



St. Mary Catholic Schools
Grades P3-12

**St. Mary Catholic Schools Board of Directors Meeting
President's Report
March 15, 2017**

Catholic Identity, Discipleship and Religious Programming

SMCS System

- The theme for 2016-17 at St. Mary Catholic Schools (SMCS), **servant leadership**, was introduced and developed at a staff retreat in August that focused on how to integrate the theme throughout the school year. Each month, the faculty and students at each school engage in activities related to that month's servant leadership-related key attribute and the environment (newsletters, bulletin boards, etc.) is updated to reflect the month's attribute. Servant leadership key attributes are: service, attitude, leadership, kindness, commitment, belief, focus, perseverance and witness.
- The first of the five initiatives of the **SMCS Strategic Plan*** is to "*advance Catholic education* as an investment in developing dynamic Catholic disciples through academic and spiritual leadership." A task force has been formed and is meeting regularly to develop goals and strategies to support the development of dynamic Catholic disciples by strengthening SMCS relationships with our parishes, promoting academic and spiritual leadership among students and working to improve the perception of the value of Catholic education in the wider community.

High School

- Each month, St. Mary Catholic High School hosts Eucharistic Adoration in the school's chapel. Beginning this year, a **Mass is offered prior to Adoration**.
- The school **chapel is being refreshed** to align with Bishop's guidelines and to create a more welcoming and prayerful space.
- In January, one religion teacher and 11 students journeyed to Washington D.C. to pray, serve the community and participate in the **March for Life**.
- A group of freshmen started a **student-led weekly bible study** called "Bible Buddies."
- Beginning with Lent, the high school will begin **exposing the Blessed Sacrament** during reconciliation.

Middle School

- To supplement the curriculum in the classrooms, the middle school community has focused this year on **Corporal Works of Mercy**. They responded to each challenge in a unique way. For example:
 - to *give drink to the thirsty*, they raised over \$1400 to help build a water well in South Sudan,
 - to *clothe the naked and give shelter to the homeless*, they partnered with students' parishes during Advent in several giving projects that benefited homeless shelters and those in need, and

- to *visit the sick*, students created 27 chemo-care kits that were taken to UW-Madison children's cancer hospital to bring comfort to children going through treatment for cancer.
- An **all-school kindness project** was promoted during Advent, challenging everyone to show kindness. A visible sign was on display in the entryway where a manger stood, and for every act of kindness, students could put a piece of straw in the manger to welcome Jesus. Students were challenged each week to focus on kindness on a different group of recipients, such as those around them whom they are most often unkind to. This was tied to the monthly theme of servant leadership, and reinforced in classroom lessons.

Elementary Schools

- At the K-5 level, each school is working closely with its affiliated parish to serve the community (locally and globally). Each school engages in frequent **Catholic disciplines** including daily prayer, weekly liturgies, rosaries, pastoral visits, Stations of the Cross and reconciliation.
- In this election year, **schools held elections** after researching and campaigning for "favorite angel" or "most inspirational saint." One school's 4th and 5th graders also signed a "kindness pledge" that they've been working to honor all year.
- As a religion class project, after **studying the Beatitudes**, students cut out hearts for Valentine's Day and wrote the Beatitudes on them. The hearts were hung throughout the school, making a connection between a "good" heart and living a life following the Beatitudes.
- Students participated in the **Catholic Daughters education contest** by writing essays with the theme "whatever you do for the least of my brethren you do for me" (Matthew 25:40) or "healing the needy where I live."
- To **integrate religion into other educational tools** (promoting literacy and charity), fourth grade students wrote essays about the impact of the school's pencil drive for our diocesan mission in Dominican Republic.
- Each day by **doing physical warm-ups to Christian music** through Move to the Groove, students express their faith through movement and music.
- In the spring, all fourth and fifth grade students will **travel to the National Shine of Our Lady of Good Help**, where they will attend Mass and participate in prayerful reflection.
- At one school, students in grades 2-5 participate in **monthly Holy Hour** with the parish community.

Academic and Curricular Developments

SMCS System

- As part of the strategic initiative*, a **task force to help deliver academic excellence** was developed. The group, composed of principals and board members, issued three surveys (one to parents and two to teachers, each with a different focus) to determine what the system is doing well and where improvements are needed in the area of academics. The task force is compiling and analyzing the data, and will use it as the foundation for making recommendations and actions for improvement.
- A three-year implementation of **Project Lead The Way (PLTW)**, a STEM (science, technology, math & engineering) program, was launched to supplement our science curriculum. By year three, PLTW will be integrated as part of the curriculum for all K-12 students.
- Our new **pupil services** program provides comprehensive academic assistance to students from kindergarten through twelfth grade using a proactive student assessment

system to identify students in need of extra help and create for each individual a plan designed to support each one to reach his or her highest potential.

