

The Report of the Visiting Committee

**St. Joseph Catholic School
Vancouver, Washington**

**Prepared for
The Accrediting Commission for Elementary Schools**

**Submitted to
Western Catholic Educational Association
and
Northwest Association of Accredited Schools**

**Process for School Improvement
Visitation, February 20-22, 2007**

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Preface

Visiting Team Report

The members of the visiting team congratulate the pastor, principal, staff, parents, and students for their willing participation in and strong commitment to the school improvement process.

We congratulate everyone involved for the quality preparation of the WCEA/NAAS accreditation self-study, which identifies school-wide areas of strength and recognizes school-wide areas for growth.

We are grateful to the entire school community for their warm acceptance, genuine friendliness, and gracious hospitality. Please be assured that we are most impressed by the dedication of the school community to the educational, spiritual, and personal welfare of each student.

We present this report to you in the hope that the recognition of areas of strength will be a source of encouragement and assurance to the school community. It is our desire that the key issues for growth and the school improvement plan will be a guide for you in furthering your endeavors to provide quality Catholic education in a Christian environment highlighted by a strong sense of community and team effort.

St. Joseph School

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CHAPTER I

THE STUDENT/COMMUNITY PROFILE

St. Joseph School sits on a sylvan tract of 12 ½ acres in southwestern Washington. The school opened in 1954 with grades one through eight. It underwent major renovations in 1968 and again in 1998 when it began the process of adding a second class at each grade level. Today, the school has two classes each, kindergarten through eighth grade, with approximately 25 students per class, which is its target occupancy.

The neighborhood is residential and centrally located in Vancouver. The student body is 92% Catholic, with 84% from St. Joseph Parish. Neighboring parishes subsidize their Catholic students who attend the school. Of the 420 students, 85% are Caucasian with an even mix comprising other ethnic groups. There is no Catholic high school in the community. However, over 70% of its students regularly apply to the Catholic high schools in Portland even though transportation and distance provide a real hardship to the families. Ninety-nine percent of its students are accepted and choose to attend.

There is a strong fund raising commitment by the parish community to retain the viability of the school. Any profit from its Extended Care Program is one source of funds for financial assistance for families. Families are obligated to 50 share hours as part of their commitment to the school.

Surveys from all stakeholders (clergy, staff, students and parents) show a high level of satisfaction with the school. All consider the school well administered, open to new ideas, and committed to the academic and spiritual growth of the students. Recent changes in leadership and improved school safety received high praise. Discipline and communication were cited for attention and improvement.

The school enjoys a good relationship with the parish and they share their facilities equitably. Parish clergy, youth minister, and catechetical director are involved in the school to maintain a strong bond for the students in their parish life. The parish and school do long range planning together.

Standardized testing occurs in grades three, five, and seven. Scores are consistently above national norms. The staff is stable with an average of 10 years at the school. Most have advanced degrees, and the school financially supports the pursuit of advanced degrees and catechetical certification.

The school's web site, www.stjoevanschool.org, is an excellent source of information on the school's history, activities, and mission.

CHAPTER II

PROGRESS REPORT

- **What appear to be the school's major changes and follow-up process since the last accreditation self-study?**

St. Joseph School completed its first accreditation self-study and was granted a full six-year term in 2001. There were 19 recommendations made at the previous visit. Eleven major recommendations called for regularly reviewing the school's mission and philosophy statements, annually updating its five-year plan, providing avenues for enhanced communication to stakeholders, upgrading curriculum, implementing staff development and professional growth plans, improving staff benefits, and addressing custodial needs in the school. Significant effort and success hallmark the school's efforts in these areas with all major recommendations being addressed and completed.

- **To what extent has progress been made on all recommendations from the last full visit?**

There is clear evidence that the school has made substantial progress in addressing all of the remaining eight recommendations:

- New textbooks have been adopted in all core subjects.
- Music and health education are now part of the school's program.
- An Extended Care Program, both before and after school, is in place.
- The school and parish coordinate their calendars to better utilize their shared resources.
- A part-time Development Director coordinates long-range financial stability for the school.
- A school alumni program is started.
- Security is greatly improved, including a school-wide fire bell system and phone system.

CHAPTER III

SELF-STUDY PROCESS

PREPARATION FOR SCHOOL-WIDE LEARNING EXPECTATIONS (SLEs)

There is clear evidence that the process to delineate the School-wide Learning Expectations (SLEs) was a concerted effort by the entire school community starting in November of 2005. All stakeholders (administration, staff, students, and parents) were involved through surveys, meetings, and lengthy discussions. The school's philosophy and mission statements were central in the discussion leading to the final listing of descriptors. The SLEs are readily apparent throughout the school and in the lesson planning by the staff. Especially noteworthy are SLE Symbol Cards located in all classrooms and on individual desks. Students at all grade levels are familiar with the SLEs and how they are related to their lessons. Parents are continually made aware of the SLE implementation and relevance to individual student growth through class newsletters and other teacher lesson communication. The school's Target area #3 seeks to further expand the integration of the SLEs into student life and the curriculum.

SCHOOL-WIDE LEARNING EXPECTATIONS

A. Spiritual Growth

A St. Joseph Catholic School Student is a faith-filled individual who:

1. Practices an ongoing personal relationship with God through prayer, study and reflection.
2. Respects self and others.
3. Participates as a member of the Catholic faith community through worship and stewardship by the sharing of time, talent and treasure.
4. Recognizes that God is present in religion class, as well as all academic subjects and aspects of life.
5. Exhibits the ability to make moral decisions based on Gospel values.
6. Understands the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church.
7. Acknowledges and accepts the responsibility to be a good steward of God's creation.

