

## OVERVIEW

On Sunday, December 4, 2005, the visiting team for Our Mother of Consolation School met at the Parish Hall. Upon arrival the team joined with the faculty, staff, principal, pastor, and several students and parents to enjoy a welcoming presentation followed by a delicious dinner. After dinner, the principal, Mr. Michael Kimble, led the team on a tour of the school building. Following the tour, the team returned to the Chestnut Hill Hotel for its organizational meeting and discussed plans for the following three days.

During its visit at Our Mother of Consolation School, the team was able to visit and observe in every class. Personal interviews were conducted with the principal as well as various faculty members, parents, and students. These opportunities for personal contact were considered critical in ascertaining a clear picture of the school and parish community.

The visiting team would like to express appreciation to Mr. Michael Kimble for the accommodations provided for the visit. The faculty and staff of Our Mother of Consolation School also deserve recognition for the hospitality and warmth extended to the team during visits and interviews. Special thanks are in order for the steering committee for their leadership in this process. The self-study report is a testament to the time, effort, energy, and commitment of a dedicated faculty and staff.

Personal thanks are also extended from the chair to the members of the visiting team: Mrs. Mary Ann Malone, Mr. Christopher Mendicino, and Ms. Carole Ondrovic. They came to Our Mother of Consolation School very open and enthusiastic about the work that they were about to undertake. Over the next three days, they worked tirelessly to give an evaluation that was truly worthy of all the work that was put into the self-study.

## **PHILOSOPHY**

As an institution of Catholic education, Our Mother of Consolation School exists to develop educated Catholics. It proclaims the message of Jesus Christ in support of the teachings provided at home by the parents, the primary educators of their children. Teachers model examples of faith in action on a daily basis during their interaction with students, parents, visitors, and one another. Numerous projects are conducted throughout the year to develop a sense of service in all students, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

The academic development of the students is also a priority of the faculty. Teachers at each grade level stress skills that are age appropriate to establish a seamless and orderly continuum that allows students to find success at subsequent levels. A variety of teaching strategies is employed to serve the unique learning styles of the students.

The overall personal development and maturation of the students is a primary concern of everyone at Our Mother of Consolation School. To that end, students are encouraged to make positive choices that reflect the values they have been taught and that honor their dignity as children of God.

### **Commendations:**

The visiting team commends:

1. the well-established and respectful relationship that exists among administration, faculty, students, and parents;
2. the warm and relaxed atmosphere that exists throughout the school.

### **Recommendations:**

The visiting team recommends:

1. that the school continue to incorporate Catholic practices and further student involvement in liturgies;
2. that the administration, faculty, and staff continue to serve as role models in developing Christian values among the students.

## **COMMUNITY STUDY**

Our Mother of Consolation School serves the children of its parish as well as an increasing number of non-Catholic students. In recent years,

the number of Catholic students has decreased somewhat as some parents are choosing other area Catholic, non-denominational private schools or public school. At the same time a number of Catholic schools in the area have closed, and Our Mother of Consolation School has absorbed some of their students. The number of non-Catholic students has increased because parents view Our Mother of Consolation as an affordable alternative to the Philadelphia public schools.

Various local colleges and other institutions work with the school to provide services such as student teachers, summer reading programs, nutrition guidance, and recreational facilities. The students, teachers, and administrators also take advantage of offerings in the locale surrounding the school.

The school takes advantage of the financial support of corporate rewards programs and foundations. Grants have been written and obtained to underwrite the purchase of new equipment which supports the technology program.

Our Mother of Consolation School cooperates with the parish and community by making its facilities available for parish CCD programs, student teachers, and various local events.

Our Mother of Consolation School is committed to communicating the good news of its school to parents through the parish bulletin and information sent home in weekly folders. There is a quarterly school newsletter and a parish website with a link to the school website. An information packet designed for parents of prospective students is available at the school or through local real estate offices. Newsworthy information about the school is disseminated to the community at large through local newspapers and televised media. Interested families are given tours of the school throughout the year, and an open house is conducted each year on the Sunday of Catholic Schools Week.

