

Report of the Quality Assurance Committee For Ascension School

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Review Dates: November 10- 11, 2010

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Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the Archdiocese of Louisville visited Ascension Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky on November 10-11, 2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed the principal, the pastor, three members of the administrative team, four students, six parents, fifteen teachers, and six members of the support staff. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the school. Specifically, the team examined the school's systems and processes in relation to the eight AdvanceED standards:

- Vision and Purpose
- Governance and Leadership
- Teaching and Learning
- Documenting and Using Results
- Resource and Support Systems
- Commitment to Continuous Improvement
- Catholic Identity

Through the examination of the school's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following commendations and required actions.

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the school for the following strengths and accomplishments. While additional strengths are noted in the detailed review of each standard that appears later in this report, the commendations listed below are the strengths that the team selected to highlight.

- **Ascension School has a strong sense of Catholic Identity for the student and parish community.**
Upon entering the main gathering area of the church and school office, one immediately sees a banner with handprints of the students of Ascension School proclaiming the school's faith and Catholic identity to all. Throughout the building, banners of values related to the school mission are displayed. There is a prayer table in the gathering space of the church and again outside the school office for parish and school community members to request prayers. The principal shares these requests daily during the morning broadcast. Interviews with students, faculty and parents revealed many opportunities for prayer and worship that are institutionalized at Ascension School. These include: an all-school retreat day to open the school year linking prayer and stewardship, an all-school field trip called "In Search of God," weekly student-planned liturgies, sacramental programs, and monthly school spirit assemblies.
- **The faculty and staff offer many enrichment opportunities for student growth.**
In interview and survey results, students and parents identified many opportunities for students to develop beyond the classroom setting. Examples include: the middle school

science program partnership with the University of Louisville Speed School of Engineering department; special mentoring programs providing teacher to teacher support, teacher to student support, and student to student support; an extracurricular opportunity to join the school band; and a special end-of-the-year enrichment program – a collaborative effort involving teachers, parents, and community resource people.

- **Minds in Motion developmental program provides essential coordination- brain training for student academic success.**

Ascension teachers attended training for Minds in Motion, a research-based program that addresses the impact of balance and vision on learning. The program has been institutionalized for students in junior kindergarten through grade 5. A resource room was created specially for the program; teachers bring students to it throughout the week. Because Ascension has taken such strides toward Minds in Motion implementation, it is a pioneer in the Archdiocese. Hopefully, if expectations for improved learning are realized and noted, the school will serve as a model for others in the system.

- **The staff has access to and actively uses multiple assessment data for making decisions for continuous improvement of the learning process.**

Continuous improvement is based on a clear understanding of the current profiles of student achievement. The administrative staff and faculty use Terra Nova test results, Singapore Math and Simple Solution data, and STAR assessments for literacy, as instruments to examine student performance. Availability and analysis of these data provide a foundation for goal-setting and instructional planning.

- **School leadership and teachers have designed creative use of time and talents of the staff.**

The school has experienced many staffing changes due to declining enrollment and changing demographics. Teachers demonstrate willingness to collaborate in many forms, such as sharing knowledge in subject areas, assisting one another with technology usage, and designing cross-curriculum projects. This collaboration, in addition to enhancing the learning experience and the students' opportunity for success, is supporting the faculty's professional growth.

Required Actions

- **Design a plan for sharing ownership of school initiatives with faculty through meaningful roles of leadership.**

The principal (possibly with a faculty committee) should identify school initiatives that would benefit from the sharing of leadership among faculty members. After this determination, the principal (committee) should clearly define goals and leadership opportunities as aligned with identified needs. No doubt, some of the opportunities will demand more time and effort than others, so weighting the responsibilities and categorizing them could be helpful. The hope would be to incorporate the experience and

expertise available within the faculty to help the school reach its goals and operate with a vision toward the future.

A plan for the faculty and staff to sign up the opportunities that they would be willing to assume will assist the administrative committee in matching teachers and staff members to the responsibilities. Teachers who assume roles that involve more meaningful leadership should be consulted regularly and often as important school decisions are made and new initiatives are considered.

