

April 19-21, 2010

St. Michael Catholic School

Summary of the Minnesota Nonpublic School Accrediting Association (MNSAA) Onsite Accreditation Team Report

In our work of verifying the Self Study and examining the indicators of compliance with the MNSAA Standards the team conducted some 159 interviews: students, teachers, staff, board members, parents, volunteers 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, observed school arrival and dismissal, and discussed the school with everyone we met.

“Wrapping their arms around my kid and helping my kid succeed.” This was a comment by one of the parents and it illustrates one of the key characteristics, descriptions, and successes of St. Michael’s school. The school, as everyone said, is a community, a family. Sometimes, as one of the upper grade students noted, it is sort of a place which may isolate students from the outside world, but, as the student also noted, that is a good thing. People at St. Michael’s School value each other, respect each other, and they “help every kid to succeed.”

When the team asked how St. Michael’s did that, parents and students gave examples of this family sense in the use of the Prayer Buddies and the Home Rooms in the upper grades and other ways, big and small, where other students and staff were accepting and helpful. Even though the middle school is in a separate wing, there was no separation in the student body along grade levels.

This friendliness, enthusiasm, diligence, and respect of the students reminded the team of what the results of religious education can be. Many of the parents had themselves attended St. Michael and when they made a decision for their own children, there was only one place for those children to be enrolled. There is an intergenerational commitment to St. Michael.

The enthusiastic and supportive comments by the parents and their satisfaction with what St. Michael’s was providing their children also reminded us what dedicated teachers can do for religious education.

Most Significant Areas of Strength:

Students, staff, and parents have a shared belief that St. Michael's is a family, which supports, encourages, and bears witness to the mission of the school.

The school is moving forward in the acquisition and use of current technology in teaching.

The students in the school display a commendable sense of caring, enthusiasm, and respect for each other, staff, and visitors.

St. Michael's benefits from a strong commitment to leadership, not just through the administration of the school and parish, but it also can be found in teachers in their teams and in parents and other stakeholders on the boards and organizations of the parish.

St. Michael's has a capable and dedicated teaching staff, which provides a strong academic education.

Commendations:

The team commends St. Michael's for the generous provision of resources and support for the educational program.

The team commends the school for maintaining an extensive, comprehensive library and for the creative approaches to funding the library.

The team noted numerous examples of high quality published materials, which promote the school.

The team commends St. Michael's for a fine and active Parent Connections group.

The team found that the tuition schedule is comprehensive and serves to inform parents of the financial obligation. St. Michael's is also to be commended for their fine tuition assistance policy.

The team commends St. Michael's for the steps taken to effectively and regularly communicate with parents, guardians, and other stakeholders.

Most Significant Challenges:

The team recommends that the entire staff work together to develop a common format for and understanding and use of a comprehensive PK-8 Curriculum handbook, including learner outcomes at all levels.

The team recommends that there be a written plan for technology training for staff, as well as a plan for incorporating the use of technology across all curriculum areas.

The team recommends the creation of a school-wide process to use assessment data to determine whether students are meeting the written curriculum outcomes, and to use assessment data to direct and drive curriculum content and instructional practices.

The team recommends that St. Michael's review the various safety issues raised by the team including fire inspection, school pick-up traffic issues, a crisis management plan, and securing classrooms.

The team recommends that St. Michael's re-examine its strategic plan so as to (1) include more specific and measurable end outcomes, (2) examine whether the strategic plan includes relevant challenges of the self study, (3) more closely align the school's strategic plan with the overall vision and goals of the parish.