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# **ST. MARY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Westphalia, MI

Final Report

for the

**Michigan Nonpublic School Accrediting Association**

**(School Visitation: September 20 and 21, 2011)**

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## **LIMITATIONS ON THE DISTRIBUTION, USE, AND SCOPE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

It is the official intent of the M.N.S.A.A. Board that this report be considered a privileged document of the school. The distribution of the report and its availability for public consideration beyond that point rest solely in the hands of the school administration. Neither the chairperson nor the other members of the Visiting Team are authorized to release any of the information contained in this report without the approval of the administration of the school.

The primary purpose of the Visiting Team was to examine the educational and religious setting of the school, including courses of study, learning materials, student needs and interests, staffing, and facilities. The Visiting Team attempted to assess the effectiveness of the total school program in meeting the educational and religious objectives the school has established for itself and in meeting M.N.S.A.A. standards.

It was not the purpose of the Visiting Team to evaluate individual teacher performance. The use of this report as an official assessment of any staff person's professional competency would be in violation of the process and the intent under which the school evaluation was conducted. Such use would be inherently invalid since at no time during the Team Visit was the Team concerned with the evaluation of individual teacher performance.

Members of the Visiting Team have utilized their best professional judgment in drawing the conclusions reported in this document. The Team members are not to be held accountable for any injudicious or unauthorized use of this document.

## FORWARD

Becoming accredited is a strenuous process. The school and its administration are to be highly commended for their efforts in this accreditation process. The self-study document and the various arrangements for the accreditation team were well organized and appreciated by the team. It is the hope and prayer of the members of the visiting team that the enclosed document is one that is accurate and helpful for the continued improvement and enhancement of the school.

The committee hereby expresses sincere gratitude to the faculty, staff and students at St. Mary School, Westphalia for the opportunity to serve on the visiting team and for the many kindnesses shown to us during our visit. Each of us on the committee has grown as a result of the experience.

This school obviously is a quality school. This was reflected not only in your self-study, but also in the comments and observations of the visiting team. We were delighted with the whole climate of the school. The school speaks out for the Christian faith to the students and to the community very effectively.

This report is carefully written and includes specific recommendations, which should be considered seriously by the school and the supporting community. Not every suggestion needs to be followed, but each should be considered.

The content of the self-study was divided proportionately among the members of the accreditation team. This report has been written by the team as a whole, with only minor editing done by the team chairperson. Each part of this report follows the following format.

- Overview:** This provides an introduction and a few observations in general terms about that particular aspect of the school program.
- Strengths:** These are the most obvious strengths of the topic.
- Concerns:** The committee felt that the school should be aware of these items. They may not be weaknesses, but they gave members of the committee some concern.
- Recommendations:** Wherever possible, specific, practical suggestions have been made to help to remedy the concerns expressed.

The visiting team pledges its continued support and assistance should you care to call upon any of us in the implementation process.

May the Lord richly bless the faculty and constituents of this school so that with the Lord's help all will continue to proclaim His Gospel ever more effectively as a result of this process.

Sincerely,

Sean Costello  
Associate Superintendent  
Diocese of Lansing  
Team Chairperson

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Visiting Team, along with Fr. Steven Mattson, Superintendent of the Diocese of Lansing Catholic Schools, would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Raymond Rzepecki, Principal, and Fr. James Conlon, Pastor, and the members of the St. Mary Education Commission for their commitment in coordinating the completion of the Self-Study, as well as the entire site visit. In addition, the Team acknowledges and thanks the teachers, secretaries, support staff and parents for their valuable contributions to the Accreditation effort and their hospitality during our visit.

## **STANDARD I: PHILOSOPHY / MISSION STATEMENT**

### **OVERVIEW**

St. Mary's current mission statement is:

St. Mary School is committed to providing our students with an excellent Christ-centered education. Our purpose is to assist parents/guardians with the spiritual, intellectual, social, and physical development of their children. This assistance is provided within a framework of Catholic teachings and moral values. This educational experience will give our students the foundation needed to live faith filled lives.

This statement as it is currently written is clearly achieved and inculcated by the faculty staff.

**(S = self-study report, I = interview, O = observation, W = written documentation)**

### **STRENGTHS**

1. Mission statement is posted throughout the school and classrooms as a reminder for all stakeholders. (O)
2. Evidence shows the mission statement and philosophy statements are being lived out at the school. (O,I,W,S)
3. Mission statement is reviewed annually by faculty, staff, and parents. (S,I)
4. Catholic identity is very apparent throughout the school. This is most evident with the construction of the new chapel. (S,I,O)

### **CONCERNS**

1. Many stakeholders, particular students and parents, do not know the mission statement.
2. The mission statement is quite lengthy, which makes it difficult to commit to memory.
3. The mission statement is written in a manner that focuses emphasis solely on the teachers' role, and does not include the students or parents as stakeholders.
4. Philosophy statements appear to be written for the benefit of the teaching staff only.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Refine the mission statement so that it can be easily committed to memory by all stakeholders.
2. Edit mission statement and philosophy statements to include all stakeholders at St. Mary's

### **IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED:**

1. The mission statement has been modified since the last accreditation visit; however, it should be reexamined to include all members of the St. Mary's school community.