- **Clarify expectations for implementing Archdiocese initiatives utilizing strategies that incorporate: differentiated instruction, active student engagement in learning, and student use of educational technology. To monitor implementation, utilize and communicate findings from e-Walk observation data.**

Evidence gathering is required to confirm that Archdiocesan professional development initiatives have been undertaken, coordinated and consistently implemented throughout the school. This will be an incremental process, varying from one teacher to the next. The administration should ensure that the faculty is receiving the support necessary for successful implementation by providing necessary physical resources, planning and collaborating time, and/or training. E-Walk technology will be one tool for monitoring teacher growth in differentiating instruction with all classes.

- **Implement accountability standards for each teacher so that the learning needs of all students are addressed within every classroom from the advanced to the struggling student.**

Interviews with the administration and faculty revealed a need for clear expectations regarding differentiation in instruction. While the school has a strong special needs coordinator, a strategic design for classroom teachers to have substantial impact on student achievement is unclear.

- **Institutionalize a formal conflict resolution process for all students.**

Most interview responses indicated overall satisfaction with the school climate, but there was discussion about the lack of a standard structure for conflict resolution. A school wide system for teaching conflict resolution with clearly defined objectives and strategies will enhance student success in a global society.

Next Steps

The school should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section, maximizing their impact on the school.
3. Develop action plans to address the required actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the required actions.
4. Use this report to guide and strengthen the school's efforts to improve student performance and school effectiveness.

5. Continue to meet the AdvanceED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Resources

AdvanceED offers a range of resources to support your school as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvanceEd Resource Network, available at www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help schools with their improvement efforts. The AdvanceED Research and Development division provides research, handbooks, and tools to assist schools with continuous improvement.

Summary

The accreditation process engages the school in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the strengths and address the required actions noted in this report. Doing so will enable the school to advance in its quest for excellence and deepen the fulfillment of its mission for all students.

Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that Ascension School demonstrates that it meets the eight standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

Standard 1: Vision and Purpose

STANDARD: The school establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the school.

Description – The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The Ascension School community has created an environment of caring and responsible educators who work collaboratively to support the school’s mission. In recent years, vision-shaping has been influenced by recognition and acceptance of particular demographic changes that have impacted the Ascension neighborhood. Presently, the school is located in an aging community. This, along with a sluggish economy and job market, has resulted in declining enrollment. While these factors have produced anxiety, they have also resulted in new opportunities. In light of this, there’s been a focus shift from “What are we going to do?” to “Look what is possible in our smaller school!” A committee comprised of a number of stakeholders -- faculty, staff, parents, students, and parishioners – articulated a set of core values to steer their collective program-building efforts. These core values encompass the vision and purpose of the school. They are displayed on banners that hang throughout the school building. In team interviews,

respondents frequently alluded to the school's mission and expanded on the core values as they spoke about the school's program of learning. There was a shared pride about the family nature of the school and a shared sense of responsibility for the success of each student, of each teacher and staff member, and of the school as a whole.

In the team interview with the pastor, it was evident that he has a clear understanding of the school's vision for improving student performance and the overall effectiveness of the school. Goals, success stories and other FYI school news items are shared with the parish community as evidenced in church bulletin and newsletter communications, and in the church welcoming area where student art work is displayed and student accomplishments are posted.

The QAR team found that the administration maintains a current profile of the school population and its students' achievements. The profile is updated as new assessment data are made available and is used to monitor and revise improvement strategies.

The school administration team guides the faculty in a thorough analysis of student achievement data from Terra Nova National Assessment. There is also an annual survey distributed to school stakeholders. It provides a thorough look at the school's strengths and weaknesses as perceived by respondents. From careful review of standardized tests, the survey and other data, the School Improvement Team (SIT) revises or develops new improvement strategies annually, always in alignment with the school's mission statement.

Strengths – The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- There is a strong correlation between the vision and mission of Ascension School and academic and faith formation activities that take place in the school throughout the school year.
- The faculty and staff incorporate the values and mission of the school in the students' work, in student-planned liturgies and other worship experiences, in displays in common areas well as in classrooms, and in student work.
- There is strong parish support of the school and good communication between church and school.
- There is growing acceptance of the school's new smaller enrollment and stakeholders' embrace of new opportunities.