B. Academic Growth

A St. Joseph Catholic School Student is a lifelong learner who:

1. Exhibits a solid foundation in academic subjects.
2. Communicates clearly through speaking, writing, and listening.
3. Gathers, applies, and interprets information in a moral and responsible way.
4. Works independently and cooperatively.

5. Displays confidence and competence in problem solving, reasoning, and decision making.
6. Utilizes technology throughout the curriculum.
7. Demonstrates a respectful knowledge of the arts.
8. Develops habits that promote a healthy mind and body.
9. Takes responsibility for the development of personal gifts, talents, abilities and learning.

C. Social Growth

A St. Joseph Catholic School Student is a well-rounded person who:

1. Respects cultural, ethnic, religious and individual differences.
2. Interacts respectfully with students, teachers, parents and members of the broader community.
3. Resolves conflicts peacefully.
4. Advocates for social justice.
5. Accepts responsibility for personal actions.
6. Demonstrates self-control.
7. Listens actively and respectfully.
8. Practices honesty, tolerance, integrity and compassion.

CHAPTER IV

QUALITY OF THE SCHOOL'S PROGRAM SELF-STUDY FINDINGS

A. Organization for Student Learning

A.1. School Philosophy and Mission

- **To what extent has the school established a clear statement of philosophy and mission that reflects a commitment to Catholic identity, thoroughness of instruction, a focus on the needs of the whole person, parents as primary educators, teachers as facilitators of learning, and recognition of the dignity of all members of the school community?**

St. Joseph School has established a clear statement of mission and philosophy reflecting a commitment to Catholic identity. Gospel values are at the forefront of the lives and are the foundation for the words and actions of those involved with the school. The School-wide Learning Expectations (SLEs) flow directly from these statements. The SLEs are printed in Parent/Student and Faculty Handbooks and are posted in classrooms and in various places around the school. The teachers, as facilitators, support the parents as the primary educators of their children providing a thorough instruction dedicated to the needs of each individual student. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and administration work to assure effective communication between parents and staff. Active parent and community volunteers strive together to create a nurturing environment that recognizes the dignity of each member.

A.2. Governance

- **To what extent does the school administration seek input/participation from members of the school community, adopt policies which are consistent with the school purpose and mission, delegate implementation to the professional staff, monitor results, and commit to sharing the Catholic vision?**

The school administration seeks input and participation from members of the school community including the School Advisory Board, the PTO, staff, parents and students both formally and informally. Policies are adopted consistent with school mission and philosophy. Active parish participation of parents is required and reviewed periodically. All teachers are either in the process of becoming or currently are certified catechists. Administration participates in daily prayer with staff and is a role model for teachers, students, parents, and the general community to living a Catholic vision.

A.3. School Leadership

- **To what extent does the school leadership encourage the cultivation of Catholic values and the spiritual formation of the school community, focus the energies of the school on achievement of School-wide Learning Expectations, empower the staff and ensure shared accountability for student learning?**

Daily prayer by staff and in the classroom and religious symbols throughout the school give testament that St. Joseph School is a Catholic school. Teachers are expected to use the SLEs in their lesson plans. Faculty and staff work together to make the SLEs connect with the students' daily work. Wednesday's rotating schedules allows teaching levels to meet keeping communication open. The administration trusts the staff to implement school policies, to make sound instructional decisions, and to take leadership roles beyond the classroom. Notably, the staff evaluated and redesigned the formal assessment process for teachers.

A.4. Staff

- **To what extent are the school administration and staff professionally qualified, dedicated to the school's philosophy and mission, committed to ongoing spiritual and professional development that will promote student learning, prepared to lead by example, and work collaboratively to create a community of faith?**

Each staff member is professionally qualified with credentials and 18 have advanced degrees. The staff is dedicated to the school's mission and philosophy. This group of teachers was the first to revisit the mission and philosophy statement after many years. Teachers strive to expand their professional development through in-services and classes on their own time through Vancouver School District or other available offerings. The Educational Support Team (EST) has been created to help teachers identify the non-traditional or struggling student. The administration and staff lead by example and work collaboratively with the parish staff to create a community of faith. Parish staff eats lunch regularly with students, organizes the eighth grade retreat supported by the school staff, participates in school prayer services, assemblies, and activities. Parish priests visit grades six through eight for weekly religion lessons.

A.5. School Environment

- **To what extent does the school create and nurture a safe and healthy learning environment, which fosters community and the achievement of religious and educational goals, and is characterized by trust,**

professionalism, realistic expectations for each student, and a respect for diversity?

St. Joseph School has created and nurtured a safe and healthy learning environment. Very clear behavior expectations are promulgated in classrooms and shared areas to provide a physically safe environment. Students are very well behaved and courteous. Security is enhanced by locked outer doors and a buddy system for students traveling between buildings. The building and shared spaces are maintained by professional and on-site custodians. Students are taught to take responsibility and pride for their school and are expected to pick up after themselves, report problems, and respect school and parish property. Cross-grade buddies and the Wonderful Individuals Sharing in Education (WISE) program expand a sense of community throughout the school and parish. A strong sense of “Catholic school” is evident from signs, statues, crosses, crucifixes, rosaries, and bulletin boards in classrooms and hallways. Mass every Wednesday and monthly theme Masses encourage school and parish celebration together. Teacher aides and parent volunteers allow for individualized attention for each student. An air of mutual respect, following Gospel values, characterizes relationships among students, teachers, and administration. Individuals cooperate with one another towards the common goals of the school.

