

**St. Francis of Assisi School  
School Improvement Advisory Committee  
2008 -2009**

**Parent Satisfaction Focus Area  
Final Report  
June 11, 2009**

**Focus Area**

The 2008-2009 School Improvement Committee (SIAC) choose three focus areas for priority work. Parent Satisfaction was a focus area determined by the Committee to be of substantial importance to the future of St. Francis School and possessed high potential to focus improvement activities with specific suggestions for action.

The Committee originally projected requesting parent perception in the following areas:

- |                                      |                                      |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. curriculum                        | 7. tuition amount                    |
| 2. communication                     | 8. student support                   |
| 3. homework                          | 9. guidance program/class/curriculum |
| 4. discipline                        | 10. high school preparation          |
| 5. grading system/progress reporting | 11. middle school success            |
| 6. faith and culture/communication   | 12. non-academic programs            |

**Methods**

Following consideration of research on successful surveying techniques, the Committee quickly determined the number of topics needed significant paring to gain high participation and worthwhile results. A written survey instrument was selected for preliminary gathering of results with the editorial and electronic counsel and service of the Heartland Area Education Agency. The following topics survived consideration for this survey:

1. curriculum (divided between elementary and middle school)
2. communication (divided between administrative office and teachers)
3. grading system/progress reporting (divided between general and middle school)
4. Catholic identity/faith formation
5. middle school success (asked only of participants with experience)
6. high school preparation (asked only of participants with experience)

All of the items drafted for the other topics were retained for future consideration and exploration with parents. Demographic information was minimally requested to improve perception of confidentiality and therefore, participation. The survey was split into two main sections: general school perceptions and middle school perceptions. The middle school section was created for specific input due to another Committee focus area on middle school success. Each section of the survey permitted participants to add general comments. All current St. Francis School parents were asked to complete the survey during about a one week period in May 2009. Parents received notification and access to the web site through the School's routine e-mail distribution list. An incentive was provided for participation that would permit a Jeans Day for students if 75% participation was reached. The parents were also assured that outcomes of the survey would be made available on the School's web site.

## **Results**

The instrument and raw data results are combined as an attachment to this report. A brief analysis of the comments is also provided as an attachment. School administration reported 383 families were sent notice to complete the survey. About 270 participants consistently provided responses to the survey. Depending on how families chose to respond, about 35% (two participants per family) to 70% (one participant per family) of families are represented in the results. About two-thirds of participants indicated 5 or more years of experience with St. Francis School. About two-thirds of participants indicated 2 to 3 children had experience with St. Francis School. And about two-thirds of participants indicated no experience with any other private or parochial school system. About 58% of participants (154) went on to complete the middle school section of the survey, however a large number of participants chose not to rate some of the questions leading to the hypothesis that some participants may have misunderstood the directions. A portion of the middle school section devoted only to those participants with middle school graduates and high school experience received 41 to 55 responses on the high school preparation items.

The general section of the survey provided relatively clear results in the opinion of the Committee. Many, many results were positive and clearly, St. Francis enjoys a position of being an excellent school able to improve with feedback. Participants agreed and strongly agreed to over one-half (14 of 27) of the items in this section. In particular, the Committee was very pleased to find very positive results of a typically difficult area, communication, especially between parent and teacher (78% to 92% positive results). Participants very highly scored the items related to Catholic Identity/Faith Formation (89% and higher agreed and strongly agreed).

The following three themes emerged from the results of the survey's general section as possessing the most potential for improvement:

1. Related Arts
2. Infinite Campus
3. Grading System/Progress Reporting

### **Related Arts**

For 23% of the participants, the quantity of elementary grade related arts opportunities are not sufficient. Multiple comments were received about the lack of a foreign language curriculum and specifically, Spanish, as an opportunity. The technology curriculum was criticized as limited to keyboarding and not interfaced well within the entire curriculum.

### **Infinite Campus**

Almost 20% of participants chose not to rate their ability as a competent user of Infinite Campus inferring to the Committee that even recognition of the system may not be fully in place with parents. Of those that did rate their competency, 50% did not agree they were "competent users" of the system. Comments from participants and Committee members indicate the system is "overwhelming" and offers information overload. The system is currently criticized as not user-friendly and difficult for parents to zero in on performance results for their children.

