



NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES, INC.
COMMISSION ON INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Visiting Team Report

St. Bernard's Elementary School

254 Summer Street
Fitchburg, MA

Deborah Wright
Principal

Chair
Mrs. Kelly Fernald

Foundation Visit: April 12, 2023

Program Visit: October 15, 2023 - October 18, 2023

Roster of Team Members

Chair(s)

Chair: Mrs. Kelly Fernald

Principal

The Saints Academy

Beverly, MA

Co-Chair: Mrs. Mary Kelly

Principal

St. Patrick School and Educational Center

Lowell, MA

VT Members

Ms. Katie Fallon

Development Director (Foundation Visit Member ONLY)

St. Patrick School

Stoneham, MA

Mrs. Janine Hanley

3rd Grade Teacher / Mass & Religion Coordinator

Cheverus Catholic School

Malden, MA

Mrs. Erin Leary

Grade 1 Teacher

St. Agatha School

Milton, MA

Ms. Corrine Pentz

Grade 2 Teacher

Trinity Catholic Academy

Brockton, MA

Mrs. Joanne Slot

Interventionist

St. Bridget School

Cheshire, CT

Introduction

Founded in 1885, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. (NEASC) is the nation's oldest accrediting agency. Since its inception in 1885, the Association has awarded accreditation to educational institutions in the six New England states that seek voluntary affiliation.

The governing body of NEASC is its Board of Trustees which oversees the work of three Commissions:

- Commission on International Education
- Commission on Independent Schools
- Commission on Public Schools

The evaluation program which the schools undergo is a three-fold process: the Self-Study conducted by the school, the evaluation by the Visiting Team, and the follow-up program carried out by the school to implement the findings of its own Self-Study (Part II), and the valid recommendations of the Visiting Team and the Commission. The Commission on Independent Schools oversees the entire process.

Each school is evaluated in terms of compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*, the quality of *Part II: Reflection, Recommendations, and Issues for Further Discussion*, and how well it is serving the needs of its students. Because each school is different, the base that undergirds the evaluation is the school's own statement of mission and core values.

School Data Sheet

Mission

St. Bernard's Elementary School Mission Statement:

Inspired by the motto, "Deeds not Words", St. Bernard's Elementary School is a Catholic community of faith, learning and service joined in living Gospel values. In partnership with our families, we strive to develop both academic excellence and compassion for others in our students.

History and Culture

St. Bernard's Elementary School was founded by the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (PBVM) in 1886. Today, 137 years later the school continues to be guided by the Sisters' motto "Deeds not Words".

The Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary were founded in 1775 by Nano Nagle. Nano Nagle was born to an Irish family of privilege in 1718. Ireland, at that time, was torn apart by war and poverty, and Catholics were denied many rights including education. Distraught by these inequities, Nano Nagle began her own schools where she educated those yearning to learn and spoke freely about Jesus Christ. In 1775, feeling strongly that to do God's work she needed to be "among the poor", Nano Nagle founded the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Through this order, she and the sisters faithfully lived their motto by continuing the schools, ministering to the poor and opening a home for aged women.

Though Nano Nagle died in 1784, the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary continued educating the children of Ireland. In 1874, twelve sisters left Ireland to teach at St. Michael's School in New York City. By 1886, Father Phillip Garrigan of St. Bernard's Parish in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, had heard of the wonderful education being provided by the Sisters and in that year, a group of sisters traveled from New York City to St. Bernard's Parish to open a new school.

Bishop O'Reilly blessed the new school on September 7, 1886, and the next day, over 400 boys and girls entered the classrooms. Here they were to receive what their parents and priests had prayed, worked and sacrificed to achieve—a complete education.

In less than four years, the enrollment of the school had increased beyond capacity. A new three-story building was erected which made it possible for 300 girls to enter their own school, leaving the first school exclusively for boys.

Although the high standards of education did not deteriorate with the years, the building and locality did. It was fitting, therefore, that a new state-of-the-art building be erected in 1966. At that time, the Sisters reimagined the structure and St. Bernard's Elementary School became a co-educational school.

Presently, St. Bernard's Elementary School provides an educational opportunity for students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through 8. The school fulfills a vital function, not only for children from the parish, but from three cities and 11 towns in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, including those of various religious denominations whose parents are seeking an education system built on sound Catholic principles. The school is affiliated with St. Bernard's Parish in Fitchburg, and therefore, part of the Diocese of Worcester.

Overview of School Findings: Foundation Standards

After reviewing and reflecting on the first five standards, the St. Bernard's Elementary School Steering Committee acknowledges that the school is indeed following the mission statement, is functioning properly and has created an inclusive learning environment for staff and students alike. St. Bernard's Elementary School has a strong academic program of studies using highly effective instructional techniques and technological tools to support its students in developing critical thinking and communication skills.

