

## VERIFICATION REPORT

St. Mary School System  
1243 Elmdale Road  
Paducah, KY 42003

Grade Range: P-12

Enrollment: 402

Administrator Name: Monica Hayden, Director  
Mary Smith, Elementary Principal  
Doug Shelton, Middle/High Principal

Verification Team Members: **Beth Hendrickson,**  
Principal, John Paul II  
**Emily Hernandez,**  
Principal, St. Mary of the Woods, Trinity  
**Jo Ann Mathieson,**  
Assistant Superintendent

Visitation Date: March 28-29, 2022

### SITE TEAM SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

On Monday, March 28, 2022, the visiting team members, Beth Hendrickson, Emily Hernandez, and Jo Ann Mathieson, met at 8:00 to review and allocate roles.

9:00 a.m. - The Verification team members met with the St. Mary School System's leadership team including Monica Hayden, Director of the St. Mary's School System, Mary Smith, Principal of St Mary's Elementary School, and Doug Shelton, Principal of St. Mary's Middle and High School.

After reviewing the schedule, the administration team discussed the process of the study. Mrs. Monica Hayden is new to St. Mary's School System and comes with extensive experience in self-studies. It was noted by all that the process was not only productive but also community building. Especially following Covid, there is an openness to resetting strategies and systems for school improvement. Verification team members asked questions regarding most of the standards and made plans for further follow-up.

10:00 a.m. - A tour was given of both buildings.

10:30 a.m. - The verification team spent time in classroom observations. Beth Henrickson observed in the elementary school, Emily Hernandez in the high school, and Jo Ann Mathieson in the middle and high school. The team was able to observe classroom management, use of technology, Catholic identity integration, and teaching methods during this time. Jo Ann also met with the school financial office who are grateful for Ms. Hayden's understanding and attention to financial best practices. They felt there was a good checks and balances system and that finances were appropriately transparent.

11:30 a.m. - The team met for a working lunch. During this time, they worked on the Verification Report.

12:30 p.m. - The team met in the elementary school library with 2 representatives from each grade (K-5). Students loved their school and felt all cared for them and were fair. Of note was that they were all aware of the "Christ" rules for behavior.

1:30 p.m. - The team met with middle and high school representatives. The high school students were very proud of their school, especially how they competed against the much larger schools. Several had stories of playing for several teams because there were so few students. The older students voiced a desire for an organized school spirit group for games and assemblies. The students felt well prepared academically and realized that they are lucky to have teachers stay in the classroom during lunch for help sessions. They are grateful for opportunities to have additional classes for dual credit and vocational experience, etc. The middle school students were less vocal, but also felt safe and cared for at St. Mary. Some middle school students would like to see more book offerings in the library. All students would like to see athletic fields kept in good condition.

3:00 p.m. - The verification team met with all teachers in the library who were given the opportunity to voice strengths and areas for improvement. New non-Catholic teachers mentioned the welcoming environment at St. Mary and would welcome more professional development in Catholic Identity. They anecdotally reflected on the rarity of both schools gathering like that. It seemed a consensus that they felt supported and that St. Mary Community was not only a good place to work but also has a mission supported by many in the community.

6:00 p.m. - Beth Hendrickson and Emily Hernandez met with representatives from Saint Mary Educational Committee ( SMEC), Parent-Teacher Association (PTO), and PIE. They ate dinner and had discussions with parent representatives. The parents were pleased with the teachers and administration and feel that the adults at SMSS care about their children and are accessible to

parents. They felt their students who had already graduated were well-prepared for college. They did believe an auditorium would be a valuable addition for events like graduation, the Christmas program, and drama productions. PIE was hoping to make some updates to the elementary building with painting, signage, window coverings, new library furniture and playground updates. The parents would also like to see the teacher pay scale increased. The visit was a positive one.

March 28

8:00 a.m. - Beth Hendrickson and Jo Ann Mathieson attended Mass at the Elementary school. First graders read the responsorial psalm and the petitions. Many parents were in attendance in the bleachers. Teachers served as the choir.

9:00 a.m. - The Verification team met again with the administrators as well as Ashley Wright, the development director. Many questions were addressed to Mrs. Wright on how she was able to create the development program and she also shared plans for continued improvement. The school is moving from Excel to FACTS Giving the following year.

