

Saint Joseph School



Executive Summary

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Introduction

Every school has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school, and the kinds of programs and services that a school implements to support student learning.

The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the school community will have a more complete picture of how the school perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.

Description of the School

Describe the school's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school serves?

Founded in 1963, Saint Joseph School has been an integral part of the community for over fifty years. Saint Joseph School has grown each of the last three years - from an enrollment of 210 at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, to 217 in 2015, to the current enrollment of 242 students. The school is a Pre-Kindergarten through 8th Grade school, with just one class per grade, located in a suburban area in the northern part of Knoxville. As the only regional elementary school in our diocese, Saint Joseph School's students come from diverse backgrounds in many ways: geographically, by parish affiliation, by ethnicity, and by socio-economic status.

Saint Joseph school serves the greater Knoxville area, with more than fifteen percent of the students travelling more than fifteen miles to school each day. The school's enrollment reflects our canonical status as a regional school. Seventy-four percent of our students attend the three largest parishes, while nineteen percent attend eight others throughout the diocese. Seven percent of our students are non-Catholic. In a part of the country that is only three percent Catholic, Saint Joseph School has cast a wide net!

The twenty-five member instructional and administrative staff is ninety-six percent white and Catholic, seventy-two percent female and twenty-eight percent male, with fifty-two percent holding advanced degrees, and an average age of forty-two years.

The student population is more diverse, with sixty-seven percent white, twenty-two percent Latino, four percent Asian, and two percent African-American. Five percent of our students make up an additional category which includes students of Native American, Eastern European, Iraqi, and Indian heritage. Our families are also economically diverse, with fifty-five percent receiving supplemental tuition support from the Knoxville Regional Catholic Schools Operating Fund, from our own school budget, or from both. In addition, twenty-two percent of our student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch according to federal regulations.

Over the past three years, several significant leadership changes have brought new successes and challenges to Saint Joseph School. The current principal served initially in an interim capacity beginning in September of 2014. Now in his third year as principal, he continues on as a member of the faculty as a teaching principal and is also a member of the parent community. A new business manager was also hired in 2014 to serve as the director of advancement. Because balancing the school budget depends enormously on reliable collection of tuition and fees and on revenue from sponsorships and fundraisers, adding an administrative position dedicated to these efforts was critical.

Numerous factors have contributed to a fifteen percent growth in enrollment over the past three years: the presence of Jesus Christ in our midst, a talented and invested staff, an engaged parent community that invites and welcomes new families, an administrative team that works together to support students, families, and staff, and an intentional outreach to our growing Latino population.

The increased enrollment also provides its own challenges: How do we engage and build connections for our new families, which make up twenty-five percent of our total? How do we meet the needs of a growing ESL

population and of the teachers who serve them? How do we address the diverse needs of multiple parish communities? How do we ensure a solid financial plan so that our growth can be sustained and our future secure?

With our hope in our Lord and our trust in each other, we strive to address these challenges each day.

School's Purpose

Provide the school's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.

Saint Joseph School exists for the salvation of souls. The core components of our mission statement represent the shared beliefs that permeate all aspects of decision-making in our school. Our mission statement:

Saint Joseph School, in cooperation with parents and parish communities, teaches and nurtures the Catholic faith. We are a school dedicated to academic excellence through a curriculum that promotes the growth of the whole child and service to others - a place where we are committed to:
"Holiness as a way of life."

Our staff understands the fundamental role parents play as the primary educators of their children. This role is cemented through frequent communication between classroom teachers and parents about conduct and academic progress. Parents are invited to serve as volunteers in the classroom, at special events, and in official capacities as Home and School Association officers and School Advisory Board members. In all instances, parent feedback is solicited to aid in a child's education, to improve events and programming, and to have a say in policy-making at the school board level.

As a regional school, Saint Joseph serves our Bishop by serving our three major parishes and eight others in the educational ministry of the Church. The school provides sacramental preparation (First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion) for young parishioners - especially at the second grade level - and will soon provide Confirmation preparation to fifth and sixth graders. In addition, the school is a hub of communication for parish events - everything from promoting parish festivals, publishing changes in Mass times, etc.

As our mission statement makes clear, Saint Joseph School teaches and nurtures the Catholic faith, providing opportunities to know, to love, and to serve our Lord. This faith - first handed on by parents and put into practice in parish communities, is strengthened at Saint Joseph through the encounter with Christ in His sacraments. Priests and deacons from our three main parishes minister at daily Mass, with each grade level attending twice a week, also offering the Sacrament of Reconciliation at various times throughout the school year. Special all-school Masses for Holy Days of Obligation and feast days like Our Lady of Guadalupe become the focus for mini-retreats and cultural celebrations. First Friday Masses are followed by Eucharistic Adoration, culminating with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Students participate in Religion classes five days a week as a part of our core academic curriculum. Our faculty, even those not directly teaching Religion, are trained catechists through our diocesan catechetical training program. Even more importantly, they are aware of their primary role as witnesses of the faith for our students. This role is reinforced each year during our beginning in-service days, throughout the year in faculty meetings and administrative emails, during introductions of staff at parent nights, and in legal print on our contracts.