St. Bernard's Elementary continues today as a Roman Catholic Parochial School carrying on the Sisters' motto of "Deeds not Words." In a partnership among teachers, students, parents and its surrounding community members, we pursue excellence in education and emphasize dignity, individuality, responsibility and respect. Together we strive to discover and strengthen our faith and gifts from God.

This self study process has reassured us that St. Bernard's Elementary School continues the Sister's original mission by employing competent and qualified faculty, staff and administration who are committed and passionate in continuing to educate and carry out the school's mission.

Overview of School Findings: Program and Strategic Planning Standards.

The Self Study confirmed that St. Bernard's Elementary School is a very strong, thriving school that lives its educational mission. The Self Study process solidified the school's confidence in its community and its educational program.

St. Bernard's Elementary School provides its students with an outstanding education in a safe and healthy environment-physically, socially and emotionally. The school community believes that the Pastor, the Principal and Assistant Principal, faculty and staff, and families work exceptionally well together to provide students with a well-rounded educational experience in the Catholic tradition.

The school community is very proud of the programs and policies that support the students' experience. Programs and policies are reviewed and updated as needed on a regular basis.

The school community recognizes that, as with every institution, there is always need for self-reflection and innovation. St. Bernard's Elementary School's entire community is committed to continuing those processes of on-going reflection and innovation that has served the school and its students so well.

Legal/Regulatory Documentation

Please see the attached documents.

Related Files

- [2023_03_08-13_13_NEASC - St. Bernard Parish Elementary School Tax Cert ST-2 Document.pdf](#)
- [2023_03_08-13_15_NEASC - Non-Discrimination Policy p. 9 Parent Student Handbook 2022 - 2023.docx](#)
- [2023_03_08-13_17_Enrollment - How to Apply for Financial Aid 2022-2023.docx](#)
- [2023_03_08-13_18_Fire Inspection Certificate.pdf](#)
- [2023_03_08-13_18_Food Permits.pdf](#)
- [2023_03_08-13_19_Principals Letter-Crisis Plan.pdf](#)

Survey Results

Please see the attached documents.

Related Files

- [2023_02_15-11_34_NEASC_CIS_Faculty_Survey_-_St._Bernards_Elementary_School.pdf](#)
- [2023_02_15-11_36_NEASC_CIS_Family_Survey_-_St._Bernards_Elementary_School.pdf](#)
- [2023_02_15-11_36_NEASC_CIS_Student_Survey_-_St._Bernards_Elementary_School.pdf](#)

Introduction and Overview of Team Findings

Thanks to School

To be completed at the conclusion of the Program Visit.

The Visiting Team would like to thank the administration, faculty, staff, board members, parents, and students for their warm hospitality and care for all members of the Team.

The Visiting Team was made to feel very welcome and was provided with more than enough space to work in the library. Meetings were on time, and all those who attended participated enthusiastically for the school. The school made sure the Visiting Team was comfortable which was shown through the hotel accommodations, well supplied meeting room, delicious meals, and the welcome gift bag.

The St. Bernard's community made every effort to assist the Visiting Team in allowing us to carry out our task in a smooth, flexible, and efficient manner. The Visiting Team wishes to extend our sincere gratitude to the entire school community for making us feel like we were a part of your school.

Overview of Team Findings - Foundation Visit

To be completed at the conclusion of the Foundation Visit.

The Visiting Team found the community of St. Bernard's to be filled with loving and dedicated staff, caring and involved parents (and former parents), supportive clergy and Advisory Board members, and respectful and happy students. The school carries out their motto, "Deeds not Words", every day. The Visiting Team looks forward to learning even more about their school and community during the Program Visit.

Overview of Team Findings - Program Visit

To be completed at the conclusion of the Program Visit.

The Visiting Team observed the welcoming atmosphere of the St. Bernard's Elementary School Community from our Sunday evening reception until our final interview on Wednesday. This was felt with everyone we met whether a student in the hallway, a staff member, or a parent at pick up. The school authentically lives their mission every day. It was a pleasure to experience the Bernardian way.

Foundation Standard 1

Standard

Enrolled Students Align Appropriately with the Mission

School's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Visiting Team's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Explanation of Rating

The Visiting Team agrees with the school's self-rating of SM1. The school community does a wonderful job of living out its mission.

Observations and Conclusions

The Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary founded St. Bernard School in 1889. The school's Mission statement was inspired by Nano Nagle, founder of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her family motto was "Not Words, But Deeds."

Inspired by the motto "Deeds not Words," St. Bernard's Elementary School is a Catholic community of faith, learning and service joined in living Gospel values. In partnership with our families, we strive to develop both academic excellence and compassion for others in our students.

There is evidence of a strong partnership with families. This was demonstrated in the parent survey. Faculty and staff frequently communicate with families. Parents serve on the Advisory Board, and there is a Parent/Teacher Organization that provides support to the school community.

The enrollment process ensures that parents and guardians are involved from the very beginning of a child's enrollment at the school. A Student Intake Form allows the school to gather information and answer questions. Prior school experiences are included along with any other supports such as early intervention, Individual Education Plans, or 504s.