10:00 a.m. - The team met with the Episcopal Vicar. Father Brad Whistle, the pastor of St. Thomas More, serves as the Episcopal Vicar for the school system. During this meeting, school accomplishments and possible improvements were discussed. Father stated gratitude for the school climate and increased enrollment and was optimistic about the school's current direction. Father is a great supporter of the school. Father had a wish for student preparation in respecting the sacredness of the Liturgy, especially in the role of lector.

11:00 a.m. - The team met and reached a consensus on all commendations and recommendations during a working lunch.

1:00 p.m. - The team met with the administrators and relayed praise for the way they led the St. Mary School system in the self-study and improvement process. Mr. Shelton and Mrs. Smith said they had originally wanted to postpone it a year but are so grateful they did not do so and felt more energized having done so. Ms. Hayden's leadership and experience were evidenced, all noted, throughout the process. The verification team gave observations from their visits with various groups. The verification team told the administrators of the recommendations they were to give for consideration, most of which had already been noted in their self-study, for which they deserved strong commendation.

## **Site Team Accreditation Report St. Mary School System - Overview**

St. Mary School System is a rural Catholic Preschool through Grade 12 school system located in Paducah, Kentucky. In 1812, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth traveled to Paducah from Nazareth to open St. Mary's Academy. At the time, the city didn't have any public schools, and the few private schools were run out of individual homes.

In 1964, the Sisters of Charity announced their intentions to close St. Mary's Academy. Bishop Henry J. Sonneker of the Owensboro Diocese sought the services of the Christian Brothers of the St. Louis Province to carry on the educational tradition. Five parishes—St. Francis de Sales, St. Thomas More, St. John the Evangelist, Rosary Chapel, and St. Pius X in Calvert City—undertook a fundraising campaign that raised more than \$1 million to build a new school.

At the time St. Mary High School was built in 1965-66, St. Francis de Sales Grade School and St. Thomas More Elementary School provided education for elementary school students. In 1982, the two elementary schools consolidated to form St. Mary Elementary. Then, in the mid-1980s, the boards of the elementary school and high school voted to consolidate and form the St. Mary School System.

Currently, the St. Mary School System has an enrollment of 402 students with Preschool ages 3 and 4 and all grades kindergarten through grade 12. The middle and high schools are in one building, and the elementary school is in another building, all on the same campus. The building and grounds committee has developed a short-term plan to address large, immediate facility needs at both schools and is working on a longer plan range to improve classrooms, the parking lots, and other identified areas. In the past five years, the ongoing maintenance has improved and continues to evidence good overall progress.

There are 42 faculty, 10 aides or after-school staff, 12 office, maintenance, or cafeteria staff, and 5 administrative staff, including two principals and the system director. Of the 42 teachers, 38 are full time and 22 hold an advanced degree. All other educators hold a Bachelor's degree, with three pre-school instructors having an associate's degree. The range of teaching experience in the system is beginning teachers to 45 years, with the average experience being approximately 16 years.

St. Mary School System relies heavily on funding through tuition, parish subsidy, and donor gifts. The Annual Fund is in its ninth year of existence, and the system is seeing growth with each year. Building the alumni database is contributing to the increase in donations to the operating budget as well as the Fr. Lew White Tuition Assistance Fund.

St. Mary School System has adopted the curriculum framework of the Owensboro Diocese. The framework is aligned to state and national standards. St. Mary currently uses Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) grades K-6, ACT Aspire grades 7-9 and ACT grade 11 for standardized testing to measure the academic achievement of students. The average class size in grades K-5 is 16, and the teacher-to-student ratio in middle and high schools is 1:9.

Since the 2017 accreditation, St. Mary School System, as were all schools in the state, has been impacted by the COVID-19 virus. The schools transitioned to virtual learning in March of 2020 to complete the academic year. With excellent planning and precautions, as well as the dedication of the faculty and staff, students and teachers were able to return to in-person learning for the fall of 2020. Although the past two years have been a challenge for the entire school community, they are closer to what has traditionally been a “normal school environment” with regular classes and extracurricular activities. Due to the Covid pandemic, the school did receive Emergency Assistance for Non-public Schools (EANS I and II), which has and will continue to provide additional resources to support students.