- The counseling department is implementing a **new comprehensive counseling software program** that will facilitate planning, and will be especially helpful to middle and high school students and their parents for career exploration and post-graduation plans.
- Five teachers are participating in the year-long ArtsCore training through UW-Oshkosh. The free workshops focus on **creative teaching methods** that integrate art with all subjects.

High School

- New, for-credit **fine arts classes**, including chamber orchestra, pop music, marching band, forensics, graphic design and drama have been added.
- Students worked diligently to prepare and represented our school community with twenty-five entries in the **WSMA District Solo & Ensemble Festival** in February. Our students received the following ratings:
 - 14 – 1* (*State-qualifying entries, including jazz ensemble)
 - 9 – 1st
 - 2 – 2nd
- **CAPP classes** were added in German and Speech for college credit.
- The school has been engaged in **accreditation** self-study and external review to prepare for a visit from the accreditation committee in May 2017.
- The school's **STEM Club** expanded this year beyond robotics to explore aeronautics, electronics, engineering and web design.
- Several VEX robotics teams qualified for the upcoming **state and national competitions**, and are hoping to earn a spot at the international competition.
- The average **ACT score** for the Class of 2016 was 24.9, and eighteen students earned **AP Scholar** awards.

Middle School

- Sixteen eighth grade students received **high school credit** by completing the first semester of high school Spanish 1 class.
- Seventh and eighth grade students are finishing up their **third-quarter projects**, a cross-curricular long-range assignment involving math, science, and language arts. Students had to complete a science experiment and gather data in science class, graph the data and results in math class, and write a research paper explaining their results and findings in language arts. Students then create display boards and eighth graders' presentations are judged in a science fair.
- The new VEX Robotics team earned a trip to the **state tournament**.
- One student came in second place at the **national level** for her art submission to the Catholic Daughters of America competition.

Elementary Schools

- Students have been learning about **coding** in school as part of the Project Lead The Way initiative. They also have the opportunity to participate in more STEM-oriented activities in the after-school enrichment program.
- Two elementary school students qualified for the upcoming VEX IQ **state tournament**.

Marketing and Recruitment Initiatives and Results

- **SMCS Annual Fund:** Our goal for 2016-17 is \$200,000; as of February 28, 2017, have raised nearly \$129,000. The annual fund is promoted with a brochure, online pledge cards, social media, website placement, pledge card inserts in publications, alumni match, phone-a-thon, personal letters/meetings, email communication, and class reunions.
- **Fundraisers:** All are promoted through various print and social media platforms and through newsletters, bulletins, etc. A portion goes to support system tuition assistance and technology needs. Net profit follows:
 - Zephyrfest (system/high school): \$318,000 projected
 - Jumbo Gumbo (system): \$52,000
 - Meet Me in the Middle (middle school): \$21,000
 - Brewfest (St. Gabriel Elementary): \$19,400
 - Wines Around the World (St. Margaret Mary Elementary): approximately \$60,000
 - Winter Escape (St. Mary Elementary): \$25,000 projected
- **Fine arts corporate & friend's sponsorships:** A campaign to raise funds for the fine arts program raised \$25,500 through direct requests and advertising via system news venues.
- **Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP):** This program is actively promoted through radio advertising, bulletin inserts, community posters, email and social media, newsletters and word of mouth. Since we began accepting WPCP students, we have exceeded the requirement for the number of applications and filled our allotted seats each year. For this year, we had 115 verified applicants and filled 96 slots.
- **A task force to *develop strategies regarding recruitment and retention*** to help grow enrollment was formed as part of the strategic initiative*. This active committee has met regularly and has devised a plan that will be implemented in a partnership between the advancement department (admission director) and parent volunteers.
- **Recruiting events** are promoted via advertisements and articles in local newspapers and magazines, with bulletin inserts and community posters, in newsletters, in social media and on the system website. Additional activities, especially for early childhood students, planned for this year are:
 - special school visit/shadow days (attended by approximately 275 students)
 - activity for preschoolers (one event so far, attended by 35 families)
 - open houses at elementary schools
 - information nights for parents and students at middle and high school (attended by approximately 75 families)
 - special student nights at sporting and fine arts events, etc.
- **Registration incentives** are offered to every family from mid-October through the end of January.
 - Through the early registration period, 772 students registered for the 2017-18 school year; over 800 students are currently registered for next year.
 - Families with children entering a transition grade next year (going into Kindergarten, 6th, or 9th grade) were eligible for a reduction in tuition of \$150 - \$300. Currently, 151 students are enrolled in these transition grades.

- This was the first year of a **community partnership** designed to provide Catholic education to qualified members of the Boys and Girls Club. A private donor set up a scholarship to benefit a BGC student to attend our middle school. The program has been very successful for this year's selected student and has been expanded to support additional students for the 2017-18 school year.