Opportunities – The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Consider new marketing strategies, particularly targeting alumni, to garner financial and other kinds of support of the school's goals and initiatives.
- Focus vision vocabulary on achieving excellence in ongoing ways, clearly separating it from specific mention of or particular emphasis on any desired award.

Finding: Ascension School has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

STANDARD: The school provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and school effectiveness.

Description – The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The school administration monitors and evaluates the performance and professional growth of all personnel observing state and local guidelines. Professional development is available for certified and classified staff. Professional learning communities have been established to promote professional development that is aligned to the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

During the team visit, teachers reported that they have a voice in school governance. They are involved in levels meetings where curriculum decisions are made and presented to the SIT. They are involved in student organizations such as KUNA (Kentucky United Nations Assembly), KYA (Kentucky Youth Assembly), and the school band. Parents also reported through interviews that multiple opportunities exist for leadership roles within school organizations. For example, parents and parishioners serve on the school consultative board, and provide leadership for the Parent Teacher Organization. The parents' role is essential in organizing the school's end of the year Ascension Classes for Enrichment (ACE) program that provides unique enrichment class opportunities for every student.

Student, parent and staff handbooks provide evidence that procedures and policies are established and shared with the school community. The handbook clearly articulates the school's plan for academic and behavioral expectations and ensures compliance with local, state and federal regulations.

In QAR interviews, students, teachers, staff and parents expressed that the school principal is approachable and accessible. She was described as a good listener, one who is responsive and addresses needs that are brought to her attention. If she needs assistance in doing so (e.g., technology upgrades), she contacts people who are willing to support the school with their talents and abilities. She was further described as open to new ideas for school improvement and willing to take a risk for the good of the school.

As mentioned above, the principal and counselor lead the faculty through a careful Terra Nova Test data analysis, and a scrutiny of the compilation of stakeholder responses in the yearly survey. These are used to revise and/or set standards for student performance. These high student expectations were evident in interview responses from all groups. Not as evident, were corresponding teacher performance expectations. Though the faculty has attended archdiocesan professional development programs, particularly those advocating differentiated instruction, authentic task design and assessment, team

observations (albeit randomly timed and brief) indicated the majority of instruction is teacher-centered and there is a need for more active student engagement.

Strengths – The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Teacher professional growth plans are aligned to data from student test assessments.
- The current principal is approachable and open to new ideas; she is willing to take necessary risks to implement changes as best practice research recommends.

Opportunities – The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Identify specific faculty and staff responsibilities for shared leadership.
- Define expectations for student-centered and engaging learning strategies.
- Monitor for effective instructional practices and high levels of student engagement. To this end, the team suggests the use of e-Walk technology for collecting data.

Finding: Ascension School has earned the overall assessment level of “Operational” and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 3: Teaching and Learning

Standard: The school provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Description – The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Teachers at Ascension School receive curriculum frameworks for all subjects they teach. They include references to the framework in their lesson plans. The principal reviews these regularly. During the self-assessment process, it was determined that while strategies that incorporate active engagement of students as well as higher order thinking and questioning were the goal, the faculty as a whole is emerging in this area. This assessment was reinforced through the classroom observations by the QAR team.

The principal, teachers, guidance counselor, and special needs coordinator review Terra Nova data and use information regarding strengths and areas of growth to guide curricular decisions. For instance, when it was determined that math scores were lower than expected, teachers attended training and adopted Singapore Math. They also implemented Simple Solutions. They have seen gains in student understanding and retention of math knowledge as a result of these initiatives. Some Ascension teachers attended national conferences regarding Singapore Math over the course of several years and are now acting as resources to teachers in the building and archdiocese.

Students also use Simple Solutions for English and this year, Science, with similar positive results. Teachers have taken advantage of professional development

opportunities to strengthen their skills in interpreting and using assessment data to guide the instructional process.

Ascension teachers have participated in archdiocesan initiatives related to differentiated instruction and literacy. Again, they are at the emerging level in the implementation of both. Plans are being formulated to increase the understanding and use of a diverse array of differentiation strategies in order to meet the needs of all students.

The special needs coordinator works closely with the classroom teacher. She works directly with students within the classroom setting and provides guidance and strategies to the classroom teacher. Collaboration with Jefferson County Public Schools has provided opportunities for testing services and additional services as needs are identified. While the school has been very successful in supporting the struggling learner, future attention will be given to determining ways to best meet the needs and challenge the advanced learner, including the gifted and talented.