From discussions with the various groups involved in St. Mary School System, it was clear that all stakeholders were adequately informed and engaged in their accreditation and long-range planning processes. All future plans for the school system have been positively accepted and embraced. All stakeholders seem to have a positive attitude about the direction the system is going relative to enrollment and budget.

## **Individual Components of the Planning Process and School System Improvement Plan**

### **Standard I: Catholic Identity**

St. Mary School System is a Catholic school system located in Paducah, KY. It is an educational ministry of five parishes in Paducah. From discussions with the Episcopal Vicar and surveys from students, faculty, staff, and parents, it is clear that St. Mary is a valuable part of the Catholic community in Paducah and is supported strongly by the parishes and community. St. Mary School System is committed to promoting an environment where our Catholic Identity is visible and exemplified in every aspect of the school. The school’s mission reflects a strong focus on the faith and is part of daily school life.

### **Commendations:**

- St. Mary students are aware of the needs, respect for all life, and social justice in their community, state, and world.
- Catholic Christian Values are integrated into visual representations in all classrooms and throughout the school buildings, as evidenced by the display of the mission statement, crucifixes, excellent bulletin boards and paintings, murals, and signage throughout the school.
- St. Mary’s continues to have a strong family presence at school-wide Masses and other liturgical opportunities.
- Quarterly opportunities for Catholic school teachers across the Diocese to meet in PLCs have allowed teachers to share integrated faith practices in all subject areas.
- Prayer happens throughout the day (school-wide, classroom, small group).
- The Mission is being modeled, and Gospel Values are taught in and out of religion classes.
- St. Mary students and families participate in service projects that benefit the community and witness social justice.

- The Paducah community perceives that our Catholic Identity is visible in all aspects of the school.
- A student leads afternoon prayer.
- Both St. Mary School facilities have beautiful chapels used for prayer and Mass.

### Recommendations:

- Increase integrating Catholic values in lesson plans in all classes, activities, and discussions.
- Additional support for middle school students focused on respecting others, including students, faculty, and staff. Teachers also expressed a need for additional resources to help guide students and parents, such as what a school counselor may provide.
- Increase “full, conscious, and active” participation during Mass and para-liturgical service in teachers and students. School-wide emphasis on continual positive reminders for students toward “full, conscious and active” participation and continued professional development for teachers may help.
- Religion teachers analyze and discuss the concepts covered on the ACRE test to ensure that all areas are implemented. All teachers are responsible for information covered on the ACRE test when a student is attending St. Mary’s.
- Continued training in Catholic Identity and the mission of the school for all teachers, especially those who are not Catholic.
- Continue to develop the sense of sacred by not allowing chapels to be used for storage, items not placed on altars, and respectful silence and behavior monitored. While the distinction needs to be made that the Blessed Sacrament is not in the elementary school, it is still essential for the formation of young minds to model reverence for sacred items and areas.

### Standard II: Mission

**“St. Mary, a Christ-centered community, rooted in Catholic tradition, empowers students academically, encourages selfless sacrifice, and nurtures learners to become a positive influence on others.”**

The original mission statement was developed in 2005 by stakeholders, including parents, students, faculty, and staff. It is reviewed at the beginning of every school year by the St. Mary Educational Committee (SMEC). The mission statement can be found in every classroom within the school building as a reminder of the roots of what St. Mary is and how it truly is a community.

The system prides itself in the faith displayed and activities that live out our mission statement. Student surveys reveal that most students feel respected by peers, teachers, and administration within the school environment, although continued work is needed with middle school students. This environment promotes learning and religious, moral teaching based on the way students and staff treat each other.

Catholic values are displayed throughout the buildings. Service projects throughout the year reflect the Gospel mission and model for all an attitude of servant leadership.

Examples of living the mission include

- Each day starts and ends with prayer.
- Students lead prayer and services throughout the year.
- Students have a variety of academic opportunities for individualized success.
- Service projects occur all year round, and families are also encouraged to participate in prayer and service outside the school setting.
- That students have the power to influence others positively is taught and modeled.

#### Commendations:

- Prayer happens throughout the day (school-wide, classroom, small group).
- The Mission Statement is being lived out by students and staff.
- Regular participation in service projects year-round.
- The community perceives that the Catholic mission is the purpose of the school.