## STANDARD II: SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

### OVERVIEW

This standard identifies the kinds of relationships that exist within the school and with the larger community. St. Mary's has a very positive relationship between the school and the community. It appears that all constituents involved are deeply involved and committed to the success of the school.

**(S = self-study report, I = interview, O = observation, W = written documentation)**

### STRENGTHS

1. This staff exemplifies the kind of positive and supportive relationships that set the tone for this school. They are a strong faith community. They support each other professionally and personally. There is a definite family atmosphere among the staff that is inviting, comfortable, and powerful. (I, O, S)
2. There is a strong sense of mutual respect between the administration and the staff. It is a shared leadership where everyone's professional viewpoint is valued and they work together as a learning community. (I, O, S)
3. The students were observed with friendly, respectful, interactions with each other, with the staff and with visiting team. This is obviously an environment where students feel safe and discipline is valued and practiced. (O, S)
4. The school communicates their activities and accomplishments with the wider community through parish and local newspapers. Parents are kept informed through a wide variety of means including the online SchoolSpeak system. (I, S, W)
5. St. Mary School reaches out to parents and the entire church community through the Parent Advisory Committee and by the many activities/programs/projects throughout the year which connect with the broader community. The strong Catholic identity of the school is especially exemplified in these activities. (I, S, W)
6. Parents love this school and appreciate the strong impact it has on their families as an institute of learning and more importantly, as a beacon of their faith.

### CONCERNS

1. The self study expresses a desire by the staff to review instructional goals with administration early in the school year and to target areas to improve from evaluations.
2. There is a desire for more regularly scheduled times for the Pastor to spend time in each classroom.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Choose a week early in the school year where each teacher schedules a time during 'specials' to meet with administration to go over their designated goals for the year. Review again with same procedure in January.
2. Meet with Pastor to choose a block of time each week/month when he is available to spend time in the school, then, do a calendar of visitations for the school year rotating classes into the schedule.

## STANDARD III: SCHOOL CLIMATE

### OVERVIEW

St. Mary's has Christ at the center of their school, and they have created a very Catholic culture throughout the school as a whole. Teachers, staff, and parents are all involved to insure that the school retains this culture.

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### STRENGTHS

1. St. Mary, Westphalia has the appearance and feel of a Christ-centered school. The students speak politely with one another and to staff; staff addresses students respectfully and by name. (O)
2. The classrooms and hallways are orderly, clean and well-planned. The mission of the school is posted in classrooms and hallways and kept in the minds of those who work and learn here with bulletin boards, art projects, and opportunities for students to participate in the monthly virtue. (O, S)
3. Teachers demonstrate awareness as to whom their students are and make an effort to differentiate instruction and to provide for opportunities for students to use their gifts. Examples of this are evident when I spoke with two teachers who coordinate the "Life Club" for students and another staff who told about helping students with dramatic ability to find a part in the Christmas play. I observed a lesson when a student was asking questions that no one seemed to know the answer to and the teacher sent the student to the classroom computer with a partner to find the information. (I, S, O)

### CONCERNS

There are no concerns at this time. (S, O)

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED:

1. St. Mary School has dealt with the concerns from the past accreditation report including behavioral expectations of students, dress code, teacher professional dress, and communication between teachers and administrator (S, I, O: Exhibits)

## **STANDARD IV: ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION**

### **OVERVIEW**

St. Mary's is organized well and structured efficiently to carry out its mission. The roles and relationships of each member of the school community are clearly defined. The administrative staff is competent, qualified, and effective in continuing the success of the school's daily operations and the long term vision that is in the process of being achieved.

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### **STRENGTHS**

1. Fr. Conlon is very supportive of the school. He is keenly aware of all aspects of the school program, and there is a clear expectation on the administrative structure of the school. (I, O, S)
2. The pastor and principal are both in constant communication about the different elements of the school. The principal goes above and beyond to ensure that the pastor is kept abreast of any issues at the school. (I,O)
3. Principal, teachers, and staff have a positive disposition and work well together, which has been fostered by the principal's open door policy. (I,O,S)
4. The principal is instituting monthly classroom observations for teachers to provide feedback on their instructional performance. (I)
5. Principal ensures that faculty members have opportunities for professional development. (I,S)
6. Office staff has clearly defined roles and is aware of all duties they need to perform. (I)
7. St. Mary's offers multiple opportunities for families to pay tuition based on their personal needs. (I,W)

### **CONCERNS**

1. Personnel files are disorganized and some documentation is absent from them. (O)

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Personnel files need to be organized and missing documentation, based on the diocesan checklist for personnel files, needs to be placed in files.

### **IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED:**

1. The faculty appears to have a much better understanding of the role of the principal in their building, and there is a great professional environment for all involved.
2. The need to include time for staff to share information on workshops attended has been alleviated some because much of the professional development being offered to faculty is directed towards improving the whole school.

