



Executive Summary

Saint Ambrose School

Diocese of Metuchen

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Introduction

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

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

Description of the School

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

St. Ambrose School has a student body of approximately two hundred students from pre k3 through 8th grade. The school day begins at 7:40 and concludes at 2:10, for a total of 6.5 hours daily. The school is located in Old Bridge Township which lies in the southeast portion of Middlesex County. Old Bridge occupies 42 square miles and has an approximate population of 60,000 and growing. The students of St. Ambrose are primarily residents of Old Bridge, but the school does draw from neighboring towns.

The student body of St. Ambrose is ethnically diverse. Besides Caucasian, some of the cultures represented at our school are Asian (including Indian and Filipino), Hispanic and African-American. This mix is a good representation of the cultural make-up of the neighboring area.

St. Ambrose is fortunate to have a long-tenured faculty. Many of our teachers have been at St. Ambrose for their entire career. The average length of service is over 20 years. Every member is New Jersey State certified and 33% also have masters degrees.

There have been significant changes at St. Ambrose School and Parish in recent years. During the summer of 2012 we welcomed a new principal and office staff. Then, in 2013, Father Jack Grimes became the Pastor and there were staff changes in the parish office as well. This area of Middlesex County would be considered middle to upper middle class. The overall economic conditions and the rise in number of single parent households presents a challenge. The issue of high property taxes in the area also creates a deterrent to parents choosing a Catholic school education over the free public school education available. The Old Bridge Public School system is beginning a full day kindergarten for the 2014-2015 school year. It is expected that this may have a negative impact on our future kindergarten enrollment. St. Ambrose holds events that are open to the community and beyond. The largest of these is our annual carnival. Our food bank and financial assistance which are run by the St Vincent DePaul Society are available to any Old Bridge resident in need. We sponsor Boy and Girl Scout Troops. We are a member of the Old Bridge/ South Amboy/ Sayreville Chamber of Commerce. We hold an annual walkathon that The Sisters of St. Joseph, who once taught here at St. Ambrose, initiated. We partnered with a local karate school to raise money for The Make a Wish Foundation. Every grade level adopted a family that was affected by hurricane Sandy. We are one of the training sites for those volunteers needing to fulfill the requirements for Protecting God's Children.

School's Purpose

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

The mission of St. Ambrose School is to enable our children to grow in knowledge and love of learning within a faith-based community that fosters spiritual and moral development as well. Our standard of excellence in education is designed to inspire every child to reach their full academic potential in a safe, stimulating, and nurturing environment.

St. Ambrose academics, consistent with the Diocese of Metuchen, Catholic school, and Common Core Standards, are taught by an experienced, accredited faculty, always guided by the Master Teacher, Our Lord, Jesus Christ. In addition, St. Ambrose provides a full range of physical and athletic opportunities, fine and performing arts instruction, state-of-the-art technological facilities, and exciting extracurricular activities.

Our ultimate goal is to foster students whose solid foundation of spiritual, social, and academic experiences will enable them to continue toward a life of responsible, moral, and joyful Catholic adulthood.

As a proud Catholic school we include faith teaching in our daily academic routine; our children are immersed in the biblical and liturgical traditions of the Church. All the children in our school, whether Catholic or non-Catholic, benefit from the safe, warm, and nurturing environment appropriate to our school's Christian traditions and values. The children attend Mass weekly and participate in frequent prayer services. The Christian spirit consistently infuses everything we do, across all curricular and social venues.

St. Ambrose School encompasses and conforms to the Diocese of Metuchen, Catholic school, and Common Core Standards, and teaches through the lens of our Catholic faith and values. We are a Pre-K - 8 institution that strives to provide a diverse and challenging educational experience for all of our students. We respond to our students' wide spectrum of learning styles and varying ability levels through a variety of effective pedagogic strategies. We adhere to the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment cycle via differentiated instruction, formative assessment, state-of-the-art technology, and on-going evaluations. Our curriculum includes religion, reading/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, technology, music, art, physical education, and Spanish.

We are proud to offer a variety of both intramural and interscholastic sports for every skill level including soccer, basketball, softball, track, cheerleading, baseball, and bowling. Our extracurricular activities include the game club, glee club, musical instrument instruction, cooking club, Spanish club, drama club, student council, chess club, lector club, debate club, tech team, Mini-Vinnies, Spanish dance, teen choir and our award winning academic challenge teams.

Our vision is to enable students to perform to the best of their abilities in all academic disciplines. While doing so, we guide them to follow in the footsteps of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, via instruction and example. Our school combines education with love, compassion, and the teachings of the Catholic Church, rendering a community of educators and students we are proud of. Our mission, guided by the Holy Spirit, is to prepare our children to tackle life's future challenges with courage and to take advantage of future opportunities with skill, enthusiasm, and optimism.

