



Executive Summary

Saint Gregory the Great Academy

Diocese of Trenton

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Introduction

Every school has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school, and the kinds of programs and services that a school implements to support student learning.

The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the school community will have a more complete picture of how the school perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.

Description of the School

Describe the school's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school serves?

St. Gregory the Great Academy, located in Hamilton Square, New Jersey, has been a vital ministry of the Church of St. Gregory the Great since 1965. Education at St. Gregory the Great Academy is a partnership between a student's parents and the institution; thus familial engagement is a necessary aspect of the St. Gregory the Great Academy learning community. The most encompassing vehicle of engagement with families and community is the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), which is comprised of an Executive Board, committees, and has a membership consisting of every parent. The PTA plans and carries out a variety of community building and fundraising activities each school year, including a Halloween Trunk-or-Treat, Christmas parties for each grade level, and a springtime parent social. The PTA also provides "buddy families" for every family that is new to the Academy each year. Additionally, the PTA provides special treats to the student body, including a free Christmas lunch, assistance at Field Day, and an end-of-year school picnic. The Academy PTA is a critical aspect of familial engagement, and is known throughout the county for its level of involvement. The enrollment for the 2015-2016 stands at 447 students in grades K-8, with an additional 66 students in Three Year Old and Four Year Old Preschool. There are 40 full time teachers and administrators, with an additional 10 support staff members. St. Gregory the Great Academy faces the challenge of high property taxes in the surrounding public school districts, which can make tuition an unrealistic additional burden for those parents who are interested in Catholic education at the Academy. Over the course of the previous three years, enrollment has been generally steady. Notably, as of the 2015-2016 school year the Academy will have had three years of kindergarten classes which have been larger than the year prior.

School's Purpose

Provide the school's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.

The mission statement of St. Gregory the Great Academy is informed by the mission statement of the Church of St. Gregory the Great thusly: "Saint Gregory the Great Academy, a ministry of Saint Gregory the Great Parish, is committed to nurturing, enlightening, and educating our students to the life and teachings of Jesus. We instill this gospel vision by integrating spiritual, academic, social, and physical development of our children with a comprehensive program of academic excellence. Our students learn about themselves and the global community, and are empowered to become faith-filled disciples, responsible citizens, and life-long learners in our Roman Catholic tradition." This mission is manifested through commitments to Catholicity and academic excellence. The sacramental life of St. Gregory the Great Academy is rich. Students and faculty attend Holy Mass regularly, have the opportunity to go to confession at regular intervals, and open and close the year with Adoration and Solemn Benediction. In addition to encountering Jesus through the sacraments, students and faculty meet the Lord through daily prayer, an annual Christmas tableau prayer service, and Stations of the Cross during Lent. Rounding out the prayer experiences for students and faculty are the Advent Jesse Tree, May Crowning, and daily religion instruction. St. Gregory the Great Academy takes measures to assure that students and their families understand and uphold the academy's philosophy and mission. Faculty and staff collaborate to instill the Gospel vision by integrating the spiritual, academic, social, and physical development of the children within a comprehensive program of academic excellence. Students learn about themselves and the global community and are empowered to become faith-filled disciples, responsible citizens, and life-long learners in the Roman Catholic tradition. Data and surveys affirm that parents, faculty and staff support the philosophy and mission which is consistent with ethical norms and demonstrates respect for persons of all races, creeds and cultures. Through brochures, promotional materials, policy, procedural handbooks, websites and similar resources, St. Gregory the Great Academy's philosophy and mission are clearly communicated.

Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

Describe the school's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school is striving to achieve in the next three years.