The schedule for junior high teachers was designed to allow for a common planning period. This time allows collaboration between grade levels as well as for the vertical alignment of curriculum.

Ascension teachers attended training for Minds in Motion, a research-based program that addresses the impact of balance and vision on learning. They then implemented the program for students in junior kindergarten through grade 5. There is a classroom dedicated to this and teachers bring students throughout the week. In fact, it was noted that some teachers of older students have found times (e.g., prior to testing) when they have taken advantage of Minds in Motion resources.

The school has several interactive white boards. Success in using these as well as other educational technology resources has been limited, in part due to the lack of confidence caused by the issues the school has faced with the logistics such as wiring, unreliable equipment, etc. Teachers who are confident in their own use of technology have taken it upon themselves to help not only other teachers but also to help with classes other than their own. In addition to the computer lab which is accessible to all students, those in grades 3-5 have the opportunity to use the mobile keyboard lab several times each week. Members of the Student Technology Leadership Program have the opportunity to operate the cameras for the morning broadcast.

Ascension has focused attention on writing across the curriculum. Students have opportunities to learn and use various types of writing. The principal reviews the writing of the students throughout the year.

Ascension reserves the last few days of school for ACE, an enrichment opportunity. Students have the opportunity to choose from a vast array of topics offered by teachers and community volunteers. These creative, hands-on activities have been met with excitement and energy.

Ascension has teamed up with the University of Louisville Speed School to provide expanded opportunities within the classroom in the area of science. The volunteer works weekly with students at various grade levels.

Strengths – The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Curricular decisions and instructional improvement plans are guided by a careful review of Terra Nova and other assessment data.
- To address math weaknesses, the school implemented Singapore Math and Simple Solutions.
- There is strong collaboration between the Special Needs Coordinator and the classroom teachers.
- After noting improvement and gains in Math, Simple Solutions programs for English, and Science were implemented.
- The principal arranged common planning time for junior high teachers.
- After a research study, Minds in Motion was adopted and a resource room created for it.
- A parent and teacher effort to keep students engaged in learning resulted in a special end of the year program of enrichment (ACE).
- The middle school science teacher has partnered with a University of Louisville Speed School professor, allowing students to make science connections from the classroom to the world.

Opportunities – The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Actively engage students in their learning in all grade levels.
- Increase the use of higher order thinking and questioning skills.
- Increase the use of strategies that allow for differentiation and literacy instruction to meet the needs of all students, including the advanced learner.
- Provide common planning time for primary and intermediate teachers.
- Increase the use of educational technology, particularly those strategies that involve student usage.
- Expand the responsibilities of and widen participation in the Student Technology Team.

Finding: Ascension School has earned the overall assessment level of “Operational” and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 4: Documenting and Using Results

Standard: The school enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents student performance and uses these results to improve student performance and school effectiveness.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

As stated before, the school has a comprehensive assessment system in place. Terra Nova tests are given to all grades annually. The administrative staff guides the faculty in an analysis of results and an examination of trends and result comparisons to other schools in the Archdiocese. (The QAR team noted growth in student performance in many of the Terra Nova tested subjects.) Test results are shared with parents first, and then with other stakeholders, including business and community leaders, through such channels as the school website, newsletters and brochures. Should a teacher need to examine any results as she works and plans for particular students and/or classes, the data and analysis are readily available to her.

In addition to summative data used to gauge student progress, teachers (including the Special Needs Coordinator) utilize formative assessments from STAR Reading, Simple Solutions in Math, English, and Science, and Singapore Math.

Data for analysis of instructional effectiveness are gathered through formal classroom observations and walk-throughs. We did not find evidence to reveal how such data are used to improve instructional practices. Nor did we have evidence to indicate if and how high expectations for instructional effectiveness have been established and monitored for progress.

