STATE OF THE SCHOOL REPORT

2022 - 2023







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From the Pastor

Dear Friends in Christ.

Salutations! How are you? I hope that this message finds you doing well.

Immaculate Conception Church in Columbia Heights, Minnesota was blessed in 1939 when Father Joseph Lapinski broke ground for Immaculate Conception School. From those humble beginnings, we opened our school doors to students and families and we have continued the tradition of providing a strong Catholic Christian education for the children of our parish and surrounding area. We have grown, improved and made heartfelt efforts to learn as faculty members, administrators, parents and clergy about the best way to foster Catholic and moral virtues as well as to provide an excellent academic education.



As we continue to implement our recent School Strategic Plan developed during our 2023 MNSAA Accreditation, we pray for God to guide our work, ministry, and the education we offer to the children and families of our community.

May the Lord bless you greatly in all that you do!

Peace with Christ,

Father James Peterson



School Theme and Mission Statement

"God is a shield to those who walk with integrity." Proverbs 2:7 Be the Light!



The theme outlined above was our inspiration for the 2022-23 school year at Immaculate Conception School (ICS). Our theme was inspired by the need we recognized to teach on a daily basis how to live with integrity, relying upon Christ as our teacher. We had also discovered a beautiful piece of artwork, entitled *Be the Light*. It spoke to our hearts and minds. Thus, we adopted the phrase "Be the Light!". This has served to remind each of us as to how we live and impact those around us, both near and far. Our dedication is to the powerful role we play in forming disciples of Christ through Catholic education.

Our students returned to the halls of Immaculate Conception School (ICS) on September 6, 2022 with a renewed excitement to begin the school year. Throughout the school year, we have had many experiences both in the classrooms and extracurricular activities offered.

We view each child as a gift and work to enable each of them to realize their many God-given talents and how they can share those with the world. Throughout this report, I will share how our foundation in faith, academics, and service are integral to the education we provide at ICS.

Our work as a school is guided by our Mission Statement that is developed as a part of the accreditation process. As we prepared for our on-site accreditation visit during this past school year, one of our tasks was to develop a new Mission and Philosophy Statement. Our Mission is displayed in the entryway of the school, in offices, on communications and in classrooms. It reads:

Immaculate Conception School is a thriving Catholic community ministering to children within the parish and throughout the surrounding neighborhoods. In the name of Jesus Christ, we are dedicated to fostering academic excellence, spiritual growth, and we hold a strong commitment to becoming disciples in the world.

Throughout this seventh year of the accreditation process, we invested a great deal of time and effort into the Self-Study process. That process will be elaborated upon within this report.



Enrollment

Over the course of 10 years, our enrollment has more than doubled!

2022-23 Enrollment

Pre-K: 26 | 1st Grade: 19 | 3rd Grade: 19 | 5th Grade: 21 | 7th Grade: 23 Kindergarten: 18 | 2nd Grade: 16 | 4th Grade: 18 | 6th Grade: 14 | 8th Grade: 17

Total: 191

Accreditation and Strategic Plan

Immaculate Conception is accredited through the Minnesota Nonpublic School Accreditation Association (MNSAA). Within this process, a strategic plan is developed with objectives, strategies and action steps that ensure we are making continued progress toward goals established during the accreditation process. At the conclusion of each school year, there is an annual report made to MNSAA that summarizes the progress made in the strategic plan.

During this past school year, 2022-23, the school staff hosted a visit from a MNSAA site accreditation team. A full year of self-study is conducted the year prior to the visit. All aspects of the school are studied and a new strategic plan is developed for the upcoming years. During the period of self-study, we examine the work we do and how well it aligns with the standards of MNSAA. Within each standard, a narrative is created and evidence is provided that demonstrates how the standard is met. The on-site visit took place in March of 2023 and in May of 2023, we received feedback from the MNSAA Board with items which need to be addressed. The work on the corrections will occur throughout the summer of 2023.

Our Strategic Plan Objectives are:

The school will provide a personalized learning path for each student.

The school will enhance partnerships and communication with families in the community to ensure our students' needs are heard and addressed.