Our service program provides students and families with an authentic means of living out the faith through service to parishes, our school, and the wider community. Each class sponsors a service project throughout the year, with Middle School age students fulfilling specified service-hour requirements. Efforts are made to connect service projects to the Religion curriculum, to current events, and to seasonal celebrations to enhance the meaning of each action. For example, the Corporal Works of Mercy are highlighted through various

service options; projects are organized to address needs in the local or wider Church community; and food drives are timed with celebrations like Thanksgiving.

Our firm belief in the dignity of each human person as an image of Christ is at the foundation of our pursuit of the education of the “whole child”. We desire to give each child what is just - a challenging core academic curriculum that includes a commitment to art, music, technology, physical education, and Spanish-language instruction. At the heart of this curriculum is our Focus Group approach. Our learning specialist meets with groups of teachers to review an extensive range of benchmark testing and classroom performance. Based on data analysis, interventions are planned, recorded, and evaluated. The Focus Groups allow for collaboration to find the best strategies to challenge each student and help him or her grow. Referrals are made to our school psychologist and school counselor as necessary and ongoing parent input is solicited. Staff development needs are also a fruit of our Focus Group meetings - as student needs are addressed, areas for staff improvement become evident.

Underlying our entire approach at Saint Joseph is our school motto: *“Holiness as a way of life.”* Our Lord promised that a life of holiness - a life of keeping His commandments - would lead to our joy being complete (John 15:10-12). If we are successful at living our mission and not only sustaining what is described above but building upon it through a commitment to continuous improvement, we will attain our school vision:

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Saint Joseph School is committed to serving families in the greater Knoxville area, and together with parents, to foster the spiritual, academic, physical and emotional growth of each of its students in a joy-filled environment, centered on the love of God and nourished by His sacraments; a place where the image of Christ in one another is recognized and celebrated.

Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

Describe the school's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school is striving to achieve in the next three years.

God has accomplished much at Saint Joseph School! An average of twenty souls are prepared each year to receive our Lord in First Holy Communion and trained as altar servers. An average of 1800 service hours are recorded by our middle school students each year.

Last year, twenty-five percent of our fourth-seventh grade students qualified for the Duke TIP program with at least one subtest score at the ninety-fifth percentile or higher on the Iowa Assessments. Class average scores on the Iowa Assessments regularly exceed national averages and in many classes, exceed predicted levels from the Cognitive Abilities Test.

Our middle school students regularly qualify for and win awards and honorable mentions at the Southern Appalachian Science and Engineering Fair and have their artistic and musical talents on public exhibit at the Knoxville Museum of Art and in performances at Knoxville Catholic High School, East TN Children's Hospital's Fantasy of Trees, and the Knox County Public Library's Festival of Reading. Last year, our drama department proudly staged our first student-written play, *Diablo's Tale*.

Successes have come in the athletic arena as well, with three consecutive tennis championships, two consecutive girls basketball championships, a boys basketball championship, and a second-place finish for girls volleyball last year.

Our fundraising efforts have been improving under the leadership of our new director of advancement, with our first ever walk-a-thon netting nearly twenty thousand dollars. Requests for major gifts in the past three years and for school sponsorships made by our school president have also helped to streamline our development approach, bringing in over seventy-five thousand dollars last year. These new efforts made it possible to build and furnish a new Library/Media Center for our school - one that is debt free!

We all see the fruits of God's work and our collective labors in our increased enrollment. As mentioned above, the fact that parents are choosing to send their children to Saint Joseph School in a region and at a time when enrollment at other schools is declining speaks to the quality of the faith-based education provided here. Not wishing to rest on our laurels, our staff seeks to improve ourselves and what we offer our students.

Our diocesan accreditation steering committee has determined an overall need for improvement in mathematics. In the context of Saint Joseph School, student scores on the Iowa Assessments are inconsistent in math. Some class groups score below national averages, some on par, and others above, without specific trends emerging. Our goal is always to see each student achieve a minimum of a full year's growth. Our school improvement plan addresses this goal with various strategies for different subgroups.

In addition to our academic goal of improving mathematical proficiency, the need for a comprehensive strategic plan became apparent through our stakeholder survey process. Surveys indicated that our staff and parent stakeholders trusted in the administrative vision for the future, but were unaware of the decision-making process for budget concerns and financial planning. Nearly thirty-four percent of staff and parents answered *Neutral* or *Don't Know* for Standard 36 - "Our school consistently shares its financial plan with the school community". No published strategic plan that addresses long-range planning for all areas of school life

currently exists. It is the organizational task of Saint Joseph School to develop and publish this plan within the next few years - a plan that includes a vision and processes to bring about improvements in Catholic identity, academic excellence, financial planning, and campus maintenance and capital improvements.

Additional Information

Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.

Saint Joseph School has changed much since its founding over fifty years ago. Where once religious sisters could be seen throughout the building, now lay teachers carry on their role. What hasn't changed is the school's commitment to hand on the faith - to serve and strengthen families - and to help each child grow academically. This commitment was instilled by our founder, Father Albert Henkel, Pastor of Holy Ghost Church, and has been handed on through generations of students, teachers, and families to today. As Father Henkel once put it, "Heaven is my home, but I'm not homesick yet!", we strive to build God's kingdom here at Saint Joseph School so that we might enter it eternally.