Students and families are interviewed, and all students are screened to make sure they are a good fit for St. Bernard. Students in grades 4-8 are invited to shadow their prospective class for a day to experience the school. This allows new students to experience the Catholic identity of the school for themselves.

Commendations

The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's for the partnerships made with families through consistent communication. The school's partnership with community organizations, such as Messiah Lutheran early child care, assists with the enrollment of families committed to the philosophy of the school. With four Catholic schools in the area it is commendable that the enrollment is strong.

Recommendation 1

The Visiting Team recommends that St. Bernard's update their school website to continue to attract new families.

Recommendation 2

The Visiting Team recommends that the school research how they could entice students who might leave for the local charter school in grade 7 to stay at St. Bernard's.

Foundation Standard 2

Standard

The Governing Body/Board Assures the School Remains Sustainable and True to its Mission

School's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Visiting Team's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Explanation of Rating

The Visiting Team agrees with the school's rating of SM1. St. Bernard's Elementary School has done an exemplary job of pulling together individuals to be a part of their Board that are invested in the school. Most Board members either have children who are alumni or have students enrolled currently in the school. Despite many budgeting issues in years past, the board and current leadership were able to turn everything around.

Observations and Conclusions

Together with the Board, leadership made it their mission to ensure the future of St. Bernard's Elementary School is thought about and planned for. After turning around the budgeting issues the school faced, the Board and leadership proceeded to correct many areas that needed organization and planning. To do this, they spoke with faculty and staff about their healthcare benefits and changed things to help them to save money and dig out of the red. They were also able to apply for various grants that enabled them to earn and utilize the funds in areas that needed rethinking. Using connections they already had and grant money, the school transformed its facilities department and corrected several other areas needing improvement.

St. Bernard's has a long history and likely many grateful alumni. The school is encouraged to utilize its development consultant to identify those that might be potential planned-giving prospects and are willing to leave funds to St. Bernard's in their will. These individuals are normally 'low maintenance' as fundraising prospects. There are many ways to cultivate these donors: sending cards on holidays, having students write personalized letters, and inviting them to big events on campus.

Commendations

The Foundation Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's Elementary School for bringing together stakeholders to form a board that not only has the school's best interest in mind, but also looks to the future and what can be done today to support where the school is going.

Recommendation 1

The Foundation Visiting Team recommends that St. Bernard's Elementary School continue exploring ways that volunteers can help. This includes hosting fundraisers, sponsoring activities at the school or even using their own expertise in ways that benefit the school (this is something St. Bernard's is already really great at identifying and utilizing).

Recommendation 2

The Foundation Visiting Team recommends that St. Bernard's Elementary School continue to explore a capital campaign and other fundraisers (ie- Fun Run, golf tournament, etc.) that will bring more donors into the fold and also allow current community members the opportunity to support the school.

Recommendation 3

The Foundation Visiting Team recommends that St. Bernard's explore alumni giving as well as planned giving.

Foundation Standard 3

Standard

The School's Resources Sufficiently Support Present and Prospective Operation

School's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Visiting Team's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Explanation of Rating

The Visiting Team agrees with the school's self-rating of SM1. St. Bernard's has continuously made strides in the infrastructure of their school and has not lost sight of the need for future planning and execution of those plans. To continue being sustainable in the future, St. Bernard's will need to continue their focus on the three main areas of finances, facilities, and technology.

Observations and Conclusions

Historically, St. Bernard's has recognized areas in the school that have room for improvement (ie- facilities, finances). They have begun to engage an accounting firm to develop a more efficient bookkeeping system. In addition, they have utilized their relationship collateral to revamp their facilities subcommittee and how they manage their time.

St. Bernard's created a revenue stream during the pandemic that utilizes grants from the government and other sources. These grants have supported many capital improvements, technology upgrades, new playground equipment, new curriculum, and professional development.

The School is encouraged to build an Endowment Fund that will provide sustainability in the future and also consider a capital campaign. A capital campaign will allow St. Bernard's to bring new donors from their community and outside of their community into their pipeline. These new connections will benefit the school in the long term not only with financial support but also allow them to put their mission and school in front of people who may not have an affiliation already. Creating best practices and written policies around development activities will provide all stakeholders a structure to follow and reassure donors that the school is using its dollars

ethically and responsibly.

Commendations

The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's for an exceptional job of utilizing the resources they already have as well as creating new revenue streams (through grants) in order to ensure they can sufficiently support all members of the school community.

Recommendation 1

The Visiting Team recommends the Advisory Board and Development Consultant continue to explore growing the development program at St. Bernard's by developing written policies around donations to the school.

Foundation Standard 4

Standard

The School Assures that the Adult Community is Qualified and Organized to Implement the Mission

School's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Visiting Team's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Explanation of Rating

The Visiting Team agrees with the school's rating of SM1. The administration ensures that all faculty and staff are qualified and follow all protocols established by the Diocese of Worcester.

