

Academic Excellence

Standard 7

An excellent Catholic school has a clearly articulated, rigorous curriculum aligned with relevant standards, 21st century skills, and Gospel values, implemented through effective instruction.

Narrative Summary

St. George Catholic School has a clearly articulated, rigorous curriculum aligned with relevant standards, 21st century skills, and Gospel values implemented through effective instruction. Evaluation of the curriculum at St. George Catholic School is continuous and responsive to student needs. Religious Education is integrated into the curriculum and is incorporated in the educational experience for each student. St. George Catholic School's instruction provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life-skills that lead to success. Lesson plans and curriculum mapping require teachers to include standards and 21st century skills, teacher observations check for clearly articulated goals, the integration of gospel values and effective instruction practices.

Commendations

The curriculum at St. George Catholic School adheres to appropriate, delineated standards and is vertically aligned to ensure that every student successfully completes a rigorous and coherent sequence of academic courses based on standards and rooted in Catholic values. Vertical alignment of the curriculum ensures that expectations are being met from one grade to the next. Common Core standards are resourced for lesson planning and are used as a minimum expectation for instruction. St. George Catholic

School schedules department meetings for each subject area throughout the year. A representative from every grade level attends these meetings to ensure there are no gaps or overlaps in content. That information is then disseminated to all teachers who teach that subject area. Assessments and projects are compared and discussed at this time to ensure vertical alignment. In addition to Department meetings, grade level teachers meet on a weekly basis to discuss best practices and share individual teaching strategies. Grade level chairpersons and administration make sure these meetings are productive and continue throughout the school year. In addition to vertical alignment practices, the teachers at St. George Catholic School are in the process of implementing Atlas Curriculum Mapping. This tool will allow teachers and parents to gain a larger view of what is taught at each grade level, when it is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is measured. This resource will also give insight to what students are experiencing in the classroom and the requirements needed to not only succeed, but excel. Instructional decisions are determined based on the information gathered through department meetings, level meetings and Atlas, with a focus on increasing academic achievement and instilling Catholic values. According to the AdvacED Program Effectiveness survey, 79% of staff feel that St. George Catholic School has a strong culture of collaboration within the school at all levels to advance excellence.

St. George Catholic School's curriculum and instruction provides students with 21st century learning. Students gain the knowledge, understanding and skills to become creative, reflective, literate, critical, and moral evaluators, problem solvers, decision makers, and socially responsible global citizens. Student performance and work products demonstrate critical, creative, literate, and moral thinkers related to solving real world problems and making decisions. Teachers use a variety of instructional techniques and resources to implement 21st century learning. Group and/or peer learning within the classroom provides opportunities for the student to reflect, evaluate, problem solve and critique real world problems and promotes decision making, as evident in the work samples and lesson plans provided. Field trips are designed to support classroom lessons and make content more meaningful and relevant to the students. All classes incorporate the use of technology on a daily basis. To enhance students' understanding of media and technological applications, all students are scheduled to have weekly computer classes. Grades 1-5 have scheduled times and middle school students have the opportunity to use the lab on an as needed basis. All students have access to laptop and I-pad carts in the classroom, depending on age and availability. St. George Catholic School's technology plan is designed to enhance instruction and technological skills. 91% of staff agree that St. George Catholic School's facilities equipment and technology plans are designed to enhance teaching and learning, according to the AdvancEd Program Effectiveness survey. Technological 21st century based learning takes place daily in St. George classrooms through the use of IXL (math program), AR (Accelerated Reader program),

United Streaming, Brain-Pop, Smart boards, Computer Labs, and Apple TVs. The AdvancEd Program Effectiveness survey reports that 82% of the staff believe St. George Catholic School has a clearly articulated rigorous curriculum infused with Gospel values, preparing students for life and work.

St. George Catholic School has recently adopted the only Common Core State Standards aligned reading program for grades K-5 that is infused with Catholic values and principles. The Catholic Identity Edition of the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt series combines a rigorous reading curriculum with Catholic values and principles in each lesson. Catholic values can be found in other areas of the curriculum, whether it is documented in lesson plans as a planned part of a lesson or part of a teachable moment undocumented. However the need for further integration of religion throughout the curriculum is recognized as an area needing improvement for St. George Catholic School as evidenced by E-Walk results and the survey results. Only 64% of students surveyed agreed that the teachings of Jesus were integrated into subjects other than Religion. Recognizing that student's academic achievement is greatly dependent on their emotional well-being, students are continuously reminded to follow the examples of Jesus. In guidance classes, the guidance counselor intentionally addresses the affective dimensions of learning, such as, social dispositions, relationship building and habits of the mind. Lessons and discussions rooted in Gospel values are held every other week I grades 1-5. In addition to Guidance classes, the counselor is available to meet with individual students throughout the day to ensure that emotional needs do not interfere with achieving academic success. Other services provided by the Guidance Counselor include coordinating meetings with parents, anti-bullying campaigns and Red Ribbon Week. St. George Catholic School discipline policy also addresses the emotional well-being of students while focusing on their spiritual, moral and ethical development. Students are given gold slips to acknowledge good behavior. The following quote is written on a gold slip to remind students that they have acted in a Christ-like manner, "This gold slip is awarded to (student's name) for displaying exemplary behavior that Jesus taught and lived." Gold slips are read aloud on a daily basis at morning assembly by an administrator. Likewise, pink slips are given to students who do not abide by the discipline policy. The following quote is written on a pink slip to remind students that they have not acted in a Christ-like manner, "God, we know that you are always with us, but sometimes we fail to follow Jesus. May we make up for any harm we have done to others. Help us to live as your people each day of our lives. (Student Name) made an unwise choice today." As a result, students are called to reflect on their actions based on their Catholic values and principles.