#### Recommendations:

- A plan for addressing faculty development to strengthen the Catholic mission should be established, especially for new and non-Catholic employees.
- All students need to take personal ownership of the mission and how they can live it out beyond the school.
- All stakeholders should review the mission statement for potential updates annually.
- While small posters that Christ is the reason for the School are in several places in the elementary school entrance and office, consideration should be given to replacing a few with a centralized mission statement.

#### **Standard III: Governance**

St. Mary School System (SMSS) has a school education committee, a consultative body (St. Mary Educational Committee – SMEC) that works with the Episcopal Vicar and administration to review and oversee policies. They meet monthly throughout the school year. Committee members represent all parishes involved with SMSS and include at least one non-Catholic member. Members serve a three-year term and may serve a second consecutive term. The school's mission is represented in the various committees and communicated to the stakeholders. Newly elected committee members receive training about their role on the committee and receive an orientation packet.

All legal responsibilities regarding school policy, safety, student records, payroll, human resources, and financial reporting are followed. The leadership team and SMEC abide by the institutional policies.

Commendations:

- The school system has a strong education committee that works tirelessly for the school.
- SMEC has subcommittee membership with varying perspectives.
- All parishes are represented.
- From SMEC discussions, changes are made, and actions are taken.

Recommendations:

- More communication to parents about who SMEC members are and their roles.
- More meaningful evaluation process for administrators.
- Better correlate and connect the mission with the goals on an ongoing basis.

**Standard IV: Finance**

St. Mary School System's Finance Manager completes monthly financial reports consisting of a Balance Sheet, Statement of Financial Position, and Statement of Activities. The financial statements are reviewed and approved by the Finance Committee and later approved by SMEC. A budget is prepared annually, and the Statement of Activities is compared to the budget. An annual report is prepared to summarize the school's achievements for the prior school year. High-level financial information is included in this report for the benefit of our stakeholders. The school is currently debt-free.

An external committee reviews and monitors the endowments and investments held in St. Mary's name to ensure the monies are invested in low-risk, diversified funds and oversee the funds.

Interviews with Father Brad, Mrs. Hayden, Mrs. Wright, development director, and Mrs. Mower, finance manager, demonstrate "checks and balance" and transparency processes in place. There are plans to adopt the FACTS giving software program that will assist in the processes related to donations.

Commendations:

- The financial position of the school system is transparent to stakeholders and evaluated and reviewed by administrators and SMEC.
- The Finance Committee has established a consistent rate of tuition increase so families can expect and plan on the increase while accounting for school growth.
- The school has the commitment of current donors and is consistently adding new donors to diversify funding sources.



### Recommendations:

- Need for long-range financial planning for competitive salaries, significant projects, improved facilities, and technology.
- Refine the awarding of financial aid to families in need for greater transparency and consistency.
- Improve financial position by maintaining and growing enrollment by collaborating with all stakeholders.
- Ensure financial processes, including small fundraisers, have documentation and cross-training in the event of unforeseen absence of personnel.

### **Standard V: Plant and Facilities**

St. Mary School System stakeholders are proud of their campus and school facilities which are cleaned and sanitized daily. The lawn areas remain cut and edged; the landscaping is neat and trimmed. School entries are cleared and safe.

There are two buildings, one for the elementary and preschool and one for the middle and high school. Both buildings have large cafeterias, gyms, and libraries to accommodate students. The two buildings connect by an access road next to the baseball field, which is clean and free from obstacles. A new auxiliary gym, financed by a long-time supporter of the St. Mary School System, will be constructed in 2022.

There is appropriate technology for all students, with plans for continued updating using Educational Assistance for Non-public Schools (EANS). The school installed additional wifi points in the summer of 2021 to support the extra usage, and online security is kept current and updated.

The school is updating the HVAC systems to be more energy-efficient, using EANS funding. Future needs include repaving the parking lots and interior painting of the buildings. There are also plans to update the locker room and weight room facilities in the MS/HS using recent fundraising proceeds and donations.

All mandated safety reports are completed as required. Safety equipment is inspected regularly and updated when necessary.

Student interviews noted a wish for the upkeep of athletic grounds, especially fields and track.

### Commendations:

- Is kept very clean and orderly.
- Has begun implementing LED change across the school system.
- Students, teachers, staff, and volunteers take pride in the landscaping.
- Will erect a new auxiliary gym in 2022.
- Has increased technology usage, infrastructure, and availability.
- Recently built a concrete walking trail around the elementary playground with donations and talents.