## **STANDARD V: PROFESSIONAL STAFF**

### **OVERVIEW**

All school personnel are to support the philosophy/mission statement of the school, meeting the standards required by the state and the diocese for religious certification. St. Mary's staff is on mission as they move the school forward. The atmosphere is warm and welcoming, and they are constant professionals.

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### **STRENGTHS**

1. All teachers are state certified with eleven of thirteen having attained Masters Degrees. (S,W)
2. Many opportunities for spiritual development among the staff are provided: retreats, seasonal prayer services and spiritual reading materials shared by administration. (I, S)
3. A strong mentoring program, initiated four years ago, has been well-received by new and seasoned staff alike. New teachers felt welcomed, respected and supported. (S, I)
4. As a result of many collaborative activities, the staff sees themselves as professional leaders. (S,I,O)

### **CONCERNS**

1. Some teaching staff do not have basic catechist certification. (S, W)
2. Some teachers need to correct lapsed state certification. (O,W)

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Review certification status to see which areas are needed for the most teachers, then plan time during a PD day to do a session. This could be done in collaboration with a nearby school.
2. Staff members who have allowed their certificate to lapse need to correct this as soon as possible.

## **STANDARD VI-A: ELEMENTARY CURRICULUM**

### **OVERVIEW:**

There is little doubt that St. Mary's is a Catholic school, and Faith integration throughout the curriculum is certainly evident. Catholic Identity is marked on every wall in the school. The teachers are using a guaranteed and viable curriculum, and it is evident by the achievement made by students.

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### **STRENGTHS**

1. Curriculum objectives are grounded in the mission of the school; changes are assessed based on the impact that the change/s will have on the maintenance of the mission. (S, I)
3. Diocesan Guidelines and Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations are followed. (S, I)
4. Application of what the student is learning is part of the planning, instruction and assessment. (S, O, I)
5. Staff engages in Professional Development in order to provide activities and to use strategies that are effective for all types of learners. Professional Development has lead to changes in the way teachers teach. (S, I)

### **CONCERNS**

1. Increase staff ability to assess and implement research based interventions to meet the needs of all students.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The Star Program (beginning in October, 2011) will address individual needs of students in Mathematics and Reading.
2. Continue professional development in the area of differentiated instruction and student assessments.

### **IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED:**

1. Common planning time for grade level teachers has been initiated.
2. The STAR Program for individualized student assessment and instruction in Mathematics and Reading is being implemented in October, 2011.
3. Grade level learning outcomes have been developed in the areas of Math, Religion, Science, and Social Studies.

## **STANDARD VI-B: STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

### **OVERVIEW**

Student assessment is integral to evaluate student mastery of the curriculum presented to them. St. Mary's is currently using multiple means to assess students to insure that learning is taking place.

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### **STRENGTHS**

1. The staff of St. Mary School has completed clear grade level outcomes and identified ways that the outcomes will be assessed. (S)
2. A variety of assessments are used. (S, I, O)
3. Assessments are used routinely; instructional planning reflects the information culled from the assessment/s. (S, I, O)

### **CONCERNS**

1. Time needed for grade level collaboration. (S, I)
2. Formative assessment tools needed for Mathematics and Reading. (S, I)

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The Administrator has arranged schedules so that grade level teachers have common planning time.
2. The Star Program will be implemented for Mathematics and Reading in October, 2011.

### **IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED:**

1. Curriculum has been evaluated; common grade level planning time has been implemented. Curriculum committees meet to ensure that higher order thinking skills, assessment tools, and related seasonal activities and events are indicated for grade level/school-wide curriculum.

**OVERVIEW: (RELIGIOUS EDUCATION [Diocese of Lansing Addendum] grades K-8)**

The program of religious education is both solid and strong at St. Mary School. The school's foundational commitment to the Catholic Faith is immediately evident upon entering the school and is thematic throughout the school's daily activities. The Faith is inculcated through direct instruction, the personal example of the faculty/staff and in the behavior expectations placed on the students.

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**STRENGTHS**

1. A survey of school parents indicates that nearly all of them highlight "Catholic education" as their primary motivation for sending their children to St. Mary School. The school itself underscores its identity as a Catholic community of faith as its "greatest strength." (S, W)
2. The school is ordered toward the Eucharist through weekday Mass every Monday and Adoration every Friday. In addition, Masses are celebrated on particular feast days and highlight the importance of the particular saint's charism. (S, I, W)
3. The school benefits from the strong support of the pastor. (S, I)
4. Religion is taught using a variety of materials and experiences, including, but not limited to:
  - Online research, use of interactive faith based websites, an annual All Saints Day powerpoint presentation;
  - Service projects, clothes drives, care taking projects, cards and letters to those in need, special prayers and gifts for the sick;
  - Bible reading, catechism, class visits to the recently added school chapel;
  - Stations of the Cross, May Crowning, Advent and Lent devotions;
  - Right to Life Club, Children's Choir;
  - Projects to evangelize and to encourage family prayer;
  - A well maintained and updated library;
  - Time set aside for daily prayer in common and silent personal prayer; (S, I, O)
5. There is a religion curriculum committee that meets to analyze and evaluate the school's implementation of the diocesan curriculum. (S, I)
6. Vocations speakers have been added and the religious media collection has been updated. (S, I, W)
7. Family and personal prayer aids are provided and used. (S, I)
8. Faith integration was observed across the curriculum, notably in handwriting and science (O)