A.6. Reporting Student Progress

- **To what extent does the administration and staff regularly review and report to the school community progress toward accomplishing the School-wide Learning Expectations?**

The administration and staff at St. Joseph School regularly review and report to the school community progress toward accomplishing the SLEs. Report cards, progress reports, conferences, standardized test results, and teacher progress summaries are evident as well as classroom updates reported in bi-monthly newsletters and the weekly church bulletin. Teachers hold themselves accountable to both parents and students for reporting student progress.

A.7. School Improvement Process

- **To what extent does the school administration facilitate school improvements as a process which is driven by a plan of action that embodies faith formation and quality instruction for all students, has school community commitment and involvement, and effectively guides the work of the school; and does the administration and instructional staff in cooperation with the school community demonstrate accountability through the monitoring of the implementation of the School-wide Learning Expectations?**

The school administration facilitates a school improvement process driven by a plan of action that embodies faith formation and quality instruction for all students. The plan grew from the recommendations of the 2001 Visiting Team Report. In 2002 a School/Parish Five-Year plan was created with the collaboration of the School Advisory Board, the PTO, faculty and staff, school and parish administration, and the pastor. This plan was updated in 2003. School improvement is an ongoing process using, but not limited to, the School/Parish Five-Year Plan, the WCEAWASC Process for School Improvement Self Study, reports from the 2001 Accreditation Report, regular staff meetings, Parent Teacher Organization meetings, and School Advisory Board meetings.

St. Joseph School values the individuals in its community. The staff accepts the responsibility for creating and nurturing a safe healthy learning environment that is characterized by trust, professionalism, and mutual respect. It is an environment where strong, realistic religious and educational goals are met.

Key Areas of Strength for Organization for Student Learning:

- Professionally prepared and well-qualified administrators, faculty, and staff
- Administrators, faculty, and staff model the faith for the community
- A strong Catholic Identity present in all areas of the school
- An effective network of communication among administrators, faculty, staff, and families
- Expectations and guidelines clearly stated in the Parent/Student Handbook
- Administration values interactions with faculty, staff, and families
- The school invites and receives a high level of parent involvement and support
- A wide range of activities available for student participation both in and out of the school day

Key Issues of Growth for Organization for Student Learning:

- Development of program to serve children with diverse needs
- Formally connect the reporting of student growth to the SLEs
- Update and prioritize the school's five-year plan
- Update the school emergency procedures/safety plan
- Update and strengthen current anti-bullying programs

CHAPTER IV

B. Curriculum and Instruction

B.1. What Students Learn

- **To what extent does the school provide a challenging, comprehensive, and relevant curriculum for each student that fulfills the school's philosophy and mission, strengthens Catholic identity, and results in achievement of the School-wide Learning Expectations?**

St. Joseph School provides a challenging, comprehensive, and relevant curriculum that fulfills its mission and philosophy. The School-wide Learning Expectations (SLEs), the Seattle Archdiocesan Curriculum Guide, and the Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) guide the curriculum. In order to update resources available to teachers and students, the school formed committees to evaluate textbooks on a regular basis and adopt new ones as necessary. These committees review current instructional practices, the SLEs, state and archdiocesan guidelines, test scores, and student needs as it evaluates textbooks. A cycle has been developed for book purchasing that will continue to update resources available to teachers and students.

The curriculum at St. Joseph School strengthens Catholic identity by inviting, encouraging, and providing a variety of opportunities for parents and guardians to participate in their child's education and in their faith journey. The faculty and staff take their responsibility to model Christian values seriously.

Faculty members use a variety of teaching strategies, techniques, books, and tools to accommodate individuals while still assuring the SLEs are achieved with each child. A wide range of educational opportunities that address a variety of learning styles are available to students including educational assemblies, extracurricular activities, and guest speakers. The administration recognizes the need to provide school-wide training to assist teachers in knowing how to address the needs of each student. Teachers at St. Joseph School are encouraged to participate in continuing education courses to further their knowledge and to implement best practices.

St. Joseph School is committed to educating the whole child. Specialists teach physical education, music, art, technology, and library classes. These teachers work with the classroom teachers to supplement the core curriculum. Parents lead an art docent program in the classrooms, instructing art history and related lessons. Students display their talents and skills in such programs as the Shine and Show (art and music), Field Day (P.E.), Advent Program (music), research paper symposium, Science Fair, and various technology/media presentations and projects throughout the year.

The social component of the SLEs are met in part by the various cross-grade relationships that exist within the school, through the many service projects in which students are involved and through the family and social events that celebrate the school's togetherness.

Regular partner and level meetings facilitate the sharing of knowledge and ideas to ensure that skills and concepts are covered effectively. These regular meetings also give teachers a chance to monitor student needs or progress. New textbooks adopted by the school allow for continuity and provide for a spiral model of learning. The curriculum builds upon itself to create the cumulative effect desired by the SLEs.

B.2. How Students Learn

- **To what extent does the professional staff use research-based knowledge about teaching and learning, design and implement a variety of learning and formational experiences, which actively engage students and are consistent with the school's philosophy, mission, and School-wide Learning Expectations?**

The St. Joseph School staff designs and implements a variety of learning and formational experiences, basing instruction on the current understanding of how students learn. Understanding that students learn in different ways and at different rates, teachers adjust instruction to meet the needs of each child. Strategies that teachers use include the following: traditional pen and paper exercises, group and independent projects, whole group discussions, literature circles, research projects, hands-on exercises, games, music, art, journals, and class meetings. Active participation is encouraged in all subjects to make student learning as authentic as possible. Teachers go beyond the text by using the Internet, supplementary materials, live video clips, and newspaper and magazine articles.