### Recommendations:

- Develop a long-term plan for the growth and maintenance of the entire campus. (Review the air handling systems across the campus, weight room, locker room, PE corridor improvements, etc. )
- Research the needs of the soccer field, track area, and all athletic facilities and communicate plans to students MS/HS students who voiced concerns.
- Conduct an energy audit.
- Communicate with parents on planning progress regarding their voiced concern that they would like to investigate the possibility of building PIE updates to the elementary building and an auditorium for drama productions, graduation, etc.

### Standard VI: Administration and Staffing

Saint Mary School System has adequate school personnel who are qualified for the positions held. SMSS administration consists of an Episcopal Vicar, System Director, Principals for the Preschool/Elementary (Grades PK3 – 5<sup>th</sup>) and the Middle School/High School (Grades 6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>), an Advancement Director, and a Finance Manager. The faculty and staff consist of teachers, a part-time guidance counselor for high school, a part-time guidance counselor for middle school, a full custodial staff, instructional aides, office personnel, and preschool/afterschool personnel. The faculty and staff have the privilege of working in a clean, well-organized environment. Based on the school surveys, parents, students, faculty, and staff are fully committed to the school's mission. St. Mary maintains personnel to provide quality instruction.

Administration supports and communicates about professional development opportunities. The principals provide a new teacher and staff orientation before each school year to provide needed and concise information and resources. Faculty are promptly updated concerning their performance, and the administration quickly addresses any issues appropriately. It was noted by parents that the administration swiftly takes care of any parental concerns. Some areas for growth include staffing for special needs students, professional development for serving students with learning challenges, and better support for new or incoming teachers. It was requested by teachers to have a guidance counselor in the elementary school, or at least a referral system when they recognize a student that needs social and emotional support.

Student surveys indicate that students feel supported by administration and staff and are treated fairly. Faculty surveys show that they feel respected and appreciated by the administration. The administration has done a fantastic job maintaining open communication with parishes and parents about policies, student achievement, and success.

Documentation proves there are clearly written job descriptions for every position. The school has established instruments for evaluating all personnel and a schedule to complete these evaluations in a timely fashion. The school has also implemented all appropriate Diocesan procedures for the hiring of personnel and personnel record keeping.

### Commendations:

- Feedback and guidance are given to faculty regularly and not only at the time of formal observation.
- The administration encourages data to drive instruction. Administration provides reports for staff use.
- The administration's encouragement and support create a positive environment for teaching and student learning.
- All professional personnel are qualified for positions and assignments.
- The staff is large enough to provide quality instruction for programs offered and has a better than satisfactory student/teacher ratio.
- The Episcopal Vicar and pastors of the local parishes are all supportive of the schools.
- The position of the Advancement Director has been a positive addition to further the mission of the school system.

### Recommendations:

- Staff members, specifically non-Catholic staff members, need continual training on Catholic traditions, practices, and seasons of the church and incorporate them in all subjects. The training would increase religious teachings past the scheduled Religion time.
- Providing the annual opportunity for peer observations would encourage educators to continue a line of increased communication between sequential grade level teachers. Designating time each year for educators to watch other professionals would also provide beneficial learning opportunities due to seeing a variety of teaching styles and classroom management strategies. It would also benefit student transition between grades.
- More meaningful evaluation process for all staff.
- Administration to provide learning opportunities in proven classroom management strategies and expect a school-wide and consistent implementation with high expectations of our students. The middle school and high school could implement something similar to the Christ Rules in the elementary school.
- While the staff is well prepared for non-special needs students, more needs to be done to support the teachers' ability and confidence to recognize red flags for social and emotional needs. It is recommended to provide professional development for suicide prevention yearly.

### Standard VII: Curriculum

St. Mary School System teachers employ an effective system of instructional decision-making, organization, and delivery of instruction that provide their students with opportunities for achievement, success, and mastery of learning. Teachers research innovative ways to present content, current trends within their disciplines, and best practices utilized by other teachers in the country. St. Mary teachers have a robust pupil assessment system within their classrooms and evaluate their students in both formative and summative exercises. The parent and staff surveys indicate that differentiation occurs, but improvement can continue to be made in this area.

Parents are kept abreast of student progress effectively and in a timely manner. When there are delays in communicating student progress, the administration addresses it.