A three-tiered tuition program is in place for children of parishioners, those of Catholic non-parishioners, and non-Catholic students. The school makes a sincere attempt to balance the need for income with the desire to provide a quality education at an affordable price. A tuition administrator has been hired to closely monitor the tuition collections.

#### Commendations:

The visiting team commends:

1. the school for its desire to plan and implement initiatives for recruitment and retention of students;

2. the support of the pastor and assistant pastors both spiritually and financially;
3. the school for hiring a tuition manager who oversees that the school has a steady income;
4. the Sisters of St. Joseph, the founding community, for their ongoing commitment to the school;
5. the administration and faculty for stabilizing the student population with its high standards for values and academics.

Recommendations:

The visiting team recommends:

1. that the school investigate the possibility of hiring a grant writer to assist in obtaining future financial assistance;
2. that the school continue to seek ways to assist needy students financially;
3. that the school reach out to past generations of alumni for financial support of the school, asking them to ensure its future.

**STUDENT SERVICES**

Our Mother of Consolation School provides food service to their students three days a week. On all days milk is available as an alternative to sugary drinks. A group of dedicated and highly supportive parents and other volunteers prepares and distributes the lunches to the classrooms. Lunch periods are monitored by parent volunteers or teachers. Lunch periods are staggered to ease food delivery.

Students arrive at school by bus, public transportation, bicycles, cars, or by walking. Teachers direct students in crossing the streets safely, and students are dropped off at designated points. For other transportation needs (field trips), the services of Sague Bus Company are contracted.

At Our Mother of Consolation, a registered school district nurse is available one day each week. When the nurse is not on school premises, the faculty and staff provide care for illness and minor injuries. Parents are contacted for more serious illnesses or injuries. Faculty members have been trained in first aid; concerns have been noted about lack of CPR certified staff on hand.

The school has obtained services from Elwyn, Inc. to provide a variety of assistance in academic and emotional counseling matters, as well as speech therapy. Elwyn, Inc. instructors work with math and reading groups once a week and communicate suggestions for more effective instruction techniques with teachers and principal. In addition, Sr. Annemarie Feeley, SSJ, provides math help in grades 3 to 5 with the Horizons math program.

Gifted or talented students are not singled out for advanced instruction. Rather, these students provide peer editing and peer tutoring within classes and are challenged to show a greater mastery and more in-depth understanding of the subject matter in individual work.

Our Mother of Consolation School provides guidance counseling to individual students, groups of students, or classes as needed. Most of these services are provided by Elwyn, Inc. Major topics of counseling include organization skills, anger management, study skills and handling peer pressure. Students can be referred for guidance services by faculty, principal or parents. Also, SHALOM, a guidance program, conducts programs for students in grades two through eight on topics such as self-esteem, substance abuse, smoking and peer pressure. Grades K through one are referred to SHALOM's Babes program.

Noted concerns include a need for more timely processing of students in guidance situations and an increase of personnel to accommodate an growing number of students in need. Also, faculty members have expressed a desire to reinstate the D.A.R.E. program as provided by local police officers.

Commendations:

The visiting team commends:

1. the school for providing, through the support of parents, an organized and efficient hot lunch program without cafeteria facilities;
2. the administration and faculty for recognizing the need for timely expedition of students requiring special services;
3. the faculty for recognizing the need to challenge gifted students with in-class peer tutoring and with in-depth mastery of subject matter;
4. the faculty and staff for accepting extra duty before and after school hours to ensure students' safety.

Recommendations:

The visiting team recommends that:

1. the administration seek formal CPR training for all faculty and staff;
2. teachers and staff continue to provide a safe system to enter and exit school grounds;
3. the administration seek to increase available support staff to serve a larger number of students and to decrease processing time when a student has been referred for guidance services;
4. the school seek assistance in monitoring classes during lunch to allow teachers a full lunch period and organize lunch delivery to grades 5 through 8 so that lunch is in place when students return from recess.