Observations and Conclusions

The Faculty and staff at St. Bernard's Elementary School are qualified by education and experience to complete their assigned positions.

The Principal has been in this position for nine years and is an experienced educator and administrator in both Catholic and public schools.

St. Bernard's teachers are certified, have been certified (some licenses lapsed), or are working towards certification. The administration makes sure that faculty have the basic required certifications when coming on the staff, including SEI endorsements. Stipends and/or coverage are provided for those that need to complete any requirements.

The administration provides professional development that impacts their classes, is timely, and is respectful of teachers'/staff's time. This past year, they participated in PD for reading and writing. They are shifting to Math moving forward.

The school is dealing with the national teacher shortage by trying to offer competitive salaries for their area with a 3% increase yearly. They also take advantage of the resources they have within the school by utilizing faculty as

needed. This year it was noted that a teacher, after 34 years, is retiring and another teacher in the school is moving into that position.

It was noted that the administrative assistant is Servsafe certified as she is also the director of the lunch program.

The school nurse is a registered nurse and works full-time. There are two substitute nurses available to cover as well.

All faculty and staff are also required to follow all guidelines of the Diocese of Worcester for background checks, safety training, and a code of conduct. The Principal, faculty, and staff have the mission of the school as a priority. They support each other and work to ensure that the school runs effectively. When necessary, they each take on roles with more responsibilities than their position to make sure the school continues to offer and maintain the excellent educational standards they provide.

Commendations

The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's faculty and staff for their collaborative spirit. It is evident when talking with faculty and staff that they truly care about the school and its mission.

The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's for their mentoring program of new teachers which provides support and helps to encourage teacher retention.

Recommendation 1

The Visiting Team recommends that the administration continue to support the faculty and staff with professional development opportunities that are meaningful.

Recommendation 2

The Visiting Team recommends that the administration team continue to support the faculty and staff to provide an excellent education to all students.

Foundation Standard 5

Standard

A Proactive Culture of Health and Safety Permeates the School

School's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Visiting Team's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Explanation of Rating

The Visiting Team agrees with the school's rating of SM1. St. Bernard's Elementary School clearly understands that the health and safety of its students and school community are of the utmost importance. The world continues to add challenges, but St. Bernard's is committed to making sure their school is a positive and safe space. A health and safety plan must always be changing and evolving as needed.

Observations and Conclusions

St. Bernard's motto of "Deeds not Words" guides their everyday practices to create a healthy and safe environment.

The school is fortunate to have a committed staff that includes a full-time school nurse and office administrator who also works as the lunch director. The nurse maintains all medical records, completes all screenings as required, communicates with families about any incidents or concerns, facilitates staff training (such as AED, CPR, and First Aid), and also helps with the social-emotional needs of students. The office administrator/lunch director manages all permitting (building inspections, etc.), is ServSafe certified, monitors the food program working with Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School's culinary department, and makes sure the cafeteria is fully monitored by staff. Faculty and staff monitor lunches and recess following a rotating schedule. A walkie-talkie is utilized so that those on duty can reach the nurse or main office if needed. Lunch is ordered in advance via a menu provided by the technical school. Each meal includes milk, fruit, and/or salad.

Drop off and pick up is a well-managed routine. The Principal and a parent volunteer monitor morning drop-off. Parents pull up to a circle at the main entrance and drop students off. PreK students' families pull up and then walk students to the entrance. From 7:45-8:15 am, all students enter via the main entrance. Older students help younger students arrive safely at the before-care program. The main entrance is closed and locked at 8:30 am

and anyone arriving after this time must use the bell to enter. The school utilizes Fitchburg transportation for three buses currently. At dismissal, bus students are called to the lobby, lined up, and then escorted to their buses by a member of the faculty or staff. Parents arriving by car pull around to the back of the building and are directed by a staff member when it is safe to pull up to the front of the school (when buses have left). This staff member announces last names (located on signs on car visors) through a walkie-talkie. Each classroom has a walkie talkie and students are sent down to the office/main lobby as called. There are several staff between the lobby and the sidewalk to direct cars and students safely. The Principal is visible and active at this time as well. School protocol for early dismissals or students being dropped off is that a staff member meets the parent at the door, the student is signed in or out, and brought into the building or out to the parent. This protocol acts to control access to the building.

Each classroom and workspace has a plastic pocket near a hallway door with a First Aid envelope and emergency folder. Each classroom also has a walkie-talkie and a phone that can call the office and/or room to room.

There are cameras at the main entrance as well as the PreK entryway. All outdoor entrances are locked and card readers are on several doorways: the main office, PreK, cafeteria, and the back door.

The school has one AED that has been coordinated with the Fitchburg Fire Department's system so that they can receive data if necessary. The school is looking into a second AED for the 2nd floor. St. Bernard's works closely with the Police and Fire Departments. The liaison officer works with the school on such things as ALICE training and drills. The school works with the fire department to ensure all safety requirements are met and/or exceeded.