The teachers of St. Joseph School make provisions for the learning needs of students with diverse backgrounds and abilities. The faculty and staff have developed and are currently piloting a process called Educational Support Team (EST) to better assess and meet the needs of students. The team is available to advise and help classroom teachers facilitate options and strategies to meet the needs of individual students. This EST is in its infancy, and the staff recognizes that additional support is needed in order to reap the full benefits of the program.

The wide range of instructional methods and activities are consistent with the school's mission, philosophy, and SLEs because they recognize the need to teach the whole child, academically, socially, and spiritually. The staff provides many varied opportunities for learning to take place and they welcome the chance to learn more ways to meet individual needs.

B.3. How Assessment Is Used

- **To what extent is teacher and student use of assessment frequent and integrated into the teaching/learning process? Are the assessment results the basis for measurement of progress toward the School-wide Learning Expectations, regular evaluation and improvement of curriculum and instruction, and allocation of resources?**

The use of assessment at St. Joseph School is frequent and integrated into the learning process. Through varied assessment methods, teachers gain insight into what is working well in the classroom, which then assists in curriculum planning. A wide variety of formal, informal, and authentic tools are used to measure learning including standardized tests, paper and pencil tests, essays, self evaluations, teacher observations, class discussions, peer editing, daily assignments, journaling, presentations, and student-led conferences.

Teachers use assessment results as indicators of where adjustments or change in methods need to occur. Assessments reinforce the school's mission and philosophy and assist teachers in monitoring individual student progress toward the achievement of the SLEs. Parents are informed of their child's performance through various reporting methods, including progress reports, report cards, conferences, and phone calls.

Teachers and staff analyze assessment results to determine student progress and to assist in evaluating curriculum. These tools are used to assist in identifying and prioritizing where resources are most needed. The school has added teacher's aides, a variety of media resources, new textbooks, and funds for additional instructional materials as a result of assessment data analysis.

Key Areas of Strength for Curriculum and Instruction:

- Newly introduced Educational Support Team
- A rotational cycle to update materials and purchase texts
- Commitment to nurturing well-rounded individuals through academics, the arts, technology, and physical education
- Cross-curricular enrichment programs

Key Issues of Growth for Curriculum and Instruction:

- A comprehensive school-wide program to address the needs of diverse learners
- Help students and parents better understand the effectiveness of the SLEs
- Better utilize the time set aside for teacher collaboration
- Better utilize ITBS scores to guide teaching needs

CHAPTER IV

C. Curriculum and Instruction - Religion In-Depth

C.1. What Students Learn

- **To what extent does the school provide a challenging, comprehensive, and relevant curriculum for each student that fulfills the school's philosophy and mission, strengthens Catholic identity, and results in achievement of the School-wide Learning Expectations?**

The religion curriculum at St. Joseph School is based upon the Seattle Archdiocesan Curriculum Guide, the approved textbook series *Blest Are We*, the mission and philosophy statements of the school, and the School-wide Learning Expectations (SLEs). As the number one priority of St. Joseph School, religion is taught and practiced daily.

Students are encouraged to practice a Christian attitude at all times. They are active participants in daily prayer, listen respectfully, learn to express themselves using kind and considerate words, and follow Jesus' model of acceptance and tolerance in their interactions with classmates, cross grade level buddies, and volunteers. The use of *Second Step* and *Steps to Respect* programs reinforce these concepts by providing the students with the tools to solve problems using appropriate words and actions, as well as to make decisions based upon morally sound practices. Staff members are not only instructors of these programs, but also act as role models for solving problems respectfully and peacefully.

The application of their faith in real life situations is the ultimate goal of the religion curriculum. Students practice their faith as a community during daily prayer and attendance at weekly and monthly Masses. They are involved in a variety of service projects, including Feed the Need food drives, Nathan's Toy Story toy drive, the Penny Drive, and Operation Rice Bowl. A number of opportunities to interact with the parish are also available for the students. These include serving at Mass, funerals, and Golden Fellowship luncheons. Students also participate in Children's Choir, weekly Adoration, and Life Teen Youth Group. The staff is active in the parish community as parish members, Eucharistic ministers, and lectors.

The religion curriculum of St. Joseph School aligns with Catholic Identity and the school's mission and philosophy statements and helps to develop the spiritual, academic, and social growth of each student. Classroom and parish activities, including school Masses, Sacramental Preparation Program, Reconciliation, Adoration, Stations of the Cross, service projects, recitation of the Rosary, classroom instruction, visits by the parish priests, and field trips to Northwest historical religious sites, build upon the curriculum and enhance the Catholic identity.

Grade level expectations based upon diocesan guidelines challenge the students to think critically, think globally, and to act as good stewards of their time, talent, and treasure. The expectation of the curriculum is that it is inclusive of all learners. Teachers, therefore, provide a variety of activities to make lessons relevant to the students and to allow all learners to be successful. Religious education is not limited to the religion class, but integrates the precepts of the Catholic faith into all subjects taught at St. Joseph School.

Teachers are committed to ensuring that curriculum expectations build from year to year and that the students successfully learn what is taught at each level. To aid in this endeavor they have enhanced their own knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith by attending the Catechetical classes offered by the Archdiocese of Seattle with most finished or close to finishing the three-year program.