The staff of St. Ambrose School believes that the purpose of a Catholic school education is to develop in our students true gospel values, a hunger for knowledge, and the ability to satisfy a healthy curiosity through the utilization of technology and other information resources. We endeavor to teach not only by pedagogy but by modeling Christian values as we instruct and interact with the children. We strive to prepare for the Lord "a perfect people" who will function happily and productively in society at large, while sharing the Good News.

Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

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

St. Ambrose School has recorded a number of achievements and recognized several areas of improvement over the past three years.

- Through collaboration with the entire school community we revised the school's mission statement to better reflect our faith, values, and goals as we continue to evolve in the 21st century.
- Graduating 8th graders have earned acceptance to many prestigious high schools, including Regis High School, Marine Academy of Science and Technology, Allied High School for Biomedical Sciences, Technology High School, Christian Brothers Academy, St. Joseph's (Met.), and Mater Dei Prep. In addition, the graduates over the past three years have been offered in excess of \$750,000 in scholarships.
- We have vertically integrated our math department, coordinating summer work and making all work available online.
- The school website (www.stambroseschool.net) has been redesigned to make it more functional and more visually appealing. Also, each teacher has their own web page for homework, announcements, and other important information.
- St. Ambrose was asked by the mayor to represent Old Bridge at the NJ Clean Communities conference in the spring of 2014.
- The governor's office invited St. Ambrose students to participate in town hall meetings with Governor Christie on two occasions.
- St. Ambrose has an active and successful selection of extracurricular activities, including sports, clubs, music, dance, drama, and our Minnie Vinnies, who are student members of the St. Vincent DePaul society.
- We have greatly improved our communication with the updating of our website, the increased use of the Honeywell Instant Alert System, weekly web announcement emails, the creation of a Facebook page for the school and pages for alumni, and our smartphone app.
- Students have shown consistent growth in standardized test scores, exceeding the minimum diocesan expectations on average.
- We have an award-winning Academic Challenge team made up of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students.

There are also some areas where we feel that we can improve. We have set the following goals to address some of these areas:

- To increase the spiritual growth of the student body through increased communication and collaboration with the different stakeholder groups in the community. We will create a Spirituality Committee that will work with other parish groups to disseminate information to the community on the important spiritual aspects of St. Ambrose School. This will be accomplished in a variety of ways, including the increased use of technology, including school website, smart phone app, Constant Contact, Honeywell instant alerts, and Facebook.
- To increase the proficiency of the staff in the use of technology in the classroom. This will be accomplished by requiring all faculty members to complete a minimum of 10 hours of professional development with a technology component. This professional development may be self-directed. To assist in the completion of this goal, we will create a web page with online webinar offerings so that teachers may participate in topics they choose and at the time most convenient to them.
- To improve student proficiency in math computation and problem solving. The goal is to achieve an increase of 10% in math scores on the Terra Nova standardized test by the end of the 2017 school year. This will be accomplished in a number of ways, including: visual & graphic depictions of problems; peer assisted learning activities; and systematic and explicit instruction. Teachers will work together to develop uniform strategies and procedures. They will work in conjunction with the technology goal to find professional development opportunities that apply to this goal.
- To analyze the use of technology in the classroom. We will create both a use and a needs assessment. The use assessment will show how technology is currently being used. This will allow us to explore ways to increase the usage. The needs assessment will help us determine the amount and types of technology we currently have, and create a plan to acquire the appropriate hardware and software to meet our growing usage.
- To increase reading scores on the Terra Nova standardized test. The goal is to increase scores a minimum of 2% above the diocesan minimum expected annual growth. We will employ a number of strategies, including differentiated instruction, remedial instruction when

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needed, and increased use of technology including online resources and software. We also will be implementing student portfolios that will allow teachers to track student progress from year to year and to collaborate on best practices to assist each individual student.

Additional Information

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

Through collaboration of the Parish and School's business offices, St. Ambrose School has achieved fiscal stability. St. Ambrose School has, with the support of the Parish Administration, been successful in improving and developing the following areas;

- Use of the science lab for middle school experiments, such as dissections, and the live births of chicks, ducklings and guinea pigs.
- The development of a Science Lab for grades 3, 4 and 5 in the 2014-2015 school year.
- The transformation of our current school music program into a theater/performing arts/music program.
- We have opened up more services/programs to the community: carnival, school musical, parenting workshops (homework help).
- St. Ambrose School has participated in many fundraising events such as: Olivia's Make-a-Wish, Walk-a-Thon for the Philippines, Backpacks for Hurricane Sandy victims, and the Parade for Hunger to replenish the food pantry in Perth Amboy, just to name a few.

Our Home School Association (HSA) works very closely with the teachers and administration to make improvements and provide various fun and educational experiences for our students.