### **CONCERNS**

1. Not all teachers have attained advanced catechist certification. (I, W)
2. Some students lack enthusiasm about participation at Mass. (S)
3. In light of the many strengths of the school in the area of religious education, constant and vigilant efforts should be in place to continue to build upon these strengths, and thus guard against any temptation toward complacency.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Encourage teachers to attend catechist training opportunities; also, explore the options of hosting catechist formation in-house, utilizing qualified local persons as catechist trainers, after obtaining approval for lessons from the Diocesan Office of Catechesis.
2. Continue efforts aimed at catechizing about the Mass through materials and formation opportunities aimed at parents and students alike.
3. The “Six Tasks of Catechesis” should be reviewed on a frequent basis, making certain that each task is given strong emphasis throughout the religious education program as well as in the life of the school in general.

**OVERVIEW: (SOCIAL STUDIES grades K-8)**

The teachers are well aware of their needs and strengths in this area. I talked with the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher about concerns transitioning from a 25 minute period in third grade to a 50 minute period in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. They have also embraced their new textbook series and have done a great job incorporating a whole world view in relationship to Geography and especially Michigan history to see how students in Westphalia, MI fit into the world

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**STRENGTHS**

1. The biggest strength I see is the staff's recognition of the need to transition from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Michigan History and 25 minute classes to 50 minute classes. (S,I)
2. I also saw and heard how teachers collaborate between classes especially 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> to make sure Civics are covered and that there is a smooth transition. 6<sup>th</sup> grade also collaborates with the PW school district for the transition from 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grade. (I)
3. Use of Brain Pop Jr. for supplemental instruction. (O)

**CONCERNS**

1. Integrating the faith on a daily basis with an emphasis on social justice. This did not come up in any conversations. As noted in VIC# 2 they are aware but a greater overall emphasis should be considered. (S)
2. Not enough instructional time in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Michigan History. (S,I)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Expand the perspective beyond just social justice to a whole integrating the faith into social studies. Use the diocesan curriculum of integrating the faith. Also use current event videos or newspapers to integrate geography, economics, history, anthropology, etc.
2. Continue to supplement with computer apps and weekly news magazines

**IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED:**

It has been noticeable that St. Mary's has added resources especially through the mimeo software and web-based activities to supplement and expand their social studies curriculum. The need for specific software has been met.

**OVERVIEW: (LANGUAGE ARTS Grades K-8)**

Language Arts is definitely stressed throughout St. Mary School at all grade levels. Further, writing (as part of Language Arts) has a strong and solid emphasis. The writing is approached from a variety of angles, with the emphasis, at this time of the year, on students working to express their ideas in writing. Teachers were clearly working at the development of written self-expression and the students were actively writing, enjoying what they were doing and sharing their ideas with each other.

It was very clear that the teachers had prepared the students for the writing experiences they were having. The teachers were organized and knowledgeable and had their students engaged in a variety of writing and verbal exercises. Further, the mission statement of this school clearly directs the way the teachers here respond to their students.

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**STRENGTHS**

1. Teachers were well prepared and enthused about the writing exercises they were doing. In addition, students are actively involved in learning writing and reading. (O)
2. Teachers modeled expectations clearly for the students so the students had a complete understanding of what was expected. (W,O)
3. Student writing needs were being met individually, in small groups and within the larger group in the classroom. (S,O)
4. A multitude of visuals are posted in the classrooms that directly relate to writing as well as grammar. In addition, all the classrooms have 2 computers available for student use along with various sets of books available for student use. (W, S, O)
5. Student writing experiences were directly tied to the students' personal experiences. The same was true as students were beginning to read a new novel. (O)
6. Logical and critical thinking skills were being stressed. Students met together in "knee positions" (small groups) to share their writing and to get more ideas from their peers (a form of peer editing). In addition, students volunteered to read their writing to the class (large group) and to get feedback on their particular piece. (O, S)
7. Teacher directed class discussions allowed students to think logically and develop critical thinking skills. Students were asked to clarify or explain their reasoning for their opinions and choices. (O, S)
8. Writing across the curriculum is being stressed. For example, students journal responses to reading assignments, write explanations about social studies questions, write and draw ideas in religion. (O)