Also, as mentioned in previous narratives, stakeholder perception data is gathered through surveys administered to faculty, students, and parents. These too serve as documentation and a measure of progress as perceived by respondents, and in some cases, provide data to suggest certain program modifications or improvements.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Administration and faculty are keenly aware of student performance on Archdiocese mandated assessments and are willing to work collaboratively towards improvement.
- Administration is secure and willing to solicit stakeholder feedback regularly to help assess school effectiveness.
- The school has studied the report cards for students and purchased a new grading program.
- Professional Learning Communities provide a venue for use of data to inform instructional decisions.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Expand the use of formative assessments with all classes, thus establishing higher expectations for student learning and more opportunities for mastery.
- Monitor for effective instructional practices and high levels of student engagement. To this end, the team suggests the use of e-Walk technology for collecting data.

Finding: Ascension School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met

this standard for accreditation.

Standard 5: Resource and Support Systems

Standard: The school has resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Description – The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Ascension School recruits, employs, and mentors qualified professional staff. Although a significant portion of the faculty at Ascension has remained the same for many years, they have an advanced mentoring plan that pairs new teachers with an experienced teacher. A monthly checklist includes ways to ensure that meaningful support and contact continues throughout the year. Teachers are supported through continuous professional development promoting best practice and archdiocesan initiatives. Professional development choices are directly linked to the Professional Growth Plan as well as the School Improvement Plan. At times, the entire faculty attends the same professional development opportunity to support identified needs. The principal conducts formal and informal observations. While she does not currently use the e-Walk process, she does provide feedback to teachers following the observation.

The school has experienced a declining enrollment due to changing demographics. One impact of this has been a reduction in staff and the creative use of existing faculty. Teachers demonstrate a willingness to collaborate in many ways. This takes the form of helping the teacher of a different grade or subject area with a project, with computer usage, etc.

The principal reviews the budget each year with the business manager to determine the status of the school's finances. The Finance Committee reviews the budget as well to ensure that funds are used most effectively. Instructional and staffing decisions are based on financial resources. Creative use of resources keeps expenses within the budget.

Ascension has full- and part-time custodial and maintenance staff. The Building and Grounds Committee oversees major facilities and maintenance needs. In addition, parishioners and parents join a monthly work crew to address specific projects.

Drills and safety inspections are conducted on a regular basis. Visitors must be admitted through the school office. All staff and volunteers take Safe Environment training and submit a background check.

The school has both a counselor and special needs coordinator. The counselor meets regularly with all grade levels to deal with peer relationship and problem solving issues. She works with students to resolve bullying issues and prevent future problems. In

addition to the work with whole classes, students have access to guidance and resource services through several channels. The student may self-refer, be referred by a teacher or by a parent. Ascension has a strong special needs program. The special needs coordinator works closely with the classroom teachers to ensure that the needs of students are met. Her particular focus is on the struggling learner. She regularly works in the classrooms alongside the teacher. She oversees the 504 and School Strategy Plans.

Strengths – The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- A teacher who is new to Ascension School is paired with an experienced teacher who serves as a mentor during the first year.
- There is strong collaboration between the counselor and special needs coordinator and the classroom teacher.
- There is a widely-shared willingness among the faculty and staff to collaborate and support one another in meeting student needs and best interests.
- Professional development choices are connected to Professional Growth Plans and the School Improvement Plan.
- Common professional development opportunities are provided for entire faculty, enhancing the sense of shared mission and objectives.
- The principal arranged common planning time for junior high teachers.

Opportunities – The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Monitor for effective instructional practices and high levels of student engagement. To this end, the team suggests the use of e-Walk technology for collecting data.
- Establish a written security and crisis management plan with appropriate training.
- Implement a conflict resolution process.
- Expand common planning time to provide this opportunity to teachers of all grade levels and content areas.
- Differentiate instruction to meet the needs and challenge all students, particularly the advanced learner.

Finding: Ascension School has earned the overall assessment level of “Operational” and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communication and Relationships

Standard: The school fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Description – The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

At Ascension School, teachers and administrators maintain regular and frequent correspondence with stakeholders. A weekly principal's newsletter, e-mails, the school website, and annual fund reports are examples of the standard communication tools. Updating the school's website with student technology assistance is a particular goal cited in the School Improvement Plan. Just this year, the school installed the PowerSchool program. Currently its primary use is the reporting of student grades, but other program features are being studied and will be utilized to convey other kinds of information (calendars and events, news items, test dates, project deadlines, syllabi, etc.) in the future. This promises to make communication more efficient, timely and explanatory.