The aftercare program is staffed based on students' schedules. Drop-ins are only allowed in emergencies. An iPad with the ProCare program is utilized for check-in/out, snacks, and billing. The program on average has 30 students with 3 adults monitoring. Students are separated by age for safety. Daily procedure: homework gr 3-8 in the library; PreK-gr 2 in the PK room; then games in the cafeteria or outside for play. A staff member monitors each area. The iPad is connected to the main entrance camera so that staff can see who is there to pick up, a staff member meets that person at the door, and then brings the child and walks them out. At least two staff members are on duty until the program closes at 5:30 pm. Healthy snacks and water are available to those that choose.

The school does not currently have a counselor on staff. The nurse and the principal work with students and families as needed. The school has purchased *The Second Step* program piloting with the 6th and 7th grades this year and extending the program to the whole school the following year. St. Bernard's also is looking to utilize grants from St Paul Consortium and Health Alliance to assist them in working to support the social-emotional needs of their students.

The Foundation Visiting Team recommends that St. Bernard's continue to maintain the health and safety protocols and procedures set in place currently. In addition, the school should work to enhance the tools to respond to the social-emotional needs of their students as challenges from the outside world develop.

Commendations

The Foundation Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's Elementary School for:

1. Having a Registered Nurse on staff full time
2. Organized, safe, and fully staffed drop off and pick up procedures
3. Partnering with community agencies such as Fitchburg Police and Fire Departments for their expertise
4. Accessing grant money to aid in the funding of health and safety needs

Recommendation 1

The Foundation Visiting Team recommends that St. Bernard's Elementary School implement a Social Emotional program such as *Second Step* as planned.

Recommendation 2

The Foundation Visiting Team recommends that St. Bernard's Elementary School look into the possibility of hiring a counselor - at least part time.

Foundation Visit Key Recommendations

Key Recommendation 1

The Visiting Team recommends that the school update their current website to help attract new families to the school.

Key Recommendation 2

The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue growing their development program by developing written policies around donations to the school.

Key Recommendation 3

The Visiting Team recommends that the school look into the possibility of hiring a counselor, at least part time, and implements the Second Step Social Emotional program.

Program Standard 7

Standard

Commitment to Mission and Core Beliefs Informs Decisions, Guides Initiatives and Aligns with the Students' Needs and Aspirations

School's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Visiting Team's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Explanation of Rating

The Visiting Team agrees with the school's rating of SM1.

St. Bernard's Elementary School's commitment to its mission is reflected throughout the school and community.

Observations and Conclusions

The school community is passionate about the mission and how it is lived within the school. It was obvious that the mission is indeed what informs decisions, guides initiatives, and aligns with the students' needs and aspirations. There are many examples of the mission being lived, including the mission statement displayed throughout the building, students reciting the mission at the beginning of the day, and the many service projects accomplished throughout the year. The Pastor supports the mission and the school. Families also are living the mission in their work running the PTO.

After meeting with the pastor and the principal, and some faculty members, it is very clear that the mission is lived at St. Bernard's Elementary School by all. The Catholic identity in the school is visible in many ways - statues, holy items, Bibles, and posters with the Mission statement displayed and their motto "Deeds, not Words" - but more importantly the mission of the school is lived. The love and dedication of the teachers and staff is evident through the students. Their actions show kindness and compassion and truly follow the ways of God. The middle school students show great leadership to the younger students through their Book Buddy program, sitting with their buddies at Holy Mass, organizing and implementing events for the younger students - pumpkin decorating contest, Trunk and Treat, dances - as well as coordinating fundraisers to raise money for the school.

The students are happy and motivated to be their very best.

The Advisory Board members are dedicated people who love St. Bernard's Elementary School and strive to make the school viable for years to come. Most of them are related to the school as a Bernardian, parent, grandparent, or 2nd and 3rd generation. The history of the school celebrating the Sisters of the Presentation is clear and vibrant and reflected in the Nano Nagle statue and related books for all to read. The board members' relationship with the principal allows all facets of the school - finance, planning, facilities, marketing, and development - to work together and serve the needs of the students. They feel strongly that the leadership of the school is the foundation of the faith, learning, and service at St. Bernard's Elementary School, and decisions and operations are grounded in the mission for the betterment of the school. This strong relationship between administration and advisory board helps to ensure sustainability and exemplify the mission.

The parents of St. Bernard's Elementary School students were very happy to report that their children feel supported, valued, and known by the whole school community. The deeply grounded faith taught and lived at the school is one of the main reasons parents reported for choosing St. Bernard's Elementary School. Communication and partnership with families and faculty was another important factor. Families who joined St. Bernard's Elementary School from other schools stated it was obvious to them that safety was a priority here and that this was a contributing factor in their decision.