### **CONCERNS**

1. The school is equipped with surround sound in all classrooms. This system is clearly helpful to students with hearing issues and learning differences. It is also very useful for students without these issues. Since it is so readily accessible, using it consistently benefits all students and teachers.
2. Inclusion of available technology ( i.e. the mimeos, surround sound, Smart Boards) is another teaching-learning tool that can contribute to the overall educational process. Utilizing it on a daily basis should be possible in some capacity.
3. Because it is early in the year, the approach to writing is focusing on the writing process. At some point, grammar and spelling need to be addressed (which seems to occur based on talking with teachers and visuals posted in classrooms). These need to be directly taught as well as incorporated within the writing process.
4. Again due to the time of the year, personal narrative writing is the focus. As much as possible, other writing genres should be included as well.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Continue creating an environment in which the teacher is able to conference with individual students on their writing as the rest of the students are writing.
2. Continue developing in-service opportunities for teachers with regard to differentiated learning/instruction.
3. As funds become available, continue updating technology that will contribute to the language arts curriculum.

### **IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED:**

Both Literacy by Design and Lucy Calkins are being used in the school. In addition, Writing Workshop and Accelerated Reading are also used. The classrooms are equipped with surround sound through Lifeline amplification (which benefits all students) and many teachers are using all of these. Teachers have received extra training to be teaching various levels of reading and writing to students. The faculty and administration are working very hard to develop both a strong language arts and a strong reading program for the benefit of the students.

**OVERVIEW: (FOREIGN LANGUAGE grades K-8)**

**Not Applicable**

**OVERVIEW: (MATHEMATICS grades K-8)**

St. Mary School displays a dense and cooperative math program throughout the building. Math is geared to individual grade levels as needed. A whole-group instruction with the use of the Mimeo Boards definitely enhances the learning experience.

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**STRENGTHS**

1. The Simple Solutions program was implemented throughout the entire building this school year. This is used as a supplement to the math curriculum and as a whole-group activity in the lower grades where the students eventually grow to complete the task at an individual pace on their own. (I,O,W)
2. Math is easily and effectively integrated into other subject areas. (O, W)
3. Mimeo Boards are used throughout the entire building for math instruction. (I,O,W)
4. First grade uses counting and number sequences as part of their circle time on a daily basis. (O)
5. Teachers have the ability to modify assignments for students that may be struggling. (I,O,W)
6. Teachers periodically use a variety of tools for assessment. (I,O,W)
7. Manipulatives are readily available at all grade levels. (O,W)

**CONCERNS**

1. Math textbooks don't meet all of the grade level expectations. (W)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Provide funds to purchase supplemental materials to meet all grade level expectations.

**IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED**

1. Since the last accreditation, teachers have developed modified curriculum for those students that may be struggling.
2. The integration of computers and technology has also improved the math program.

**OVERVIEW: (SCIENCE AND HEALTH grades K-8)**

Teachers at St. Mary Catholic School develop and implement lessons to promote advanced problem-solving skills. Teachers periodically meet with other teachers in the district to collaborate in science as well as other subjects.

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**STRENGTHS**

1. The scientific method and problem solving techniques are taught from first grade all the way to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. (I,O,W)
2. Technology and hands-on experiments are integrated into science instruction at various grade levels. (I, O, W)
3. In the 2011-2012 school year the Harcourt School Publisher science series was implemented. (W)
4. There is a wealth of resources available to all teachers within their classroom or in a storage area to be used for experiments. (I,O,W)
5. Teachers periodically use a variety of techniques to assess students. (I,O,W)

**CONCERNS**

1. The written report reflects a concern for lack of integrating faith, scripture, and Catholic teachings into the science concepts and curriculum. (W)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Implement an approach to use comparisons of faith, scripture and catholic teachings to science. The use of the Catechism of the Catholic Church was a recommendation.

**IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED:**

1. Since the last accreditation, St. Mary School has purchased a new science textbook series.

**OVERVIEW: (FINE ARTS PROGRAM -ART grades K-8)**

Students are exposed to a variety of art. This is done through the art program, and also through various projects that are created across the curriculum.

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**STRENGTHS**

1. The program includes art appreciation as well as the elements of art and use of a variety of mediums. The same teacher has been at the school for four years and builds on previous experiences and lessons. (I, O)
2. The teacher uses formative assessment when planning her lessons and when instructing students. (I, O)
3. Students are encouraged and instructed as a whole class and individually. (O)
4. Lesson objective stated clearly at the beginning of the lesson. The teacher related the lesson (face-vase: left-right brain) to real life experience (putting together a puzzle) at the conclusion of the experience lesson. (O)
5. Students' artwork is displayed throughout the school, showcasing gifts and talents. (O)

**CONCERNS**

1. There are no concerns at this time. (S, I)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the school may use in its improvement plan (practical suggestions that correspond to and might help to remedy the above mentioned concerns. They are not requirements for the school to implement.

**IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED**

1. Since the last site visit a certified Art Teacher comes to the building through the non-core shared teacher program with the public school.

**OVERVIEW: (FINE ARTS PROGRAM - MUSIC grades K-8)**

St. Mary's has music for their students provided through a shared time program with their local public district.