There is faculty and principal representation on the School Board and an active PTO. There seems to be an intentional bridging of understanding and efforts among support arms of the school (e.g., the Parish Council finance person attends School Board meetings). Extensive annual surveys are distributed to Teachers, Parents, Students, and School Board members. Results are compiled, distributed to stakeholders, and reviewed with an eye for areas where either perception or reality points to a need for adjustment and/or improvement. Similarly, the school has opted to use Terra Nova testing in all grades each year so results can be examined and used to help determine instructional goals. Test results are summarized and distributed to stakeholders as one tool to gauge the school's academic success and standing, as well as areas where growth is needed.

The current principal is a valued leader at Ascension School. Faced with declining enrollment and budget tightening, she has been forced to make some tough decisions in her tenure, but has done so while retaining the respect of all the stakeholders with whom we met. Interviews with faculty, support staff, the pastor, PTO and School Board revealed that she is viewed as competent and approachable. Several mentioned that she is an involved principal and a good listener – one who's responsive when needs are brought to her attention. She was described as a person who, because of the support she's garnered, is able to approach the right people and ask for assistance to get things done. She is a risk-taker, willing to nudge her teachers and staff as necessary when research reveals the latest in best practices and teaching strategies for today's learners.

In recent years, Ascension School has been engaged in several unique projects made possible by collaboration with people in the broader community. One prime example of this is the team-teaching that occurs once a week throughout the year involving a partnership between the middle school science teacher and a professor from the University of Louisville's Speed School of Engineering. He spends a trimester in each of the 6th, 7th and 8th grades, engaging the students in instruction which allows true mastery of science concepts as real-life applications and a hands-on approach are integrated into their study. Another example of reaching beyond the school walls to provide unique learning opportunities is a program the faculty and students refer to as their ACE (Ascension Classes for Enrichment) program. This two-day event in late May provides a wide array of enrichment sessions led by a number of community professionals, craft masters, etc. who offer unique experiences to every student. Students sign up for sessions selecting from a menu of electives. This out-of-routine experience keeps

students engaged and excited about learning until the very end of the year. ACE has been an opportunity for the past two years and stakeholders anticipate it will become a tradition.

Strengths – The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The school recently (summer 2010) installed the PowerSchool technology program.
- There is cross-over representation in school support organizations.
- An annual survey is distributed to stakeholders to assess satisfaction with various aspects of the school’s operation.
- The pastor welcomes the opportunity to visit classrooms upon teacher request.
- There are efforts to connect school learning with applications to the broader community outside its walls.

Opportunities – The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Continue to study PowerSchool features.
- Set expectations for the use of PowerSchool – phasing in requirements for posting and updating as the faculty and staff familiarize themselves with and learn how to use its communication features.
- Meet goal of updating school website, involving student technology assistants.
- Recruit more students to be regularly involved in the morning broadcast.

Finding: Ascension School has earned the overall assessment level of “Highly Functional” and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 7: Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Standard: The school establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.

Description – The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The principal, teachers and their support staff at Ascension School are committed to providing high quality Catholic education for their students. “Rising above the ordinary,” words from the school’s vision statement, were echoed by many interviewees and seem to be embedded in the school’s goals and strategies for achieving them. After a period of angst over declining enrollment, most seem to have accepted the resulting smaller school identity and the new possibilities it holds for realizing the school’s vision.

As stated previously, the school uses several standardized tools routinely that provide important data used to help measure instructional effectiveness and determine areas for growth. The school opts to annually administer Terra Nova tests to all grades. The principal, guidance counselor, and the special needs coordinator carefully guide the

faculty in an analysis of the resulting data. After one study, Singapore Math and Simple Solutions programs were adopted to help ensure mastery of skills in those target areas. After gains in math were noted, Simple Solutions was adopted in Science and English classes.

As reported, the annual school survey distributed to teachers, students, parents and School Board is carefully studied; when curricular adjustments or other improvements are suggested, the areas are reviewed and examined in that light. For instance, after a recent survey review, the topic of bullying was brought to a faculty meeting for consideration. It continues to be an area of focus, but to date no systemic approach to the problem has been determined. For other issues, initiatives have been implemented, and successive surveys have indicated most stakeholders share a rising level of confidence in the various aspects of the school's overall operation.