C.2. How Students Learn

- **To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning and formational experiences which actively engage students and are consistent with the school's philosophy and mission?**

Teachers are committed to providing a variety of opportunities for their students to grow spiritually. They begin by enhancing their own faith lives by attending Catechetical classes and coming together as an adult faith community for daily prayer. These activities carry over into the classroom where each day starts with prayer. The use of discussion groups, role playing, reflections in journals, peer mentoring, small group instruction and activities, student projects and presentations, and sharing personal experiences are some of the ways the teachers give each student opportunities to understand and grow in faith. The Wonderful Individuals Sharing Education (WISE) program emphasizes character education, social justice issues, and examples of faith through the eyes of the seniors in the parish.

Students take ownership of their learning through classroom activities as well as those that are school-wide and parish related. The First Grade Thanksgiving Celebration, rosary making, Adoration, and a wide range of Christian service, including St. Vincent de Paul Society projects, altar service, Golden Fellowship luncheons, and Sausage Fest, are a few of the activities that meet a wide range of learning styles and encourage the students to be actively engaged in their own learning.

St. Joseph School recognizes that parents are the primary educators of their children. Parents are encouraged to interact with their children in the growth and formation of their faith through home assignments, attending school Masses, and to be actively involved in sacramental preparation as partners with the primary teachers in the Sacramental Preparation Program. Opportunities, such as *Parents in Prayer* and programs during National Catholic Schools Week, provide ways for

parents to deepen their own faith lives and help them to celebrate and/or learn about the Catholic faith.

Teachers guide the religious learning of their students by modeling Christian values and moral decision making, implementing the anti-violence/bullying programs *Second Step* and *Steps to Respect*, and incorporating social justice into the school day in practical and developmentally appropriate ways. Students are challenged to use critical thinking skills to go beyond the textbook to find meaning and value in applying Gospel values and Catholic Social Teachings to their own core actions.

Clarity in rubrics, oral and written instructions, and when reviewing vocabulary and chapter information help students understand what is required to meet grade level expectations. Goal setting is a vital piece of the learning process and is used extensively in the religion class for spiritual, social, and academic growth.

C.3. How Assessment is used

- **To what extent is teacher and student use of assessment frequent and integrated into the teaching/learning process**

St. Joseph School religion teachers use a variety of techniques to assess knowledge. Assessment is frequent and integrated into the teaching strategies at every grade level. Prior knowledge is assessed informally through teacher observation and class discussions and formally by written pretests. Teachers also gather information from past teachers and from the student profile survey completed by parents. Information acquired through assessment is used to measure student progress in achieving grade level expectations.

Students at St. Joseph School are accountable for and involved in the assessment of their own learning. Formal assessments include quizzes, tests, projects, and written papers given with clear rubrics for evaluation. Informal assessments are constant and include homework, class discussion, partner sharing, reflection/journal writing, self/peer assessment, and portfolios. Students set goals on a regular basis, self-evaluate for student-led conferences, and reflect on what is important for sharing with their parents. Examination of conscience is encouraged as part of the preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In religion as in other subjects, programs are modified on an individualized basis to meet a particular child's needs. This individualization may include shortened assignments, peer reading, group activities and projects, teacher assisted test taking, extra time to take tests, open book or notes tests, un-timed tests, varying instructional styles, typed instead of handwritten assignments, and using a different grading system. Proposed modifications are discussed with parents providing another way to work together for student success. Students may be given a choice in certain assignments to give them a greater chance of presenting material in a successful manner.

Authentic assessment is an important avenue of determining whether the student is meeting grade level expectations and is used throughout the year. They include the practical application of lessons studied, such as sixth graders leading the Rosary and attending weekly Adoration, second graders preparing for and receiving the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, eighth graders spending three days on retreat, student presentation of and attendance at the Shadow Stations on Good Friday, and students assuming responsibility for Mass and prayers at Outdoor School.

The entire staff monitors the religion curriculum ensuring that all students receive a quality, meaningful, and sequential religious education. Changes are made so that individual as well as group progress is made in meeting the curriculum goals for religion. This monitoring enables teachers to make decisions in the allocation of resources for the religion program so that proper decisions are made regarding the purchasing of supplemental materials such as videos, prayer cards, music, pictures, posters, literature, and other items. Continuous monitoring also aids in correlating assessment plans with the mission and philosophy of the school to guide students in their development as faith-filled individuals.

C.4. Faith Experiences

- **To what extent does the school community place high priority on frequent prayer and liturgical experiences, which are developmentally and liturgically appropriate and meaningful as well as spiritual formation and support of the religious mission of the school?**

Prayer is a way of life at St. Joseph School. The staff meets to begin each school day with prayer, and then each class prays together to start the class day. Grace is said before lunch, spontaneous prayer may occur during the course of the day, and each day closes with prayer. Prayer tables are evident in each classroom, and bulletin boards reflect a prayerful community. *Parents for Prayer* is a group of parents who pray together each week. They also provide ideas and materials for prayerful reflection by students on Sunday Mass and other scriptural readings. Assemblies and meetings begin and usually end with prayer. The school provides a book for the community in which to write prayers, which is then used as a book of intentions at the weekly and monthly celebration of Mass.

A high priority is also placed upon liturgical experiences. Students prepare for Mass and the liturgical seasons by practicing songs in religion and music class. The school joins the parish at weekly Mass and prepares a special monthly all-school Mass. St. Joseph students are altar servers at the celebration of parish Masses and funerals. They also participate in the liturgy as members of the parish choir and as buddy ushers.