**(S = self-study report, I = interview, O = observation, W = written documentation)**

**STRENGTHS**

1. St. Mary, Westphalia students have opportunities for vocal, instrumental and performance training/experiences in music. Students participate in formative assessment. (S, O, I)
2. Students were actively engaged in the lesson. The teacher did both 'physical' (exercises) and 'vocal' warm-ups at the beginning of the lesson. (O)

**CONCERNS**

1. There are no concerns at this time.
2. (See observation below RE: fan)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Trade out the fan for a quieter version.

**IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED**

1. Keyboard has been replaced and additional instruments have been purchased.

**OVERVIEW: (PHYSICAL EDUCATION grades K-8)**

Physical Education classes are provided by shared time teachers through Pewamo-Westphalia Public Schools. St. Mary School has a good working relationship with the public school system. St. Mary School provides most of the materials and resources for P.E. classes and periodically uses some that aren't at the school from Pewamo-Westphalia Schools.

(**S** = self-study report, **I** = interview, **O** = observation, **W** = written documentation)

**STRENGTHS**

1. St. Mary School has a respectable working relationship with Pewamo-Westphalia Schools. (O, W)
2. St. Mary School has excellent gymnasium facilities and outside playground for P.E. classes.(O)
3. Students learn leadership skills when leading whole-group activities. (I,W)
4. Students develop teamwork abilities during P.E. classes. (I,O,W)

**CONCERNS**

1. Equipment owned by St. Mary School is somewhat sparse but they are able to utilize the public school for certain equipment. (O)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Secure funds to purchase additional equipment for P.E. classes.

**IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED**

1. Since the last accreditation, areas of physical health and well-being have been implemented more into the physical education curriculum. Students are encouraged to better their health through healthy eating habits and exercise.

**OVERVIEW: (VOCATIONAL EDUCATION/HOME MANAGEMENT grades K-8)**

**Not Applicable**

**OVERVIEW: (TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION grades K-8)**

St. Mary's provides an outstanding technology program for their students. A well equipped computer lab as well as mimeo boards for each classroom enhance and integrate technology into all aspects of the curriculum. Having a technology coach and a supportive principal has let St. Mary's to support the technology they have and plan for the future.

**(S = self-study report, I = interview, O = observation, W = written documentation)**

**STRENGTHS**

1. The technology coach who works with teachers to help them incorporate technology coach them in its implementation is exceptional. (I,O)
2. The use of mimeo boards in each classroom is impressive. Although they have been in use for only a few months you can see that the teachers have bought into it and are well prepared to use it. (I,O)
3. A strong curriculum based on the METS (Michigan Education Technology Standards). (S,W)

**CONCERNS**

1. Consider more opportunities for students to work independently on the computer for research and projects which puts digital citizenship into practice. May contradict diocesan acceptable use policy but should be considered. (I,O)
2. Accelerated Reader test are still bought individually. This limits variety and genres of test and books available for taking test. (I)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Allow some flexibility on computer use especially for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6th graders to work on projects, research, etc. throughout the day.
2. Consider using Accelerated Reader Enterprise to give the students more variety of Literature.

**IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED**

1. They have met and exceeded the recommendations from their last accreditation. They have committed financial resources to meet the technological needs of the school.

## STANDARD VII: INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

### OVERVIEW

A variety of instructional materials exists throughout St. Mary School. These materials are found within individual classrooms as well as in specific instructional media centers/locations. The instructional materials are suited to the various ages and levels of individual students and utilized in a variety of ways by the classroom teachers.

In addition, the school has both a librarian and a technology teacher/director to oversee these two particular areas. These two instructors are available to work with the students and the teachers at specific times.

**(S = self-study report, I = interview, O = observation, W = written documentation)**

### STRENGTHS

1. Each classroom has 3 computers, one for the teacher and two that are available for student use. (S, O).
2. In addition to the classroom computers, there is a computer lab, which has enough computers to allow individual classes to have access during the school day. As a result, an individual teacher can bring his/her class to the computer lab to work. (S, O)
3. Classrooms have a variety of books, (sets of books), which are available for student use. (S, O).
4. Within the library, a plethora of materials exists for all student-learning levels that are Christ-centered and very appropriate for use in a Catholic school. (S, O).
5. The library is bright, good sized, centrally located and provides a variety of reading and research opportunities for students. (S, O, W).
6. Maps and globes exist throughout the school along with the ability to project maps and other information using the data projectors, computers and mimeos. (S,O)
7. Raising funds through an annual book fair has provided a solid way to improve the materials in the library. (O, I)
8. Each class in the school has a specific library time when the entire class is in and is utilizing the library. (W, I)

### CONCERNS

1. While the library has increased its materials with respect to race and ethnicity, more materials addressing both areas are still needed.
2. The non-fiction collection in the library needs to have materials added to it.
3. Some of the books in the library appear worn. An annual inventory and culling of materials needs to continue.
4. Increasing the number of smart boards in classrooms, updating maps, updating computer software are important concerns that need to be addressed annually.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Updating the library depends on the availability of funds. Continuing to have a book fair and using local donations can help with this, which is costly.
2. In-service for teachers with regard to technology (what is available, how to use it, technology like the iPad) is important to keep the school and staff updated with respect to technological advances in education. In addition, MACUL (The Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning) has conferences with workshops in this area.
3. Using parent volunteers, if any are available, can help out within the library, either by shelving materials, helping classify materials, or doing things to free up the librarian.
4. If funds become available, consider expanding the librarian's hours so he/she is available more than 2 days a week.
5. Allocate funds to increase DVDs in the media room.