As a result of the formative and summative assessment practices, teachers can better able identify those students who would benefit from or require educational accommodations. The administration and staff are committed to continuing to grow in their understanding of how to support students with learning challenges.

Insofar as the vertical alignment of the curriculum is concerned, St. Mary is still struggling with this. This issue needs attention from K-12 grades and needs to be addressed toward the end of each school year so that teachers can effectively plan for the upcoming year.

#### Commendations:

- The school has collected data from pupil assessments and tracks student growth trends and learning goals.
- Individual student progress and assessment results are reported to parents or guardians, and other stakeholders receive a summary of group assessment results.
- The principal secures the necessary resources to purchase software and/or assessment instruments that provide the professional staff with a continuous stream of accurate data that track student achievement levels in reading language, math, science, and social studies.

#### Recommendations:

- Find opportunities for teachers to collaborate with each other and with professionals outside of the school.
- Provide additional professional development opportunities for differentiation and intervention strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles and the unique needs of all students.
- Train teachers to use personalized programs and develop a school-wide culture for its use. Growth mindset language in both teachers and students is recommended to take ownership for growth and adopt habits of academic rigor. There should be a plan developed at the beginning of the year for motivating students' regular use of personalized programs, such as through internal rewards or requiring completion of a portion as a weekly homework grade.

#### **Standard VIII: Instructional Improvement Plan**

The instructional improvement plan was developed using the areas of strength and the areas of growth for all standards covered in the self-study process. All faculty and staff were involved through surveys and participated in workgroups that correlated with their area of responsibility. In February, a faculty and staff development day was dedicated to disseminating the information, and demonstrators gathered for the self-study to develop goals for the next 3-5 years.

**Goal #1:** Although surveys from parents, faculty, staff, and students show that we have a strong Catholic Identity at all levels, areas to continue to grow include:

- Better integrate our Catholic faith and values into all academic areas. Faith integration should be indicated on the lesson plans and reviewed by the administration.
- Support non-Catholic teachers in learning about the Catholic faith, especially as it impacts the students, is implemented into daily lessons and is modeled to the students.

**Goal #2:** As we see our student population having different learning challenges, St. Mary School wants to be able to best support all students and have identified areas we can continue to grow:

- Work to have the appropriate and necessary staff, especially in a support capacity, who can work with students who are not at grade level or have learning challenges.
- Develop procedures to identify, record, track, and share student learning needs from year to year and school to school.
- Engage in professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to learn more about student learning challenges and how best to support them in the classroom.

**Goal #3:** Better utilize assessments as a tool for supporting student learning:

- Develop and implement a structured review process for all standardized testing, including ACT, ACRE, MAP... to review student progress, areas in need of improvement, and potential gaps in instruction.

**Goal #4:** Improve the culture of the school so that faculty, staff, and students are completely invested in the success of the school and students.

- Strengthen the current policies and procedures such that everyone is aware of the expectations and understands the applicable consequences.
- Provide education, training, and support to teachers and students with age-appropriate ways to recognize and address the emotions, educate to the dangers of drug and alcohol use, and behavioral and soft skills that enable respect for all persons.
- Improve school participation, awareness, and spirit through communication, activities, celebrations, and additional opportunities for leadership for students, faculty, and staff.

#### Commendations:

Current plan for Instructional Improvement is well thought out and intentional.

#### Recommendations:

- **Goal #2** Add the use of lesson objectives (or "I can" statement) driven instruction.
- **Goal #3** Use personalized learning programs to provide regular self-assessment for students and instruction, practice and reassessments for mastery.
- **Goal #4** Add growth mindset and academic rigor terminology to school culture for teachers and students, especially as it relates to taking personal responsibility for growth.

#### **Standard IX: School Climate**

The survey notes that most of the students in the St. Mary School System like their school and feel safe at school. One of the first things noticed is a friendly, inviting, and comfortable

atmosphere when entering SMSS. It is also noted that there is a good rapport between the pastor, administration, and the faculty and staff. There is a lot of positivity that is promoted with many types of physical examples with artwork, posters, slogans, and memorabilia throughout the school. Students noted the high expectations teachers have for them, and they appreciate how much the teachers care about them and their futures. Parents noted that they have good teachers who are accessible to parents and care about the students. The administration supports teachers and listens to their comments and concerns.