The faculty and professional support staff of St. George Catholic School meet diocesan, state, and/or national requirements for academic preparation and licensing to ensure their capacity to provide effective curriculum and instruction. Compliance with these requirements is factored into all employment decisions. Contracted employees write annual goals for instructional and professional growth for continued improvement in effective instruction. Prospective employees go through a rigorous interview process in which they are required to teach a lesson in front of the administrative team.

St. George Catholic School faculty and staff participate in professional learning opportunities to develop, implement and continuously improve the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction to result in high levels of student achievement. Master schedules set aside time weekly for grade level teachers to discuss best practices, common assessments, test results, and weekly lesson plans. Staff development meetings are held once a month. Topics discussed and implemented include current best practice, test data on standardized tests, effective teaching techniques, Accreditation and Atlas Curriculum mapping. Quarterly department meetings are held to ensure vertical alignment in all subject areas of the curriculum. New teacher meetings are also held monthly to serve as training and mentoring of new faculty members to enhance the week long New Teacher In-service held during the summer.

In addition to regularly scheduled professional opportunities, St. George Catholic School also provides other opportunities for professional growth as deemed necessary. In the past year, these have included Apple TV training, Smartboard, Kagan and Classroom Management by Harry Wong. According to the AdvancEd program Effectiveness survey of 2013, 82% of staff agree that all administration, faculty and staff engage in ongoing professional development.

The administration at St. George Catholic School monitors the use of the information gained through these conferences and professional development opportunities by conducting formal and informal classroom observations. St. George Catholic School has completed 1,248 informal E-walk observations in the last two years and an estimated 160 formal observations. St. George Catholic School ensures that teachers are well-prepared and are effectively implementing the curriculum through detailed weekly lesson plans that are reviewed by an administrator. Lesson plan templates were designed to ensure effective instruction by including the following categories: standards, objectives, bell-work, guided practice, independent practice, closure, modifications, reteach, enrichment and assessment. Teachers conduct two peer observations per year, which provide positive feedback and sharing of ideas and methods.

Test scores are periodically evaluated to assist teachers in designing instructional programs to meet individual needs. Results of unit and benchmark test are used to

determine deficiencies and gauge progress in specific skills and reading strategies. These results are used to tailor instructional pacing. Pre-teaching assessments are also given to assist teachers in adjusting lesson plans to meet individual needs. Standardized test scores are reviewed within and across grade levels. These analyses are used to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in the existing curriculum. Evidence of a strong reading program is supported by standardized test scores on the Terra Nova Achievement Test. Information from standardized test scores can be used to assist in the direction of future instructional choices.

Effective instruction at St. George Catholic School is designed to engage and motivate all students, addressing the diverse needs and capabilities of each student and accommodating students with special needs as fully as possible. In the primary grades, for example, reading groups are formed to ensure that each student is provided with the support needed to progress. The Reading Enrichment teacher can provide first and second grade small group intervention as needed using the RTI (Response to Intervention) component of the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt reading series. This intervention provides a framework for meeting the academic needs of struggling learners. In the AdvancEd Program Effectiveness survey of 2013, 91% of staff agree that teachers use different approaches to meet the diverse needs of all students. In grades 3-5, individual needs are met by employing various instructional techniques, such as cooperative learning groups, critical thinking activities, and web-based instructional activities. Some reading lessons include literature circles, series-based enrichment opportunities, leveled readers and web quests to differentiate instruction in some grades. The Accelerated Reader Program is available for students to set personal reading goals and is supported by results from STAR testing.

Similar opportunities are available to students in the area of Mathematics. St. George Catholic School employs three math resource teachers for grades 1-5. These teachers assist with small group instruction to introduce, reinforce and remediate grade level Math skills. In the middle school, math and language honors classes are utilized to address diverse needs and capabilities of individual students.

Students who qualify for accommodations based on psycho-ed evaluations receive an instructional plan. These plans are kept in a red folder along with the evaluation and become part of the student's permanent record. These records are accessible to the teachers, but are kept confidential. Academic concerns are addressed by all teachers who work with the students throughout the day. Parents are kept informed of their child's progress through individually scheduled parent meetings.

At St. George Catholic School learning activities are individualized for each student in a way that supports achievement of expectations. Teachers use technology, group work,

partner work, games, manipulatives, creative expression, labs, and other traditional techniques to adapt to the learning styles of all students. Additionally, instructional strategies are varied and differentiated based on learning styles and individual needs. In the AdvancEd Program Effectiveness survey of 2013, 94% of staff agree that teachers use effective instruction to deliver the curriculum.

Recommendations

It is recommended that St. George Catholic School continue to focus on incorporating religion and catholic identity across all content areas and provide documentation in weekly lesson plans.

Although the faculty at St. George Catholic School is well trained and dedicated to their teaching, it is recommended that continued growth in innovative teaching practices as presented in professional development be offered both in the school and from outside resources.

Rating of Standard

Based upon the evidence, benchmark worksheets and recommendations for Academic Excellence Standard 7, St. George Catholic School rates themselves at level 3.