### **IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED**

Funding is one of the biggest problems with regard to both technology and library/instructional materials. That being said, the school is working hard to raise the needed funds to both maintain the instructional materials it has, cull out the ones that are either worn out or outdated, and add more instructional materials. Maps and globes are in classrooms, along with various sets of books and religious materials. The book fair raised funds so the librarian has been able to increase both the ethnic/racial and non-fictional collections in the library.

## **STANDARD VIII: STUDENT SERVICES**

### **OVERVIEW**

This standard looks at the variety and quality of services offered to the students. St. Mary's currently offers a great deal to its students. An excellent spirit of cooperation has been established with the local public district, and they are doing a great job of meeting the diverse needs of the students at St. Mary's.

**(S = self-study report, I = interview, O = observation, W = written documentation)**

### **STRENGTHS**

1. Meeting the needs of individual students through differentiated instruction is practiced by classroom teachers who identify students at risk and provide specific interventions to support those children. (S, I, O)
2. Health services, policies, and procedures are practiced and compliant with state regulations. (S, I)
3. A new school-wide assessment program is being implemented this year to determine placement and to monitor the progress of students. (I)

### **CONCERNS**

1. Students who are exceptionally gifted could be challenged more. (I, S, O)
2. Specific interventions/procedures to meet the needs of at risk students could be more defined. (I, S)

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Possibly use the Instructional Support Team (IST) process to brainstorm ideas to challenge the gifted students.
2. Perhaps begin a data base of successful interventions to be catalogued and shared among the staff.

## **STANDARD IX: SCHOOL FACILITIES**

### **OVERVIEW**

St. Mary's School has a wonderful facility that is well equipped to meet the needs of the students. The layout of the building is very conducive to building community both between the students and the staff. The new chapel is a real benefit for the entire St. Mary community to gather for worship and reflection. The gym is most impressive and the classrooms are very well equipped with the latest technology and the support person to maintain them. Separate rooms for a computer lab, library, music, art, and a resource room are exceptional.

(**S** = self-study report, **I** = interview, **O** = observation, **W** = written documentation)

### **STRENGTHS**

1. The upkeep of the building is phenomenal. The bathrooms are clean. Hallways sparkle and students care for the building was observed. (O)
2. The flow of the building is very conducive to student learning. (O)
3. The sound system in each classroom is utilized greatly and adds to students learning and understanding. (I,O)

### **CONCERNS**

1. Change locks for electrical boxes as per observation and self-study report. (S,O)
2. Continue to keep up to date on latest trend in educational trends and needs of the St. Mary's community. (I,O)

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Replace the locks on the electrical boxes. This is a minor problem with easy solution.
2. Send teachers and parent advisory groups to visit other schools in the mid-Michigan area to see trends and other enhancements that St. Mary's could add in the future.

### **IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED**

1. They have taken seriously the recommendations in the previous accreditation and from my perspective have met and exceeded those expectations.

## **STANDARD X: DEVELOPMENT, LONG RANGE PLANNING AND FINANCE**

### **OVERVIEW**

It is clear that the strategic plan at St. Mary's is not just a document that is created to appease accreditation. This is a document that has been created by everyone involved with the school, and it is the vision that leads the school to the next level of Catholic education. The strategic plan that is currently in place is, in essence, a living document in the sense that it is evaluated and updated regularly.

**(S = self-study report, I = interview, O = observation, W = written documentation)**

### **STRENGTHS**

1. St. Mary's is operating with a five year plan that is evaluated annually to ensure its viability. (S,I,O,W)
2. The pastor is actively involved in the strategic planning process, and he is instrumental in ensuring its continued success. (S,I)
3. The principal works closely with the business manager to create and maintain the school budget. (S,I)
4. Catholic Identity and culture is a top priority for those involved with the strategic plan. (S,I,O,W)

### **CONCERNS**

1. Enrollment has decreased this year by 7%. This is a cause for concern; however, the pastor assured the site team that there was a dip in baptisms that correlates with this year, and that the trend does increase for next year's projection. (I)
2. The scholarship fund that is currently available could be larger to afford more families tuition assistance, which would make a Catholic education more obtainable. (S,I,O)
3. Because St. Mary's does not currently have a kindergarten, some families are using a local non-Catholic kindergarten program, which could lead to students not attending St. Mary's. (I,O)
4. Students are not able to obtain a true K-12 Catholic school experience because St. Mary's does not currently have 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms. (I,O)

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. St. Mary's should fully investigate the opportunity of opening a kindergarten at the school. This should be done with all stakeholders involved, including parishioners.
2. A plan for increasing the tuition assistance capital should be created and implemented.
3. A feasibility study should be employed to see if a middle school program would be possible at St. Mary's. If this is seen as a viable option for the school, it should move in this direction in a manner that ensures that everyone at the parish is given the opportunity to be informed and involved in the process.

