



ST. MARY MAGDALEN
CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Dear St. Mary Magdalen families,

As you probably know, the teachers and staff of our school have spent a great deal of time this academic year preparing for and undergoing our periodic accreditation process through the Western Catholic Educational Association (WCEA). This is an intensive process that we last underwent eight years ago. It begins with a comprehensive self-study undertaken by the teachers and administrative staff of the school, parish, and parents over the course of several months, and it culminates in a visit from a WCEA visiting committee, which occurred February 14-16 of this year. While the accreditation vote will not be taken until the full WCEA commission meets in June, we have already received our report of findings from the visiting committee, and it is my joy to share them with you. The report assesses the school in four areas, or “domains,” and I will address the findings in each domain below.

The first domain is Mission and Catholic Identity. I am happy to report that the committee determined that “[t]he Catholic identity of St. Mary Magdalen Catholic School is strong.” It noted that “[r]eligion classes are an integral part of the academic program,” that the school sets “clearly articulated standards for religious education,” and that the school’s curriculum addresses the “theory and practice of the Church’s social teachings.” The committee also observed that students “are provided with a variety of opportunities for faith formation” and “a variety of service projects throughout the year serving both local and global communities.” And in a finding that I am especially proud of, the committee noted that “[a]dministrators, faculty, and staff serve as models of faith and service for students.”

In the second domain, Governance and Leadership, the committee noted that “there is strong leadership in all areas of the school governance, including the pastor, School Commission, Parents Club, GRACE leaders, and faculty PLCs [Professional Learning Communities].” I was pleased to hear that our “[t]eachers report they feel they are able to grow in the building,” and I was incredibly humbled to hear that “there is an overwhelming show of support for the principal and her leadership style.” Finally, I was most proud of the committee’s finding that “St. Mary Magdalen Catholic School has a strong partnership with families.” “Through trust and support,” the committee’s report observed, “a collaborative relationship has developed between the families and the school that has enhanced the educational experience.”

Academic Excellence is the third domain. Here, the committee found that St. Mary Magdalen “prepares its students for the 21st Century with instruction that aligns with” Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core State Standards, “while integrating the Catholic faith into all subjects.” The committee commended the school’s “focus on planning and implementing strategies for students with individual support plans,” as well as the school’s focus on “social-emotional strategies.” Finally, the committee observed that “[c]o-curricular and extra-curricular activities provide opportunities outside the classroom to develop the whole person.”

8615 - 7th Avenue SE
Everett, WA 98208

T (425) 353-7559

F (425) 356-2687

E info@stmarym.org

W www.stmarym.org



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The fourth domain is Operational Vitality. The committee concluded that “St. Mary Magdalen Catholic School is a financially sound school.” While noting the negative impact that the pandemic had on school finances, the committee observed that “new leadership has balanced the budget in each of the last two years and made significant gains.” (The committee also stressed that the school “should be commended” on how it responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.) Regarding technology, the committee noted that the school “has made significant gains in recent years.” Finally, the committee stressed that the efforts the school has put into communications in recent years “appear to have paid off with increases in enrollment in each of the past three years.”

Of course, there are plenty of areas for improvement. One of the wonderful things about the accreditation process is that it forces the school’s faculty and staff to reflect on those areas that need improvement and to develop an action plan to address them. The accreditation committee, in turn, provides input into that process of self-improvement. Some of the key areas for improvement that we identified during this process include the following:

- creation of a facilities plan that addresses current and future needs, including an updated HVAC system and bathrooms;
- development of a curriculum adoption cycle;
- establishment and publication of a teacher pay scale;
- more effective outreach to alumni;
- development of a standard process for teacher observation to further support teacher growth and responsibility;
- establishment of wellness programs, as well as additional mental health and behavioral management resources; and
- development of a leadership succession plan. (God—and Fr. Olson—willing, I hope to be here for a long while, but, of course, hope is not a strategy!)

Please be assured that we are continuing to work on each of these areas as we implement the education improvement plan that comes out of the accreditation process and as we develop the school’s next five-year plan for 2024-29.



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I would like to thank our wonderful educators and staff for the time, energy, and commitment they put into the accreditation process—and for the time, energy, and commitment they put into your children every day. And I would also like to thank each one of you. We know that it takes great sacrifice for a family to provide a Catholic education for their children, and we are humbled that you have entrusted the education of your children to St. Mary Magdalen Catholic School.

Go Irish!

Dr. Mahar
Principal

Michal Bindas
School Commission President

Fr. Hans Olson
Pastor