St. Gregory the Great Academy fully subscribes to Michael Fullan's assertion that the key to educational improvement is building capacity in the professional staff. Furthermore, St. Gregory the Great Academy aspires to be not simply a "school" but instead a "learning community." As such, a strong professional development program is an absolute necessity. All teachers regularly attend professional development workshops provided by both the school and the diocese. Additionally, graduate studies are encouraged and supported for the teachers and administrators. St. Gregory the Great Academy celebrates the accomplishments of its students and readily shares successful strategies with other schools and organizations. Several teachers at the Academy serve on diocesan curriculum committees which develop curricula for use in all schools in the Diocese of Trenton. Every full-time teacher at the Academy is a member of a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The PLCs meet a minimum of once per month, and develop strategies that have led to school-wide initiatives. The most recent school-wide initiative which has emerged from the PLCs is the adoption of the Responsive Classroom approach at St. Gregory the Great Academy. The diocese often asks the Academy to host workshops for teachers and administrators from across the four-county diocese, and attendees at these workshops see school-wide initiatives, such as Responsive Classroom, in action first-hand. St. Gregory the Great Academy also participates in various events in the wider community, including the Scholastic Olympics at Trenton Catholic Academy in Hamilton, the Annual Mathematics at Holy Cross High School in Delran, and the Mercer County Science and Engineering Fair at Rider University. These events enable the Academy to demonstrate and share successful strategies to the local community. Additionally, students participate in the Johns Hopkins Talent Search, the National Geographic Geography Bee, and the AMC Mathematics Competition. These programs engage Academy students in academic exercises with a larger population of students. Each year the Academy hosts an annual Open House in January. During the Open House, student work is displayed throughout the buildings, teachers offer demonstrations, and students present performances in order to share aspects of the instructional program. Student outreach programs take Academy students to local nursing homes, the soup kitchen, and to parish organizations to share both their Catholic identity and to offer service. Additionally, student performances such as the Christmas Concert, the Christmas Tableau, the Winter Play, and the Spring Concert are open to the wider community. Both the Open House and student performances provide opportunities for the community to see firsthand what students at the Academy are learning. In 2014, St. Gregory the Great Academy was recognized by the United States Department of Education as a 2014 National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. The administration and faculty are hopeful that this status will enhance the ability of St. Gregory the Great Academy to share its successful strategies and programs.

Looking to the future, St. Gregory the Great Academy has several goals for the next 3-5 years. First, one goal is for all students in Preschool through Grade 3 to demonstrate growth toward end of year literacy benchmarks. Specifically, forty percent of Kindergarten, First, Second and Third grade students will demonstrate growth in Reading by 06/20/2016 as measured by the Retell Fluency indicator of DIBELS benchmark testing administered three times per year. Second, as a result of our increased focus on non-fiction literature, one goal is for forty percent of Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth grade students to demonstrate at least a five point increase in the English Language Arts standardized test score between the spring 2015 and the spring 2018 administrations, and for forty percent of Seventh and Eighth grade students to demonstrate a two point increase in the English Language Arts standardized test score prior to graduation. Third, all staff members will enhance collaboration to improve student learning. The faculty will collaborate more frequently to develop an increased number of cross-curricular activities to enhance student learning by 06/20/2016 as measured by meeting minutes and an end of year summary/portfolio by each group. Faculty will meet on a regular basis in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to discuss ways to increase cross-curricular learning through sharing and monitoring of meeting minutes and end of year narratives from each PLC. There will be at least one cross-curricular project per trimester for the 2015-2016 school year, with an increasing number of such projects in succeeding school years. Fourth, the

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Academy will continue to work toward diversifying its World Language offerings each school year. Currently, Grades Preschool through Seven have weekly Spanish instruction, Grades Five and Six have weekly Mandarin Chinese instruction, and Grades Seven and Eight have weekly Latin instruction.

Additional Information

Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.

The commitment to academic excellence is a hallmark of St. Gregory the Great Academy. Students in virtually all grade levels score at or above the Blue Ribbon School Program cutoff from year to year. The Academy has a robust instructional structure, including daily instruction in Religion, Integrated Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies which is rooted in the curricula promulgated by the Diocese of Trenton and which is informed by the Common Core State Standards. Students in grades five through eight are invited into the Accelerated Math program when specific scores on the qualification rubric meet the yearly cutoff. This course of study culminates in a Pre-algebra course in grade seven and an Algebra I course in grade eight. Students completing Algebra I at St. Gregory the Great Academy routinely test into Algebra II in their freshman year of high school. In addition to these core subject areas, students have weekly instruction in Fine Art, Music, Technology, Physical Education, Library Skills (grades kindergarten through five), Spanish (grades preschool through seven) Chinese, (once per week for grades five and six) and Latin (grade seven has Latin once per week; grade eight has Latin two times per week). The Academy has a fully equipped Science Lab, complete with a dedicated Science Lab teacher and lab assistant. Students in kindergarten through grade two have a biweekly class in the Science Lab; students in grades three through eight have a weekly class in the Science Lab. Students in grades five through eight each complete a Science project each year, with many of these projects moving on to the county science fair where the Academy routinely wins the most awards at the junior level. Each classroom in grades one and above has a StarBoard interactive whiteboard with a ceiling mounted projector, grades preschool through three have clusters of iPads to assist with center time, and all students grades four and above have an account on the Academy's Google Drive which enables the students to utilize Google Apps for instructional purposes. Grades six, seven, and eight has Google Chromebooks on a one-to-one basis; this has enabled a move to electronic submission of assignments and an online textbook in Social Studies. There are plans to expand the one-to-one Chromebook program to grades four through seven.