parents; and parents’ attitude and actions toward students, teachers, new families and others. Stated otherwise, how can we all best support and grow in Christ together in both our words and actions?

4. How can OLG School maintain and enhance its curriculum content and instruction?

The two significant themes which appear in this area of the survey responses are that ongoing comparison and review of the curriculum are key and that spending the resources to hire and retain quality staff is necessary. As expressed by one parent but echoed by many, “[t]eachers are the heart of the curriculum. Keeping teachers up to date and enthusiastic about their vocation will go a long way to enhancing our children’s education.” Parents clearly want the school to devote its financial resources to maintaining the quality of the staff; including not only good salaries and benefits but also providing opportunities for ongoing professional development in areas like technology, meeting the needs of diverse learners, etc. Further, parents appreciate and want to continue the school’s practice of a data driven curriculum (e.g., MCAs, high school reviews, etc.).

Several parents desire further focus on the school’s technology resources and outcomes, including ensuring that the K-5 program prepares students for success with the 1:1 program in grades 6-8. In addition, a number of parents questioned the school’s use of teaching assistants, wondering whether the current level is enough and whether there is consistent practice in the role of the teaching assistants in the classroom in order to be most effective. Several more parents cited the desire for smaller K-5 class sizes. Finally, a small minority of parents said that they wished the school could do more in the area of gifted learners.

5. How can OLG School continue to meet the needs of our students’ diverse learning style and abilities?

Many of the answers to this question corresponded directly to the answers provided by parents to question 4 above (e.g., more teaching assistants, smaller class sizes). Other comments call into question how both differentiation and red shirting are addressed in the classroom. Even though a large majority of parents clearly believe that the school offers a strong academic program with proven results, the comments of several parents raise the issue of whether the school could or should add more tracking. Other comments by a minority of respondents call for reflection on how to meet the needs of special needs students as well as accelerated students. Finally, one parent cautioned, “[c]ontinue to think outside of the box. Don’t compare yourself to what others are doing, but to what you dream of being.”

6. How can OLG School maintain and enhance the integration of technology into the learning process?

The technology component of the school’s education program is viewed positively by most parents and, in particular, cited as a strength in grades 6-8 with the new 1:1 program complemented by SMARTBoards. “Technology has changed tremendously for our children in the ‘real world’....The 1:1 program has really stretched my child’s creativity while at the same time building on the academics,” commented one parent. In addition, there were three overriding observations about technology from parents. First, concerns were expressed about how to best fund the school’s technology resources with suggestion from

seeking corporate sponsors to aggressive fundraising including assistance from the Men's Club. Second, parents expressed the hope that the school would continue to remain vigilant regarding misuse of the laptops and continue to educate students about how to be good "digital" citizens. Finally, parents believed that additional focus should be given to ensuring that the technology outcomes are seamless across all grade levels; that appropriate mastery of skills happens year after year; and that teachers are provided with the training, support and resources they need in order to pursue successfully the stated outcomes.

7. How can OLG School maintain and enhance its extracurricular programs?

There were numerous comments that the childcare programs are good, but that the facilities are substandard. Other than that observation, there wasn't a lot of uniformity in the parent answers to this question, but there seemed to be a general consensus that the school should, at a minimum, continue its extracurricular programs at the level they are currently and a recognition that facility limitations hinder any significant program expansions. One parent opined that the school should *"[c]ontinue to encourage and support all extracurricular programs and work to make them available to any student that wants an opportunity."* This concern about how to fairly fund the programs was expressed several times in the responses. In addition, there were a few suggestions that the school could expand the sports program into running or golf similar to the after school ski program which would not stress current facilities further or require additional gym space. Finally, there seems to be support for expanding the AAA Summer Program, especially for those classes which have small class size limits and significant waiting lists.

8. How can OLG School continue to attract and retain quality teachers and professional staff?

Parents overwhelmingly regard attracting and retaining quality teachers as key to the school's success. One parent's comments nicely summarize the many comments parents offered to this point – the staff deserves *"[r]espectful and competitive pay that is fair and appropriate.... [I]t is also important to foster a team approach and mentor-style relationship with new hires."* Several parents offered that the school needed to reach its parity and benefit goals for staff even if it means tuition increases. Several more parents noted that maintaining nice facilities also is important for staff retention.

9. How can OLG School most effectively communicate with parents and the parish community?

Electronic, electronic, electronic ... parents overwhelming support the use of electronic media by the school as its primary communication tool. In order for such use to be effective, many parents observed that there needs to be a more uniform approach to teacher website use and updating as well as to the use and updating of Powerschool. In addition, others thought that improvements in the Weekender and website could be accomplished in order to make them more user friendly. It appears that there is support for a review of the expectation, frequency and format of tools used by the school to communicate to the students, families, parish and community.

10. Tuition covers only 70% of our school's total costs to provide the quality educational programs that exist today. How can OLG School continue to provide these programs at an affordable tuition rate for all families seeking a Catholic education for their children?

Parents voiced support for additional financial support from the parish in order to keep tuition affordable. In addition and somewhat surprisingly, nearly as many parents thought that additional fundraising should occur, including with alumni and possible corporate sponsors. Parents also thought that the endowment option, as a means to aid the school's financial status, was a good strategy. Many parents indicated that they believed additional tuition increases may be necessary to continue to provide the quality educational programs that exist today; however, most of these parents also said that there must be enough scholarship aid available for those who need it. Several parents supported the school's standard tuition policy for those not contributing to the parish plate and some felt that the standard rate should be increased. Finally, a number of parents expressed concern that continuing tuition increases may make the school unaffordable for them or that the school should consider a discount for multiple children from one family.