The SMSS faculty, students, parents, and administrators have mutual respect and good working relationships. Major discipline issues are almost non-existent, and this creates a very comfortable atmosphere among students and between students and staff.

There is an inclusive environment, in which 75% of the student body reported they either agree or strongly agree that they feel a sense of belonging to the school community. Parents reported feeling welcomed when invited to SMSS. All involved at SMSS work to demonstrate the school's overall goal and mission: the pursuit of excellence through Christ.

In the elementary school, plans for evacuations, weather warnings, and intruders need to be reviewed and updated. Dismissal procedures should also be reviewed and updated. In middle school and high school, there is the belief that enforcement and accountability for behavior are sometimes lacking. It was noted by middle school and high school students that there needed to be a focus on celebrating student accomplishments and increasing participation in school spirit.

#### Commendations:

- The overall school climate is a positive one. Students and staff's sense of safety and happiness to be at SMSS is apparent.
- Teachers seem to have great relationships with students.
- During the teacher meeting, teacher concerns were student-driven, which is a testimonial to the quality of teachers.
- Students are very complimentary and close with faculty/staff, stating they feel the staff cares about them and their future.
- Faculty, students, parents, and administrators have mutual respect and good working relationships.
- An overwhelming majority of the student body reported feeling a sense of belonging to the school community.
- All elementary students could recite the Christ rules.

#### Recommendations:

- It is recommended to start a Pep Club, infusing school spirit into the middle school and high school in all activities supporting both genders equally.
- There should be a consistent behavior plan for consequences/rewards across all grades.
- The emergency response plans should be updated in both buildings.
- Reorganize the dismissal plan at the elementary school.
- There needs to be more social-emotional support in all grades and implement training for teachers so teachers feel more capable of recognizing student needs for a referral.

- The middle school students would like the library to have more books.

### **Standard X: School/Community Relationships**

St. Mary School System surveys show parent involvement is very high. Parents are informed and actively involved in the school and activities. There are many ways that students are involved. The school utilizes a new communication network that all stakeholders can access for information.

St. Mary School System is positively involved in the community. Two examples of serving the community at the elementary level are the Blessing Bouquets that the school sent to churches and businesses and the Blessing Boxes available for community needs. At the MS/HS level, the students are active in serving their community with various options both as a class and through individual Christian Service at the high school level. St. Mary strives to show a positive presence in the community. As we share our faith with others in the community, we exhibit an attitude of thankfulness and servitude.

At the elementary school, the parent organization (PIE), and at the MS/HS level, the PTO effectively supports the school mission statement. They are interested in the needs as a school community. They ask for teacher and staff input and acknowledge the dedication of school employees. Assistance from PIE and the PTO is readily available for teachers and staff.

The school system hosts a variety of events organized for the benefit of the school. Some are specific to the school community, such as Blue/Gold Night, and others are for the larger community, such as Oktoberfest, Trivia Nights, and the Auction. These events operate as fundraisers for the school and are opportunities to build relationships within the school and community.

#### **Commendations:**

- Implements multiple communication methods at all levels so that parents are always informed.
- Uses social media to communicate and share students' accomplishments and Christian Service.
- Students have Christian Service Hour requirements and organized service days.
- Has two parent organizations: PIE and PTO are very active and supportive of the school activities.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Increase faculty and staff attendance at school functions and events to boost school spirit.
- Increase outreach to more diverse populations, this was noted more with the middle/high school teachers than with elementary teachers.
- Better promotion of St. Mary in the parishes.
- Increase presence and representation of St. Mary at community-wide events (BBQ on the River, Christmas Parade) and organizations (Rotary, Kiwanis).

- Increase student participation in community competitions (essay, art) and events (students attend Veterans Day Parade, field trips).
- Recommendation/suggestion from parent interviews: post online links to textbooks for easy access at all times.

### **Standard XI: Institutional Advancement**

St. Mary School System gives high priority to Institutional Advancement, recognizing the importance of enrollment growth and financial stability to the future of the school system. The school system's enrollment has grown more than 20% over the last five years. There has been significant growth in the elementary grades, which now boasts of two classrooms for each grade other than the current 3rd-grade class. Five years ago, there was only one grade level with an enrollment large enough to have two classrooms at the elementary school.

COVID was a significant challenge for fundraising, with all in-person fundraising stopped for nearly a year and a half. Covid time was an opportunity to develop new funding sources and evaluate all fundraising events, which led to ending some no longer profitable events.