After collectively reviewing the abovementioned data and reporting data summaries to various stakeholders, school and teacher instructional improvement goals are determined. As each teacher designs her Professional Growth Plan, she seeks out professional development opportunities that relate to and support achievement of her goals. The faculty regularly attends archdiocesan professional development programs (lately focused on differentiated instruction and assessment). Otherwise, particular programs are sought to align with an individual teacher's specific improvement goals. In interviews, teachers indicated they are satisfied with the amount of assistance they receive in this area. One of the principal's goals, pertinent to this, is to ensure that peer observations occur within the school.

In interviews, it was clear the special needs coordinator is widely respected by the principal and staff. She collaborates regularly with classroom teachers and assists them with particular strategies for students with learning needs. She and the faculty have created several unique systems for monitoring students' progress. For instance, there is a Buddy Program with opportunities for an older student with particular learning needs to be paired with a younger one for shared reading. The pairing is intentional and thus offers opportunity for both students to experience reading improvement, not to mention esteem-building benefits. STAR reading assessments provide teachers and the Special Needs Coordinator with data that evaluates students' reading levels upon entering a grade level, midway in the school year, and at the end of the year. Printed results are shared with parents at conferences and with the end of the year report card. Instructional adjustments are made depending on the level of support indicated on the reports. The Special Needs Coordinator utilizes testing and additional services provided by Jefferson County Public Schools as needs are identified. In our interviews, there seemed to be wide agreement that the school has been very successful in supporting the struggling learner. A present area of focus is strengthening the program for "gifted students" (i.e., students who performed well according to Cognitive Skills Index scores). Because this goal was set recently, data to indicate what measures have been determined or their effectiveness is not yet available.

The implementation of differentiation strategies by all teachers seems to be an area for growth as evidenced by the amount of whole class instruction the QAR team observed (admittedly, visits were sporadic and brief). In our interview with the principal, she confirmed that greater utilization of differentiation strategies was a need, one we discussed at length.

For this 2010-2011 year, the schedule for junior high teachers was designed to allow for a common planning period. In our interviews, these teachers indicated that this has been of real benefit as they plan and design coursework and devise strategies to meet students' particular needs.

As stated in the Standard 3 narrative, Ascension teachers attended training for Minds in Motion, a research-based program that addresses the impact of balance and vision on learning. As our team toured the school, we noted a group of students en route to the next class, moving in silence and tossing beanbags in a particular trained way. It seemed quite natural to them. More positive effects and results are revealing themselves with continued exposure and use of these particular strategies. It will be interesting to note how the young students who've received Minds in Motion training will continue to derive learning advantages from it as they move into the intermediate and middle school grades.

As Ascension stakeholders have embraced their small school identity, initiatives like ACE (Ascension Classes for Enrichment), and the middle school Science teacher's partnership with the professor from the University of Louisville Speed School have been more easily realized and incorporated into the school program. Monthly spirit programs have also been scheduled allowing opportunities to recognize student and class achievements, share news and success stories, hear the school band perform, and build community. Increased collaboration among teachers has also been a positive by-product of declining enrollment figures and resultant budget constraints. Teachers have come to rely on one another for support and shared expertise, particularly in the area of technology

Interviews with students revealed positive feelings about school and learning; older students expressed they think they're being well prepared for high school. Junior high students indicated opportunities for leadership in extracurricular and seasonal activities like KYA and KUNA. They were not ready with responses about in-house opportunities for leadership like a student council, peer mediation, etc.

Strengths – The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The careful review of Terra Nova and other assessment data is used to guide instructional planning.
- The school implemented Singapore Math and Simple Solutions for Math to address a target need.
- The school implemented Simple Solutions for English and Science after gains in Math were noted.
- The school is a pioneer in the archdiocese for its implementation of Minds in Motion.

- There is frequent collaboration between the Special Needs Coordinator and the classroom teachers.
- A common planning time was scheduled for junior high teachers.
- The school provides a unique enrichment program (ACE) – a collaborative effort involving teachers, parents, and community resource people.
- The middle school science teacher has created a partnership with the University of Louisville Speed School of Engineering.
- The school provides professional development to help the faculty/staff achieve their performance goals.