### **IF THIS SCHOOL IS BEING RE-ACCREDITED**

A viable strategic plan is now in place at St. Mary's which is advancing the school in its mission. This plan is shared and implemented by all stakeholders, and it is a sign of the growth that has taken place at St. Mary's since the last site visit.

## **STANDARD XI: CHILD CARE**

### **OVERVIEW**

**Not Applicable**

## STANDARD XII: THEOLOGY, RELIGION, CATHOLIC IDENTITY

### OVERVIEW

The elements of theology, religion and Catholic identity at St. Mary School are very strong and well developed. The school's mission is identified with providing "an excellent Christ-centered education." The school does so through its emphasis on building a well-nourished Eucharistic spirituality, which allows students to fulfill their personal role in following their call to holiness.

**(S = self-study report, I = interview, O = observation, W = written documentation)**

### STRENGTHS

1. Since the last site visit, a school chapel has been built through the generous efforts of the parish and school community; the chapel is frequently used for class Masses, times of prayer and religious instruction (I,O)
2. Retreat opportunities are offered for students at various stages (First Reconciliation, First Communion, etc. (I, W)
3. Staff members are active and involved in various parish ministries (I,W)
4. Classrooms and the school library are well stocked with religious materials that are in keeping with the teaching of the Church. (S, O)
5. Liturgical seasons and saints days are celebrated with special Masses and catechesis. (I, W, O)
6. The school observes weekly Eucharistic Adoration. (S, I, W)
7. Sacramentals are present in the classrooms and are used by students and teachers. (O, W)
8. Homilies for school Masses are geared toward elementary students. (W, I)
9. Classroom discipline policies are based on the Ten Commandments; school service projects relate to the Beatitudes. Christ and the saints are upheld as models of behavior. (I, W)
10. Community life is built up through prayer during the school year and by maintaining prayer for every student and staff member on a particular day. (W)
11. Teachers lead Eucharistic adoration devotions on occasion. (I,W)
12. Resources, materials and school-wide prayer are offered to assist parents in fulfilling their role as primary educators of their children. (I, W)
13. The attainment of sainthood is clearly and directly stated as the fundamental goal of life. (S, I, O)
14. School-wide opportunities at the service of the Church's missionary endeavors include writing letters to the sick and homebound, school supplies for orphans, clothing and food drives, among other activities. (S, I)
15. Vocations talks are integrated into the annual calendar. (S, I)

### **CONCERNS**

1. Only 61% of the staff has attained any level of catechist certification; the others will have attained basic certification by September, 2011.
2. In light of the many strengths of the school in the area of religious education, constant and vigilant efforts should be in place to continue to build upon these strengths, and thus guard against any temptation toward complacency.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Follow the written time frame that was developed for individual teachers to attain advanced certification. The school may wish to designate in-house catechist trainers who will develop lesson plans for catechist certification, contingent on approval by the Office of Catechesis.
2. The “Six Tasks of Catechesis” should be reviewed on a frequent basis, making certain that each task is given strong emphasis throughout the religious education program as well as in the life of the school in general. Special efforts should be directed to those points which were rated as “2” under “Level of Implementation” in the Self-Study, in the section “Religion, Theology and Catholic Identity”.

## REPORT SUMMARY

### RECOMMENDATION

The visiting team unanimously recommends that St. Mary Catholic School in Westphalia, Michigan receive accreditation by the Michigan Nonpublic School Accrediting Association.

### OUTSTANDING STRENGTHS

1. The Catholic culture established and fostered at this school is remarkable, and it should serve as a model for Catholic schools throughout the Diocese of Lansing. The new chapel space in the school is truly a testament to this.
2. The effort by all the school community to work towards the common good of the school is impressive. This lends itself to the fantastic working relationship that exists for all involved.
3. The curriculum, assessment, and instruction taking place at St. Mary's are very good. The teachers are utilizing the technology available to them on a regular basis, and they are continually using best practices.

### MAJOR CONCERNS

1. A lack of a kindergarten program at St. Mary's compels parents to look toward a public school district or a protestant kindergarten program to meet their needs. A Catholic kindergarten would begin the formation of young hearts and minds, and would serve to promote school enrollment.
2. In order to be compliant with the State of Michigan and with the Diocese of Lansing, personnel files should be gone through and all necessary documentation should be put in place.
3. Although there are many strengths at the school regarding religious education, it is important that a constant watch be in place to insure that St. Mary's continues to draw students ever closer to our Lord so as to not lead to complacency.

Respectfully submitted,



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Sean Costello  
Visiting Team Chairperson  
September, 2011