Professional Staff Development and Personnel Services

- A survey was sent to all SMCS teachers to **get their input on current and future professional development**. The results were used in designing this year's professional development plans.
- Our curriculum review cycle has us looking at literacy curriculum, both content and discipline literacy. CESA 6 is doing **a yearlong professional development series on literacy** for our faculty with presentations planned for each monthly professional development day. Title IIA funds are being used to cover expenses.
- Initial educators are attending **training offered through the diocese**.
- A **representative from CESA 6 spent time visiting observing** elementary, middle and high school classrooms to offer suggestions, acknowledge the great things happening, and to adjust her presentations for future in-service days.
- We are **working with NAMI** (National Alliance of Mental Illness) to provide information to our faculty and staff. At the first of the presentations, they received an overview of mental illness, treatment, stigma, impact, and recovery.
- **SMCS educators reviewed the research** behind the diocesan department of education's task force looking at grading and assessment. This group will continue to meet and work towards standards based grading.
- A community liaison officer worked with personnel to review **safety protocols** for our schools as part of a professional development day. In addition, a monthly **safety bulletin** is distributed to all leadership-level personnel to share with their departments/schools.
- The beginning of the 2016-17 school year brought forward a **new initiative focusing on health and wellness** that are taking place on several campuses:
 - An in-house flu shot clinic
 - Zumba classes for employees
 - A plyometric class and group runs
 - Communications regarding the new Humana Go365 program (a wellness rewards program)
 - SMCS Health and Wellness Committee was reinvigorated, benefitting employees, students and families

Athletic Achievements

- The **middle school volleyball** team was the conference tournament champion team.
- The **middle school cross country team** has grown to 45 members and has had invitational success.
- The sixth grade boys **Zephyr Basketball Club team** (the feeder program for our varsity basketball team) has taken first place in two tournaments so far this season.
- Both the **boys and girls basketball** teams advanced in the state post-season play-offs.
- The **varsity girls tennis** team was the conference and WCTC tournament champion; three players made first-team all-conference.

- A runner on the **varsity boys cross country** team competed at the state meet.
- The **varsity track** team was the conference champions (spring 2016).
- The **undefeated, state-champion baseball team** will defend its state title this season.
- Our SMCS **cross country ski program** received 30 pairs of cross country skis through a matching grant program. The addition of these skis allowed us to expand our cross country ski program offered through the physical education department from grades 4 and 5 to grades K-5.
- In the program's second year, one elementary school has doubled the number of participants in its **downhill ski program** which involves parents and students and promotes physical activity and community building.
- As a result of the SMCS Fields of Dreams project, campus athletic facility upgrades are being completed, including a new regulation softball field.
- The construction of a state-of-the-art **fitness and training center** located on the combined middle/high school campus will begin in April 2017.

Specific Challenges

- Increased competition for students from both public and private schools due to open enrollment, school choice program, and perception regarding affordability of Catholic education; many high quality educational options available in geographic area.
- Percentage of self-reported Catholics in diocese declining significantly while overall population continues to grow. Interest in Catholic education waning; enrollment in Catholic schools in diocese is trending downward; SMCS elementary schools experiencing parallel. Significant shift with parents allowing children to decide on school of choice.
- Teacher and administrator compensation an issue while trying to recruit and retain qualified educators and specialists; gap continues to widen between SMCS and area schools.
- Overall cost of education continues to rise beyond tuition increases. Major costs relate to compliance, operation of new facilities, and technology infrastructure, software, and devices.
- Financial sustainability dependent on need to increase revenue sources, including identification and attraction of additional donors, sourcing third party funding for educational resources, and increased efforts required in advancement/development.

2017-18 Initiatives

- An **Aquinas Gifted and Talented Learning** program will be developed and piloted at the elementary level for children entering grade 3 through grade 5. The Aquinas program will provide project based, challenging curriculum for advanced, gifted learners. The program will also aid in the retention of gifted students who historically leave SMCS system for public school TAG programs and/or area charter schools.
- Our investment in **Project Lead The Way (PLTW)** will expand to support curriculum in grades 2, 3, and 8. PLTW Advisory Team members and teachers will engage in interactive STEM based projects in the classroom and facilitate connections to business and industry.
- Our international student exchange program will expand to include European (high school) and Latin American (middle school) students. In addition, strategies to strengthen and integrate our Chinese international program will be explored and implemented.
- Completion of our new **Training and Fitness Center** will provide opportunities to integrate a higher level of physical and health education activities into the classroom to benefit the health and well-being of all students. Students will train in multiple ways to develop the strength, agility, finesse and skills that are necessary to be competitors in all areas.