### **Grading System/Progress Reporting**

The grading system section of the survey produced the most negative results for all topics of the survey. The quantitative results paired with the comments leave one to believe he/she would not like to be in a room defending the system in any way. The Committee was also able to access the Diocesan survey results for the new grading system which also produced very high levels of negative results. Clearly the parent perspective is relatively consistent and very negative.

Additional themes garnered from the comment sections of the general section of the survey include specific concern for the performance of the fifth grade and the format of the electronic newsletters used by the School.

The middle school section of the survey produced more mixed results from participants. In the opinion of the Committee, parents are not as clearly focused on priority areas for the middle school and often have divergent and passionate opinions on performance. After careful and thoughtful review of the quantitative survey results and the comments, the Committee recommends the following three priority areas for improvement planning:

1. Study Skills
2. Curriculum Rigor
3. Discipline System

Survey results from the middle school section were intended to be funneled to the Committee's focus area on middle school success. That focus area includes several other attributes for measurement. (Please see separate report.)

### **Study Skills**

More than one-fifth of the participants did not believe their middle schoolers were readily prepared with successful study skills and organization skills. Comments included a lack of specific focus on the skill area for middle schoolers. Teachers reported that study skills and organizational skills are not a portion of the Standards and Benchmarks used throughout St. Francis School for measurement of performance.

### **Curriculum Rigor**

While a consistent 20% of participants reported non-agreement with the rigor of the middle school curriculum, some of the comments indicated the curriculum was too rigorous and some comments indicated the opposite, not rigorous enough. The Committee makes specific recommendations on communication of the level of the curriculum in the middle school success report.

### **Discipline System**

Interestingly while the "social skills" items in the survey received relatively positive results, many negative comments of the survey were directed toward the discipline system. The Committee believes that the discipline system is related to the study skills results and that the difference between "behavioral" issues versus "academic" issues is not well differentiated. While consistency in application is not a reported issue, parents, teachers, administration and others appear to send a clear message that the St. Francis School discipline system needs revision. School Administration reported to the Committee a plan to implement a new approach called Positive Behavior Support for the 2009-2010 school year.

## **Recommendations**

Related Arts:

1. Demand consistent offering of foreign languages to students.
2. The technology curriculum should be expanded to age-appropriate exposure to routine applications other than word processing (e.g., spread sheets, publishing, etc.).
3. The technology curriculum should be well interfaced throughout the full curriculum to support whole grade education similar to faith formation, language arts, etc.

#### Infinite Campus:

1. The Committee recognizes the School made a significant investment in this software and that many other users report positive success. The system must be made less overwhelming to parents and direct parents to the high priority performance results they wish to identify.
2. As with many other areas of improvement, Infinite Campus as a tool for parents will improve with a focus on refinement and communication. A task force of teachers and parents should be charged with reviewing the system and recommending appropriate changes to administration.

#### Grading System/Progress Reporting

1. The Committee is concerned by supposed reports that the Diocese has already made a decision to move to the new system even though parents completing our survey and that of the Diocese's indicate a great reluctance to do so. The St. Francis Board of Education should send a very clear message to Diocesan authorities that the system should not be entertained past the pilot phase. It appears to the Committee at this point in time no general ownership by parents is ever likely.
2. The Committee recommends a review of original motivations and goals of the grading system changes and a broader communication plan for requesting parent and other stakeholder input.

Performance of the fifth grade and improvements to electronic newsletters are whole heartedly turned over to the St. Francis School administration for advisement and consideration. The Committee particularly supported reorganization of newsletters to include "new" information at the forefront and creation of a Board of Education approved content policy.

Further analysis of middle school success attributes and recommendations for improvement are included under separate report.

The Committee would like a little more analysis of survey details by requesting various "cuts" of the data such as by years of experience with St. Francis School and experience with other school systems. Time for such analysis has not yet occurred.

Respectfully submitted,

William P. Havekost  
Chair, 2008-2009 SIAC

Members of the 2008-2009 SIAC include Pat Berrie, Tom Bowman, Mike Caligiuri, Lisa Donnelly, Nick Farley, Peggy Greenfield, Misty Hade, Sarah Harmeyer, Roberta Harvey, Mary Head, Tricia Hoffman, Gail Koerner, Mackenzie Lee, Jolene Lensing, Kerry LeWarne, Tom Mallisee, Brian Waggoner, Megan Weisenhorn and Katherine Wenman.

The Committee sincerely appreciates the counsel and services of Tinna Walberg, Partnership Director, Heartland Area Education Agency.