Parents, parish, and school staff work together as partners to instill a prayerful life in the lives of the students at St. Joseph School. The parish provides support by providing Sacramental Preparation for Reconciliation and Eucharist, as well as by offering adult enrichment classes. Administration provides leadership in the spiritual formation of the school, ensuring that Catholic values are integrated into all activities. Teachers work to deepen their own faith through catechetical classes and to prayerfully model this faith. Strength and inspiration for all is drawn from daily prayer and living as a community of faith.

Key Areas of Strength for Religion:

- Integration of religious themes across the curriculum
- Visually present Catholic identity throughout the building
- Parent recognition as the primary spiritual educators of their children
- Centrality of daily prayer
- Wonderful Individuals Sharing in Education (WISE) program
- Student opportunities to live their faith through community service projects
- Close connection between school and parish
- Faculty and staff as faith-filled role models
- Student role models for cross grade level buddies
- Book of intentions ever-present in hallway

Key Issues of Growth for Religion:

- Encouraging all grades to participate in Adoration and Stations of the Cross
- Increasing opportunities for more mini-retreats and/or classroom prayer services
- Creating a standard requirement for community service commitment for junior high students
- Updating faculty and staff in the use of *Second Step* and *Steps to Respect*

CHAPTER IV

D. Curriculum and Instruction – Language Arts In-Depth

D.1. What Students Learn

- **To what extent does the school provide a challenging, comprehensive, and relevant curriculum for each student that fulfills the school’s philosophy and mission, strengthens Catholic identity, and results in achievement of the School-wide Learning Expectations?**

St. Joseph School promotes student learning in reading, writing and effective communication, using both traditional methods and a variety of strategies. Specific developmentally appropriate techniques are identified and receive focus at all grade levels. The school’s curriculum is based on the Archdiocese of Seattle Curriculum Guide that is aligned with the state’s EALRs.

The language arts curriculum emphasizes student communication, conceptual thinking, and problem solving. Reading, writing and communication are taught throughout the grade levels. The focus in the primary grades includes the retelling of stories (reflecting moral and religious values), writing for a purpose and developing fluency through phonics and whole language. In the intermediate grades ideas of faith are incorporated in writing, building vocabulary and comprehension. The junior high grades build on these concepts. Writing skills are taught using the Six-Trait Writing Program and the Step-Up-To-Writing Program. It is a goal of the teachers to use these programs more consistently.

The spiritual and academic growth components of the SLEs are met in a variety of ways. Opportunities are provided for students to apply lessons and experiences they encounter in literature to situations they might encounter in real life.

The teachers integrate religious truths and values in discussions around literature and writing assignments. The newly adopted religion text supports the language arts curriculum, as does the use of the *Children’s Daily Prayer* book. The language arts curriculum is also integrated into other disciplines such as the use of journal writing in art, music, math and science. In accordance with the school’s SLEs, students use technology to further their communication skills: PowerPoint presentations slideshows, Internet research and writing and formatting research brochures.

D.2. How Students Learn

- **To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning and formational experiences which actively engage students and are consistent with the school’s philosophy and mission?**

Throughout the curriculum, students are challenged to apply conceptual thinking and analysis within work products; to apply the Step-Up-to-Writing components to develop writing skills; and to apply the Six-Trait Writing to assess student work. The language arts program incorporates a variety of presentation methods and unique individual/group options to challenge students and their interest levels.

As stated in the school's philosophy and mission statement, the teachers at St. Joseph School actively include religious themes in the language arts curriculum (daily prayer, journal writing and literature circles). The teachers model their faith, gathering daily for morning prayer and serving as Eucharistic ministers during school Masses. A variety of learning methods are used, including students working in pairs or teams and students working with parents. A new reading series (*Trophies*) has been adopted in the primary and intermediate grades to unify instruction in those grades. In the sixth, seventh and eighth grades, a new grammar text (*Writing and Grammar*) has also been adopted to unify those subject areas. Students engage in many activities that reflect the skills learned in language arts: reading prayer intentions, giving Student Council speeches, participating in the Science Fair, and writing a newspaper.

D.3. How Assessment is Used

- **To what extent is teacher and student use of assessment frequent and integrated into the teaching/learning process**

The school provides frequent and integrated opportunities in the teaching and learning process. Formal, informal, daily and weekly teacher communication, along with review of ITBS results and routine homework, comprise a variety of assessment practices. Parent-teacher-student conferences are held in the fall and are offered in the spring. Students set short and long term goals to evaluate their writing progress. Activities outside of the classroom and enrichment options are available. Grades five through eight receive progress reports every three weeks.

The primary classrooms each have an instructional aide who works one-to-one with children who have challenging needs. The Educational Support Team is used to assess students and adjust curriculum through accommodations to meet diverse learning needs.

Students are assessed formally and informally at various times in the trimester. The ITBS is given in grades three, five and seven. The teachers use these results to re-teach or adjust their curriculum. Daily work, homework and unit tests are also used for assessment. Self-assessment and peer editing is used in the writing program. A wide variety of assessment strategies are used and modified to reach the needs of all students.

Key Areas of Strength for Language Arts:

- Basic literacy program in place
- Continuing education of teachers
- Integration of morals and values in literature connections
- Development and inclusion of technology
- Adoption of school wide writing program
- Educational Support Team available to assess learners
- A variety of teaching strategies

Key Issues of Growth for Language Arts:

- Consistent standardized methods to assess reading and writing
- Consistent school wide use of writing program
- Further in-service training for teachers for adopted writing programs
- Additional time for teachers to collaborate to ensure continuity in the writing program
- Timely use of ITBS scores to assess needs

CHAPTER IV

E. Support for Student Personal, Spiritual and Academic Growth

E.1. Student Connectedness

- **Within the school's community of faith, to what extent are students connected to a system of support services, activities, and opportunities to assist them in meeting the challenges of the curricular/co-curricular program in order to achieve the School-wide Learning Expectations?**

The school has a wide variety of support services and activities that connect students with the community; that assist students to develop their personal interests; and that prepare students to be life-long learners. Each grade level has a variety of special activities and events unique for development in personal and social growth.