## FINE ARTS

The fine arts program at Our Mother of Consolation School follows the guidelines of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia as it encourages students to develop their God-given talents and provide a means of self-expression. As they participate in and study the arts, students at all levels develop confidence in their abilities and build critical thinking skills.

Students in all grades receive music instruction each week from a degreed music director. By studying the music of various cultures, the students learn tolerance and respect for their own and other cultures. The addition of liturgical dance provides another avenue for performance and ministry. Instrumental instruction is also available to both individuals and groups.

A part-time art teacher has been hired to provide art instruction to students in grades kindergarten through 4; students in grades 5 through 8 receive art instruction from their regular classroom teachers. Art projects are integrated into various subjects at all grade levels.

### Commendations:

The visiting team commends:

1. the school for having a degreed music director who coordinates music in liturgies;
2. the school for having a designated music room with a variety of instructional materials;
3. the school for providing instrumental instruction to its students;
4. the school for hiring an art teacher for grades kindergarten through 4;
5. the teachers of grades 5 through 8 for integrating the arts into other curriculum areas.

Recommendations:

The visiting team recommends:

1. that the school attempt to extend art instruction to all grades;
2. that instructional materials for fine arts be updated.

**TECHNOLOGY**

In the last few years, tremendous changes have occurred in the area of technology at Our Mother of Consolation School. Having computers in the classroom made the use of technology a viable teaching tool; adding internet to those computers further advanced the potential. The creation of the Technology Learning Center with the computer cart and wireless laptops has extended the use of technology even further and, along with the projector and interactive white board, has created almost state-of-the-art capability.

Students in all grades receive instruction with computers each week. All students use computers although the subjects involved and reasons for the use vary from one level to another. Projects seen throughout the building attest to the training and abilities of the students.

Commendations:

The visiting team commends:

1. the administration for realizing that the use of technology has become an essential teaching tool;
2. the school for applying for and using grants to acquire materials in this field;
3. the school for adding a technician to the staff to maintain the equipment and further enhance its capabilities;
4. the school for providing computer training for the faculty to help them integrate the use of technology into their teaching.

Recommendations:

The visiting team recommends:

1. the formation of a committee to develop a long-range plan for technology development and the ongoing maintenance of equipment;
2. continued integration of technology into classroom instruction;
3. ongoing training for the faculty.

## RELIGION

After reviewing the philosophy of Our Mother of Consolation School as well as the religion program study, team members saw a religious atmosphere dedicated to educating the students in the Catholic tradition. Members of the team witnessed faculty, staff, and administration reflecting positive attitudes to the students in respect to God, faith, and Church as well as the dignity of each human being.

The visiting team witnessed an atmosphere of service and kindness to others via projects geared to the poor and the school's Code of Courtesy.

The team saw the parish priests and the Director of Religious Formation working with the teachers on particular religious topics.

The visiting team saw a faithful and qualified faculty and an experienced music teacher with a Master's Degree in Theology serving the school in the spirit of Catholic Tradition.

### Commendations:

The visiting team commends:

1. the Catholic identity which is truly visible on every floor of the building and classrooms via pictures, student work, and bulletin boards;
2. the respect and courtesy of the students as they moved through the halls;
3. the strong visible presence of the religious community who are truly committed and dedicated to the children within the school;
4. the faculty, staff, and administration for their dedication and professionalism.

### Recommendations:

The visiting team recommends that:

1. the school implement a plan that would clarify credits needed for all teachers to complete the diocesan course of study within three years;
2. all faculty members be encouraged to begin each class with a prayer, thereby reminding everyone that all things begin with God;
3. the school continue to develop in-service days for faculty using existing resources to enrich the understanding of living as a Catholic school teacher.

### **SCHOOL ORGANIZATION**

Our Mother of Consolation School provides instruction from Pre-Kindergarten to eighth grade. Pre-K to fourth grade are self-contained classes, except for specials instruction. Grades five through eight are departmentalized. Faculty members employ a variety of instruction styles including flexible grouping, cooperative learning and individual instruction. Music, art, computer, library and physical education are presented weekly to each grade level by instructors according to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia guidelines. Art instruction is provided for grades Kindergarten to four; grades five through eight have art instruction integrated into curriculum by classroom teachers. Teachers have expressed a desire for a full-time Art teacher available to all grade levels and for additional planning time for technology and science resources.