Areas of growth moving forward focus on retention, particularly at the middle school level, and continuing to increase our alumni engagement significantly.

### **Commendations:**

- There has been a recent thorough analysis and planning of fundraising activities, eliminating less successful fundraisers (bingo, chocolate sales, etc.), and adding new programs and events (Viking Society, Tuition Raffle) to increase funding.
- The Registration and Enrollment process has been streamlined, and there are plans to move from excel to FACTS Giving to simplify the development processes.
- The reputation of St. Mary's success during Covid has helped in student recruitment.
- The current Development Director, Mrs. Ashley Wright, with the business acumen of staff and the support of the Parochial Vicar, have enabled continued growth into a successful Advancement program.

### **Recommendations:**

- Include all stakeholders in the retention process.
- Grow the alumni program by improving the database, increasing alumni activities, and sharing alumni's accomplishments.



### **Standard XII: Indicators of Success**

St. Mary School System's indicators of success are evident in areas of academics and extracurricular activities. Students compete and place in all levels of competition. Student success is reflected upon as an indicator of student progress and achievement. St. Mary and its students are recognized for their academic and extracurricular successes as well as sportsmanship and service.

St. Mary School System's assessment data is used to drive instruction and aligns with the school's mission statement. This data is also used to communicate areas of strengths and weaknesses with students and parents and student placement. An area for growth is to use MAP data better to develop individualized learning programs.

Student achievements are recognized on social media, in the daily school bulletin, in local news outlets, and throughout the school buildings.

#### **Commendations:**

- Students are recognized both inside and outside of the school for their academic achievements and extracurricular activity successes via social media and parent communications.
- Achievements are shared with all stakeholders through social media, newsletters, and morning assemblies.
- Assessment data has been collected consistently through MAP for the last two years, allowing for more accurate student growth trends.
- Has recognized consistent growth throughout subject areas and grade levels based on our MAP scores within the last three years.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Showcase student achievements in all schools.
- Provide programs and training to teachers to more thoroughly use the assessment data collected to individualize student instruction based on their mastery and non-mastery of skills.
- Allow use of built-in professional development days for analyzing assessment data.
- The school system can stress the importance of daily attendance.

### **Standard XIII: Co-Curricular and Special Programs**

There is quality programming designed by the administration and the school's governing body in order to meet the needs of all students. Students are very optimistic about the number of offerings that include leadership opportunities. They believe that everyone is encouraged to be a part of multiple clubs, and those students make deals with one another to find the players necessary for the sports team, showing true camaraderie. The faculty is open and willing to moderate existing clubs and offer new clubs. The SMHS and SMMS students expressed multiple times to have a Pep/Spirit Club to build school spirit. They seemed like selfless students volunteering to play for teams that did not have enough players at times to field the

team, even flying home from vacation to add a player to a team so they could stay in the game. The administration, parents, and community support extra-curricular and co-curricular activities.

Commendations:

- Many different co-curricular and extracurricular activities are offered.
- Numerous Christ-centered service projects and opportunities.
- Each student has access to technology for use in school.
- Resource, Title I, and speech services are available to students in K-5.
- Student-led clubs help support both the school and the community.
- Student Council leads community/school blood drives and themed weeks of homecoming events.

Recommendations:

- Further training of teachers for counseling services for students, especially for mental health services. Social and emotional well-being should be discussed, especially with the Covid pandemic's impact on students and staff.
- Review of procedures to determine the needs of students and ensure that the student's needs are met as they move from one grade to another.
- Survey students on their interest in current co-curricular activities and offer possible new co-curricular programs.
- Students were interested in a focus on dual-credit courses. Students need more information on career paths and options following graduation.
- A drug and alcohol prevention program is recommended for the high school.

CONCLUSION

The Verification Team wishes to thank all the faculty and staff of the Saint Mary School System for their cooperation and support during this process. Saint Mary School System is an outstanding school system with dedicated people and a Christian spirit.

**No Deficiencies were found.**

Saint Mary School System  
Paducah, KY  
March 28-29, 2022

**Recommendation of the Verification Team:**

**FULL ACCREDITATION**

**Respectfully Submitted,**

*Beth Hendrickson*

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**Beth Hendrickson,  
Verification Team Chairperson**