St. Bernard's Elementary School is involved in many outreach activities in the community fulfilling their mission of service to others. Within the school, students work to help and support each other, and join together for service projects.

Commendations

The Visiting Team commends the school for its full commitment to its mission, which is demonstrated in many ways throughout the school and community.

Recommendation 1

The Visiting Team recommends that the school continues with its plan to review and evaluate the mission statement and the needs of the school and community.

Program Standard 8

Standard

Commitment to Inspiration and Support Characterizes the Approach to Each Student

School's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Visiting Team's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Explanation of Rating

The Visiting Team agrees with the school's self-rating of SM1.

St. Bernard's Elementary School fosters deep relationships with all members of the community.

Observations and Conclusions

The dedicated staff at St. Bernard's Elementary School and community work together consistently to build a safe and caring environment for all learners. The school works with the outside community to provide the students with services and opportunities to grow and learn. The school promotes a sense of continuous positivity through the motto of the Presentation Sisters, "Deeds Not Words", and members of the school community live it both in school and out.

St. Bernard's Elementary School has a Reading Support Teacher and a SPED tutor on staff. The students they work with may have an IEP, 504 plan, be referred by teachers, or identified through standardized assessments. The Reading Support Teacher and SPED tutor work collaboratively to support all students. Students also have the opportunity to meet with classroom teachers after school for extra help. If a child needs support at an outside school, families coordinate the scheduling with that school. The nurse confidentially informs all teachers of any student who may have a medical diagnosis or an IEP. A parent who was interviewed stated that she was extremely happy with the accommodations made for her child who has a 504 plan from the public schools, and that the plan was being followed exactly as stated. St. Bernard's Elementary School works to make sure all students' needs are met.

There are multiple opportunities for students to join extracurricular activities including class officers, student council, the spring musical, band, choir and drama for the older students, as well as, science and cultural fairs, and Crazy 8 Math club for the younger grades. They also have flag football, basketball, and field hockey.

A sense of community is felt in every classroom. Students in grades 5 and 6 reported they felt welcomed at St. Bernard's Elementary School when they arrived in 3rd and 4th grade. This was observed through discussions in upper grades where students felt safe to share thoughts out loud. In the kindergarten classroom, at morning meeting circle, they sang a song about saying hello to everyone and we are happy you are here. The teacher also used this time to teach the students the appropriate way to greet each other (eye contact, clear voice). The PreK and Kindergarten classrooms were observed reciting the Mission statement after the Pledge of Allegiance. In the grade 1 classroom, we observed students playing a math game using dice in groups of two, and in the grade 5 classrooms, we observed students working together in groups on Native American posters. Eighth grade students collaborate ideas to come up with a theme for their year and create a large mural on the outside of the building including a quote that they feel represents them as a class.

Relationships at St. Bernard's Elementary School between the students and the staff are obvious. The staff engages with students on a personal level asking questions such as, "Did you get a haircut over the weekend?" Students in fourth grade worked in small groups to help each other during a grammar lesson. Middle School students stated that they are comfortable to share ideas about their learning due to the strong relationships they have with their teachers. The 5th and 6th grade students we spoke with said the best thing about St. Bernard's Elementary School is the teachers. They expressed that the teachers are incredibly kind, super nice, and make learning fun. The Pastor expressed his pride with the way the children treat each other during the school day.

Students are learning independence from PreK to grade 8. The children start gaining autonomy from the start of their school career until they finish and graduate. Examples of this can be seen in first grade with homework folders, second grade has their agendas where they write their assignments, third grade is given an extra responsibility, and this continues throughout the older grades.

The school has just started the Second Step Program to promote Social Emotional Learning and address concerns especially due to COVID. The program will provide students with key support and strategies that they can use now and in the future. The school collaborated with St. Bernard's High School and other schools to secure a grant to allow an adjustment counselor to be available at the schools.

Accommodations are made for different learning styles. We saw saucer seats, fidget tools, and spaces for private time for children to use bouncy seats. Students were also observed learning at their desks, in small groups, and whole group on the floor.

The school provides opportunities for older and younger students to interact and work together. One of the ways mentioned most often was Book Buddies which meet every Friday. Eighth grade students stated that they sit with their buddies at Mass. Older students were observed escorting younger children to their classrooms in the morning. The PreK and fifth grade students work together to make 'Easter baskets' for nursing home residents. The third grade school students spearhead the Haitian Relief Program. The teachers mentioned that the younger students get excited to see their older buddy around the school. A teacher shared that this creates a strong bond within the school community.

Commendations

1. The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's Elementary School on their ability to continuously create a community where all members feel safe and welcome.
2. The Visiting Team commends the school for its diligent work at securing the funding to employ an adjustment counselor.

Recommendation 1

The Visiting Team recommends that the school communicates clearly and concisely any information concerning students with IEPs, learning difficulties, and medical conditions with all necessary staff.