Our Mother of Consolation School teachers provide students with a variety of assessments. These include research projects, PowerPoint presentations, oral reports, book reports, and posters in addition to traditional testing. Students are also recognized for academic honors achievement as well as for above average adherence to the Code of Courtesy. Students are recognized in the parish bulletin, news releases to local newspapers, The School Bell (the school quarterly newsletter), and local television stations.

Curriculum modification is available to qualified students. Teacher aides work in grades Kindergarten through three. Grades one through four also have access to Elwyn, Inc. services in class. Students in grades five through eight have tutoring available during and after school hours as needed in math and ILA. Our Mother of Consolation School follows curriculum guidelines based on the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

In-service workshops are provided by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Administration provides other workshops (PACT, Merit) and distributes journal articles to be perused. Teachers are encouraged to complete Act 48 credits and religious education requirements as mandated by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Commendations:

The visiting team commends:

1. the faculty for interacting with students in a mix of teaching styles and assessment opportunities;
2. the faculty for utilizing existing technology and for pursuing training and components to enhance the current program.

Recommendations:

The visiting team recommends that:

1. the administration continue to investigate ways to provide an art instructor for all grade levels;
2. the principal and teachers continue to carve out planning time for hands-on instruction in science and technology.

## **RESOURCES**

The professional teaching staff of Our Mother of Consolation School consists of a full-time principal, ten full time classroom teachers, and six part-time teachers. There is one classroom teacher at each grade level from Pre-School through eighth grade. The part-time teachers provide instruction in art, music, physical education, computer, and library skills.

Each of the teachers holds a bachelor's degree and six have attained their master's degree. Most of the teachers have obtained Level I Certification in the State of Pennsylvania, while three have permanent (Level II) Certification, and three are not certified.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia requires that all of the teachers work toward Permanent Certification in Religious Education. Eight of the teachers have achieved permanent certification, six teachers have an

initial certification of nine credits, and three teachers have less than nine credits.

Commendations:

The visiting team commends:

1. the faculty for its efforts to work together to enhance the educational opportunities of the students;
2. the faculty for pursuing education to continue to teach effectively.

Recommendations:

The visiting team recommends:

1. that the faculty continue to work toward permanent certification;
2. that the faculty continue to take advantage of workshops and other educational opportunities.

## ACTION PLAN

After studying the Action Plan found in the self-study, the team members saw the visible presence of a Marketing Director as well as an art teacher for grades kindergarten through 4. This action has a two-fold purpose which is easily identifiable: first, to make the school widely known and visible in the surrounding communities; second, to improve student appreciation of, skill in, and knowledge of the fine arts.

Our Mother of Consolation School has taken an active approach to increasing the student population for future years. Through local news media outlets, the Marketing Director has placed several articles about recent school events in “public view.” Publicizing events and projects in the local newspapers and on television stations will increase the positive “talk” about the school and make Our Mother of Consolation a viable option for parents.

The fine arts develop a child’s creativity as well as the sharing of his/her God-given talents. It is evident from being in the school that students use a variety of means to express their knowledge of, skills in, and appreciation of the arts. Student artwork displayed throughout the school is creative and thematic.

### Commendations:

The visiting team commends the school for:

1. implementing many of the strategies contained in the action plan prior to the team’s visit;
2. the publicizing of activities in both local newspapers and television stations since the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year;
3. displaying students’ artwork to reaffirm their talents and skills as well as knowledge of the concept.

Recommendations:

The visiting team recommends that the school:

1. continue to formulate a written plan of action for marketing and to encourage the development of the fine arts across all grade levels;
2. promote weekly activities in local media outlets as much as possible;
3. initiate a plan to have an art teacher also work with grades 5 through 8 to enhance and enrich their appreciation, knowledge, and skills.