Personal and spiritual growth is enhanced through service activities, Sacramental Preparation, prayer, weekly priest visits to the sixth, seventh and eighth grade classrooms, character programs, including classroom parish volunteers from WISE, altar serving, *Parents in Prayer*, retreats, CYO and unique field trips to Catholic historical sites. Students attend an all-school Mass on a weekly basis. The school uses community and parish resources to enhance the spiritual and personal growth of students in keeping with the SLEs.

Academic growth results through a strong academic foundation, solid curriculum, and a rich variety of opportunities to obtain information. Students have access to a before and after school program that includes homework support and adult role models. The classroom teachers and Parent Teacher Organization provide multiple opportunities each year for field trips, special speakers, and other programs to support student learning.

Progress reports are given to students in grades five through eight every three weeks. There is effective and frequent teacher-parent communication, including student-led conferences.

E.2. Parent/Community Involvement

- **To what extent does the school administration employ a wide range of strategies to encourage that parental and community involvement is integral to the school's support system for students?**

The parents are recognized as the primary educators of their children. There are strong parent participation opportunities extending throughout the school and parish, many which serve effectively to reinforce Catholic identity. Parent volunteerism extends well beyond the required share hours. Parents volunteer in all school

activities, including academic areas, CYO sports and social programs. The school provides quality and consistent communication to parents of school activities. Classroom newsletters, *Coffee with the Principal*, and the school's website serve as avenues for communication. Notably, the WISE program for character development, includes active involvement by parish seniors within the school.

Key Areas of Strength for Support for Student Personal, Spiritual and Academic Strengths:

- Strong collaboration and communication among faculty, staff, parents, students and parish members
- WISE program led by senior parishioners
- Use of EST to identify students needing additional academic support
- Student-led conferences facilitate student, teacher and parent communications
- Strong support by PTO to further school's mission and philosophy
- Wide variety of extra and co-curricular activities to meet student interests and needs

Key Issues of Growth for Support for Student Personal, Spiritual and Academic Growth:

- More opportunities for individual student service learning at junior high level
- Expansion of EST with school-wide training to meet the needs of all students
- Expansion of teacher aide availability in grades five through eight

CHAPTER IV

F. Resource Management and Development

F.1. Resources

- **To what extent are the resources available to the school sufficient to sustain the school program, reflect strong financial practices and responsible stewardship, and effectively used to carry out the school philosophy, mission and School-wide Learning Expectations?**

It is evident that St. Joseph School has taken a positive approach to improve areas that were problems in the past. Every aspect of the philosophy and mission statements and School-wide Learning Expectations has been considered, as well as Archdiocesan policy and directives, before financial decisions are made. The parish administrator has been proactive in overseeing external audits.

The parish bookkeeper provides monthly and annual financial reports and statements that reconcile all school accounts. The school administration, parish administrator and budget committee from the School Advisory Board review these reports. New plans call for the school to enter into an earlier budget cycle so the Parish Finance Council can review tuition needs in time for the beginning of registration in February. Set procedures are in place to guide resource allocations and to involve staff that supports the mission, philosophy and SLEs.

Tuition assistance is a vital part of the goal to serve the parish community, and identification of additional funding sources is on-going.

Special grants, private donations and endowment proceeds have been used to further support program improvements. The school partners with Vancouver School District to acquire Title IIA, Title IID and Title V monies available to schools. Maintaining and upgrading technology was a funded item at the annual school auction. Recent improvements include the purchase of laptops for middle school classrooms, new TV's, DVD players, digital cameras and projectors. In addition, the school has subscribed to "United Streaming" as an enhancement option for teachers to use to meet the learning style needs of students. Based on the revised 2002 five-year long-range plan, many facility improvements have been made including remodeling of bathrooms, security fencing and gates, new locks for doors, and upgraded lighting in the gym, cafeteria, and outside.

F.2. Resource Planning

- **To what extent does the administration execute responsible resource planning for the future?**

The school and parish have worked together and taken a critical look at their resources, achieving sound results. A five-year long-range plan was established in 2002, which included the needs of the parish as well as the school. Currently they are in the process of reviewing and producing a new strategic long-range plan that specifically addresses the school's needs separate from those of the parish, for instance, plans for a pre-kindergarten program. The new plan will include a process for implementing an annual review and update of the long-range plan to ensure continual availability of appropriate resources that support the school. The school administration, pastor, parish administrator, facilities manager, and representatives from the School Advisory Board will serve in developing this plan.

With the hiring of the new parish administrator and a new facilities manager, work has progressed to prioritize and allocate funding for major projects needed at the school.

In the spring of 2006, a parent volunteered to coordinate a complete audit of the school's structural/facility needs. There now is a proposed list of improvement projects that are open for discussion. The process for discussion and notation of priority is continuing.

The St. Joseph School administration along with the school Development Director is in the process of developing a comprehensive marketing plan that engenders interest in and support of the school and its programs. In order to promote interest in the school, articles about school events and activities are published in the parish bulletin. Press releases are sent to area newspapers, TV and radio stations. The bi-monthly school newsletter keeps families informed. Individuals and businesses in the local community are encouraged to support the school through the Sausage Fest, St. Joseph Foundation Wine & Art Show, St. Joseph Foundation Educational Endowment Fund, Auction, Scrip, Cost of Education Appeal, Grants, and Corporate Matching Gifts.