Opportunities – The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Actively engage students in their learning at all grade levels.
- Increase use of higher order thinking and questioning skills.
- Increase use of strategies for differentiation to meet the needs of all students, from the struggling to the advanced learner.
- Create common planning times for primary and intermediate teachers.
- Increase use of educational technology, particularly those strategies that involve student usage.
- Provide additional leadership opportunities for the older students. Recruit more students and expand their responsibilities for the Student Technology Team.
- Monitor for effective instructional practices and high levels of student engagement. To this end, the team suggests the use of e-Walk technology for collecting data.
- Ensure that all teachers arrange peer observations.

Finding: Ascension School has earned the overall assessment level of “Operational” and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 8: Catholic Identity

Standard: Catholic Identity is evident in all facets of the school and in the school’s relationships with its constituencies.

Description – The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Catholic Identity is very evident at Ascension School. The school day begins and ends with prayer. Prayer and prayerful experiences are woven throughout the day. Students attend weekly liturgies. Classes take turns preparing and assisting with the liturgies. Students act as servers, cantors, and musicians. Eighth grade students may serve as Eucharistic Ministers after Confirmation.

There are prayer tables located outside of church and in the main hall of the school. Individuals are encouraged to write prayer requests on the provided cards so that students can pray for them. In addition to the prayer requests, the prayer table in the elementary wing has the color of the Church season, a candle, an open children's Bible, a rosary, and children's books that relate to special holy days. Students in junior high take turns preparing a weekly bulletin board with relevant themes for the church season. Student art with a religious focus is displayed prominently in the common gathering area. Each classroom has a crucifix, statue of Mary, and other items that reflect the Catholic Identity of the school.

The mission statement has been placed above the entrance to the school. Banners depicting the core values can be found in the hallways. Students prepare for and receive sacraments. Each class has a Reconciliation service during the year.

Students are involved in many service opportunities. Each grade level has a particular focus. In addition, an occasional all-school field trip day titled "In Search of God" combines education with service. Parents and parishioners have the opportunity to be a part of this experience. The school opens the year with an all-school retreat experience. During that time, students make items for those in need. The whole school is involved in many common service opportunities. Eighth grade students are paired with kindergarten and first grade students as a model of service to others.

Teachers of religion are of the Catholic faith. The school has various religious traditions, including a Passion Play, prayer services, and music programs that reflect the Catholic values of the school. The pastor is often invited to meet with classes, particularly those receiving the sacraments. He is willing to answer questions, lead a discussion, or teach a lesson.

The faculty and staff of Ascension model the Catholic nature of the school through their interaction with the students and with each other. There is a true sense of collaboration in the school.

Strengths – The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Prayer tables in the parish gathering space and in the main hall provide the opportunity for students and parishioners to submit prayer requests.
- Visitors, upon entering the building and parish gathering space, see a large art piece incorporating student hand-prints, illustrating the partnership between the school and parish.
- Banners with the mission statement and core values are displayed throughout the school.
- Eighth grade students can serve as Eucharistic Ministers after Confirmation.
- There is availability of extensive service opportunities on a school-wide and class level.
- An all-school field trip "In Search of God" provides and combines education and service opportunities.

- The school year opens with a retreat day for students and faculty that includes the opportunity for students to make items for those in need.
- The pastor enjoys visiting the school and is willing to make classroom visits upon teacher request.

Opportunities – The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Utilize the assistance of the pastor in locating versions of the readings that are student-friendly, particularly when the subject matter may be irrelevant to students.

Finding: Ascension School has earned the overall assessment level of “Highly Functional” and has met this standard for accreditation.

Conclusion

The commendations and required actions in this report are designed to focus the school on those areas that will have the greatest impact on student performance and school effectiveness. While powerful in potential, the commendations and required actions only have meaning when acted upon by the school.

The strength of this report lies in the school’s commitment to using the findings to continuously improve. The key is action. The school is encouraged to use the report as a call to action, a tool to sustain momentum in the ongoing process of continuous improvement.

The team identified required actions for improvement that the school will need to address. Following this review, the school will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the required actions.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the school administration, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS CASI accreditation with AdvancED.