Program Standard 9

Standard

Commitment to Excellence Distinguishes the Program

School's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Visiting Team's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Explanation of Rating

The Visiting Team agrees with the school's rating of SM1.

St. Bernard's Elementary School's program consistently reflects their mission and promotes excellence in all aspects of school life.

Observations and Conclusions

Curriculum is a priority of the school. They have developed a timeline to update textbooks. Teachers stated they are given the opportunity to give feedback, pilot programs, and examine new editions of existing programs. An example was given about updating the Math program. Teachers asked to implement a new program, but it did not live up to their expectations and they were able to discuss with the principal and return to the former program. Professional development for each new series is built in and provided for the teachers.

Teachers have the freedom to choose materials based on quality and not financial considerations. The teachers informed the Visiting Team that they are not constrained by budget.

Catholic teaching and values are integrated into all aspects of school life. During music the children practice the hymns that they will be singing at upcoming masses. In art, the teacher incorporates religious themed projects throughout the year. It was shared with the Visiting Team that the school selects a Catholic value to promote throughout the year. Evidence was kindness and basic respect.

The school provides outreach programs that support causes brought by students, faculty, and community

members. These causes include Walk for Alzheimer's, Food Drive for the local Food Pantry, Veterans Day celebration, Nursing Home service project, and selling Sunflowers for Ukraine.

The Catholic identity in the school is visible in many ways. Statues, holy items, Bibles, and posters with the Mission statement are displayed, as is their motto "Deeds, not Words."

The teachers at St. Bernard's Elementary School are satisfied with the technology in their classrooms. A projector, document camera, and a laptop are provided for each teacher. Students in grades 4-8 have access to Chromebooks in their classrooms, and the lower grades have access to Kindle Fires. We observed some classes using Chromebooks. Students that do not have computers at home can sign a contract with the school to be given one.

Commendations

1. The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's Elementary School for their strong Catholic Identity.
2. The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's Elementary School for their extensive curriculum planning that is designed to meet the needs of the students.

Recommendation 1

The Visiting Team recommends that the school reinstate programs and projects that were in place prior to COVID restrictions specific to their outreach programs.

Recommendation 2

The Visiting Team recommends the school continue to restore former and investigate new student clubs and extracurricular activities.

Program Standard 10

Standard

Commitment to Continuous Professional Development Permeates the Adult Culture

School's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Visiting Team's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Explanation of Rating

The Visiting Team agrees with the school's rating of SM1.

St. Bernard's Elementary School dedicates time and budget to a robust and meaningful professional development program for their faculty and staff.

Observations and Conclusions

The Principal has emphasized to the Advisory Board/finance subcommittee that a dedicated budget line for professional development is a must. The budget reflects the past 10 years of historicals to make an accurate decision. There are also reserves if the principal finds some type of PD during the school year that was not budgeted. PD is also supported by Title funds.

Reading intervention has been a major focus at St. Bernard's Elementary School. Teachers, including reading support and SPED tutors, have taken courses in a variety of reading instruction methods. According to the Principal, teachers are allowed to choose professional development classes they are interested in, and they are given time to attend them. Paraprofessionals are welcome to attend professional development either with the teachers or on their own. The Principal states that focusing on Math will be the next priority. She states that this will begin shortly after the Self Study visit is complete. Collaboration between faculty, reading support team, and SPED tutor shows dedication and ensures the ability to meet the needs of every student.

All teachers have taken or are taking Theology courses to become certified as a Master Catechist. Currently, the Principal and six teachers are Master Catechists, and six teachers are pursuing this certification. Individuals pay

for their own training.

All teachers are CPR and First Aid certified. Training takes place every two years and is supported with Title funds.

The Principal and 6 staff members have completed the SEI (Sheltered English Immersion) endorsement.

New teachers are assigned a mentor teacher. Last year, a teacher began in the middle of the school year and worked collaboratively with another teacher meeting before or after school on a consistent basis. Currently, we were told, a new teacher and their mentor meet together on an as needed basis. The expectation of the Principal is that they meet on a regular basis. This mentor position is a funded (stipend) position. There is no professional development or formal training for this program.

The Principal has served as a chair, assistant chair, and team member for NEASC visiting teams, and a few teachers have served on NEASC visiting teams as well. Other teachers are willing to serve on these teams going forward.

Commendations

The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's Elementary School for its dedication and priority to meaningful professional development.

Recommendation 1

The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue to develop a comprehensive, formalized process to effectively mentor new teachers to the St. Bernard's Elementary School community.

Recommendation 2

The Visiting Team recommends that the school follow through with their plan for professional development in math to be initiated for all teachers.

Program Standard 11

Standard

Commitment to Engaging with the Greater Community Enhances Student Experience

School's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Visiting Team's Rating

Standard Met (SM1, SM2): The students' experience is supported.

Standard Unmet (SU1, SU2): The students' experience is compromised.

SM1. Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

Explanation of Rating

The Visiting Team agrees with the school's rating of SM1.