Key Areas of Strength for Resource Management and Development:

- Strong, solid support of the Pastor for the school
- Strong programs that attract and maintain maximum enrollment
- Position of Development Director
- Resources allocated to attract and retain staff

Key Issues of Growth for Resource Management and Development:

- Funding issues for a pre-kindergarten program
- Enhancing facilities for art and music
- Updating the school's strategic plan
- Developing a planned schedule for annual maintenance
- Identifying sources for additional funding for tuition assistance

CHAPTER IV

SYNTHESIS OF SCHOOL-WIDE AREAS OF STRENGTH AND SCHOOL-WIDE CRITICAL AREAS FOR FOLLOW-UP

General Comments

The school appears to be on a positive path, after several years of transition. The faculty is a body of committed and positive educators. The administration is well qualified, strong and future oriented. Catholic Identity is at the core of the school and is strongly evident through the school community.

School-wide Areas of Strength Include:

Catholic Identity present in all areas of the school;

- Administrators, faculty, and staff as faith-filled role models
- Integration of religious themes across the curriculum
- Centrality of daily prayer
- Parent recognition as the primary spiritual educators of their children
- Student opportunities to live their faith through community service projects and role modeling

Administration and Staff well-qualified and professionally prepared;

- An effective, valued network of communication among administrators, faculty, and staff
- Position of Development Director
- Resources allocated to attract and retain staff
- Strong, solid support of the Pastor for the school

Support from Parents, Parish, and Pastor furthers the mission and philosophy;

- The school invites and receives a high level of parent involvement and support
- Wonderful Individuals Sharing in Education (WISE) program
- Strong collaboration and communication among faculty, staff, pastor, parents, students and parish members

Curriculum

- A rotational cycle to update materials and purchase texts
- Commitment to nurturing well-rounded individuals through academics, the arts, technology, physical education, and extra and cross-curricular enrichment programs
- Educational Support Team available to assess learners

School-wide Critical Areas for Follow-up

Catholic Identity

- Greater participation in Adoration and Stations, opportunities for mini-retreats, and classroom prayer services
- Standardized requirements for community service commitment for junior high students
- Updating faculty and staff in the use of *Second Step* and *Steps to Respect*

Curriculum

- Meeting the needs of diverse learners through expansion of EST program
- Better utilize ITBS scores to guide teaching needs
- Enhancement of the writing program through training, standardized methods of assessment, and collaboration to ensure continuity
- Formally connect the reporting of student growth to the SLEs

Maintenance and Long-Range Planning

- Update school emergency procedures and safety plan
- Enhance facilities for art and music
- Update the school's strategic plan
- Planning for a pre-kindergarten program
- Identify sources for additional funding for tuition assistance

CHAPTER V

ONGOING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT (Action Plan)

Summary of School Wide Action Plan

The Visiting Team Committee affirms and acknowledges the five target goals set forth by St. Joseph School. These include methods of identification and assistance for diverse learners; development and implementation of consistent writing standards; expansion and integration of the SLEs; development of a five-year plan for facilities maintenance and improvement; and the establishment of a pre-kindergarten program to open in Fall 2007.

The target goals for St. Joseph School are:

1. Improve methods for identifying and assisting students with different learning styles.

This will assist teachers to address the diverse needs of each child within the classroom.

2. Writing - develop and implement more consistent standards in writing throughout the school.

This goal recognizes the need for greater consistency in writing standards and execution among all grades throughout the school.

3. Expand the integration of the SLEs.

This goal sets to integrate and align the SLEs with the curriculum, the reporting of student progress and growth, and establishes the foundation for assessing the effectiveness of the SLEs within the school community.

4. Facilities Maintenance and Improvements

This goal will result in a prioritization of maintenance needs and repairs for the future as part of the school's strategic planning.

5. Establish a pre-kindergarten.

This program will help ensure future enrollment stability for the school's kindergarten program and thereby strengthen the overall enrollment stability of the school.

To what extent does the school-wide action plan address the critical areas for follow-up?

The Visiting Committee recognizes that strides have been made for the accomplishment of three of the five target goals. The school has developed the Educational Support Team to identify and assist students with different learning styles. The school administration has adopted and scheduled training (August, 2007) for the *School's Attuned Program* which will enable all teachers to identify and assist students to be successful learners. The parish and school administration has completed initial identification and prioritized needs for the viability of the school's maintenance concerns. The parish and school administration has completed the initial steps to establish a pre-kindergarten program by identifying space and creating a program schedule. The action plan for the remaining two target goals involve teacher collaboration for the development of consistent writing standards and assessing the effectiveness of the SLEs in the lives of the students.

To what extent will the action plan enhance student learning?

The St. Joseph School community has clearly demonstrated their commitment, dedication and professionalism in pursuit of school improvement. The target goals ensure the future success of St. Joseph School in providing a quality Catholic education and in the on-going process of school improvement. The methods for identifying and assisting diverse learners promote successful student learning. As written communication is essential to life-long learning, the development of consistent standards will benefit students. Integration of the SLEs and curriculum guidelines provide a measurement tool of student achievement. Improvement in facility management plans will ensure a safe and comfortable environment necessary for learning. The pre-kindergarten program will provide continuity in student learning as the students become a part of the Catholic school community at an earlier age.