St. Bernard's Elementary School is committed to engaging with the greater community to enhance the experience of their students.

Observations and Conclusions

St. Bernard's Elementary School communicates and promotes a community with a sense of belonging through a monthly "What's New- St. Bernard's Elementary School News". Every grade highlights the happenings in their classrooms. Gradelink allows teachers to send an email blast about school events and happenings. Teachers are available during 'office hours' for extra help. Each teacher keeps an open line of communication with families via email, notices, handwritten notes, Gradelink, phone calls, or even texts when appropriate. They have an open-door policy. The school uses 'Thursday envelopes' (weekly communication), as another way to contact parents. The Principal also sends hard copies as a pdf and uses Gradelink for schoolwide text messages. The school shares with the Parish a monthly newsletter in the bulletin.

St. Bernard's Elementary School connects with their alumni and the surrounding communities through many different activities.

The school includes the community in their Veterans Day assembly. Teachers have had their family members and alumni, who are in the military, come in and speak with the children. Volunteers for Reading Day is a great way to get alumni and community members involved. St. Bernard's High School students (school alumni)

volunteer in the classrooms and school community fulfilling community service hours. The school also reaches out to alumni to be judges for the "one act plays". The Advisory Board also participates in school events, for example some of them have been judges at the Science Fair. The Holiday Fair brings in parishioners and community members by advertising on the sign out front and through their social media sites. The Grandparents Luncheon is an important community event that includes multigenerational Bernardians. The Mayor, as an alumni and community member, also participates in school events, specifically events, specifically the Eighth Grade dinner.

St. Bernard's Elementary School Advisory Board is working on building a successful relationship with alumni. They mentioned that re-establishing the connection with members of the alumni is a lifeline. They are beginning to utilize an online platform for donor management that will also be a database of St. Bernard's alumni. The board mentioned this would make it possible for current students to give back in twenty years. The parish is bringing people together that did not go to school in this building. They would like a full-time Development Officer to find the connection and pay attention to detail to make it better and better.

Students at St. Bernard's Elementary School are taught to address social and ethical issues in accord with Catholic Social The school gives back to the community with various outreach projects including care packages for soldiers, Christmas Cards, holiday hat/glove tree, Haitian backpacks, collecting socks at St. Patrick's Day, and Easter/May baskets. During Catholic Schools Week, the school honors local veterans, first responders, nurses, etc. with gift baskets. The gift baskets were added as a special treat after COVID. Parents attend and participate in school activities such as the Cultural Fair, (coming back now because of COVID), Veterans Day celebration, Reading Day, and Grandparents Luncheon.

Parents stated that the school collaborates with them effectively and appropriately. They said teachers reach out when necessary to share concerns, positive feedback, and answer questions in a timely manner.

Commendations

1. The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's Elementary School for its strong communication through a variety of platforms.
2. The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's Elementary School for its commitment to outreach projects.

Recommendation 1

The Visiting Team recommends that the school work to grow its alumni database to enhance the work their development team is doing to begin their first Annual Giving campaign and Endowment Fund.

Major Commendations and Recommendations

Major Commendations

1. The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's Elementary School on their ability to continuously create a community where all members feel safe and welcome.
2. The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's Elementary School for their strong Catholic Identity.
3. The Visiting Team commends St. Bernard's Elementary School for their ability to recruit and retain talented members of the Advisory Board.

Major Recommendation 1

The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue to develop a comprehensive, formalized process to effectively mentor new teachers.

Major Recommendation 2

The Visiting Team recommends that the school continues to explore options to replace the heating system of the building and work towards creating a partnership with the Diocese of Worcester for solar energy.

Ratings Table (rev 020720)

Ratings Table (rev 020720)

For each applicable Standard, please:

1. Enter the school's self-rating and the Visiting Team's rating in the first two columns.
2. Enter an X in the column for "Unmet Rating?" if the Visiting Team's rating is an SU1 or SU2.
3. Enter an X in "Differing Rating" if the Visiting Team's rating differs from the school's self-rating.
4. Enter an X in the last column to indicate that you have provided evidence for an unmet or differing rating within the text of the *Visiting Teams Report*.

Skip any Standards which do not apply.

	School's Self-Rating	VT Rating	Unmet Rating	Differing Rating	Evidence Provided for Unmet/Differing Rating (page number)
Foundation Standard 1	SM1	SM1			
Foundation Standard 2	SM1	SM1			
Foundation Standard 3	SM1	SM1			
Foundation Standard 4	SM1	SM1			
Foundation Standard 5	SM1	SM1			
Foundation Standard 6					
Program Standard 7	SM1	SM1			
Program Standard 8	SM1	SM1			
Program Standard 9	SM1	SM1			
Program Standard 10	SM1	SM1			
Program Standard 11	SM1	SM1			
Program Standard 12					
Program Standard 13					
Strategic Planning Standard 14	SM1	SM1			