The school will build a nurturing learning environment

which reflects the Mission and Philosophy.

The school will strengthen its sustainability through communication, marketing, advancement, and governance, building a legacy for future generations.

Our preschool program continues to maintain its accreditation through NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) and license through the Department of Human Services. We also have had eight years of maintaining a 4 Star Parent Aware Rating in the state. This rating allows us to apply for funding to offer our preschool families.

In April of 2019, we hosted a NAEYC assessor to review our preschool accreditation. In preparation for that visit during the 2018-19 school year, the preschool staff worked to review all the essential standards and identify evidence of how we meet the standards. It is a project that deepened our understanding of preschool children's needs and creates a continued program of excellence. We did receive the assessor's evaluation in the early summer of 2019 and we are pleased to report that we continue to maintain our nationally accredited status.

Our Preschool program received a Department of Human Services licensing visit during the 2022-23 school year. The information we receive is invaluable as DHS shares updates to licensing and steps we take to maintain a safe and professional program for our youngest learners. To run a fully licensed, accredited and Parent Aware Rated Preschool is truly an accomplishment!

Professional Growth and Development

Based upon our school's Mission Statement, we are committed to continuous improvement through the development of skills and knowledge, recognizing that this is essential to professional growth. Professional development (PD) is a shared responsibility between the administration and teachers. Increasing the competency of educators increases the level of quality of our school and students' learning and development. PD must be targeted and intentional to help individuals work toward the achievement of goals, therefore, plans should be put in place and reviewed. An Individual Professional Development Plan or goal setting provides each educator with a plan for how to move forward and achieve specific goal (s). The goals are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Oriented/Realistic, and Time-Bound. This will also further the professional development of the entire school.

Professional Development Goals

Goal #1: To continually improve student achievement and ensure deeper understanding of the academic standards measured in our standards-based report cards, instruction driven by reading and mathematics data (NWEA MAP, AIMSweb, educational technology, formal and informal assessments) will be monitored and utilized in curriculum and instructional decisions. School curriculum will be aligned and/or maintained with standards through the accreditation process, using a curriculum mapping process during the 2022-23 school year.



Goal #2: Provide opportunities for professional growth and development in the areas of Blended/Personalized Learning, technology integration, growth mindset, cultural proficiency, social-emotional learning, and differentiated instruction to meet the unique needs of staff and students during the 2022-23 school year.

Goal #3: Provide professional development opportunities that further the understanding and implementation of classroom management approaches, with special emphasis in Responsive Classroom/Developmental Designs and intentional school culture during the 2022-23 school year.



In Goal # 2, technology integration is emphasized to facilitate that we have equipped classrooms with up-to-date technology. We have SMART Boards/Panels that allow for interactive lessons as much of the curricula we purchase has electronic portions for the teachers to use for instruction. We have one wonderful computer lab and a STEAM Lab. Students are blessed with a 1:1 program, whether it be an iPad or a ChromeBook. Teachers are provided with a laptop and iPad as well.

Marketing, Outreach and Advancement

An important element of our school is communicating the excellence we offer through marketing and outreach. This school year, we scheduled evening Open Houses in which interested parents reserved a time to come in for a personalized tour of the school with our Director of Admissions and Principal. We hosted a Preschool and Kindergarten Play Date on Earth Day in which the children received a passport and encountered visits with llamas, learning about plants, decorating a planter and planting seeds to take home! Students also received a gift as they departed. There were 28 preschool and kindergarten children present with 25 families, resulting in a total of at least 75 people present. Many commented about how fun and well planned the event was! In planning ahead, we may again ask Parent Ambassadors to join us on these dates and share the unique viewpoint of the school experience that parents possess.

We have been recipients of generous grants from the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence (CSCOE) and one area they assist greatly is in marketing and admissions. With the grant monies, we utilized exciting marketing strategies during the entire year. We frequently create an ad for the school in the Columbia Heights Jamboree booklet that comes out each summer in preparation for the city festival. Our electronic monument sign in the parking lot on 40th Avenue is vital to communicate and invite guests to upcoming events and invite people to register or visit. We also hired a photographer, Mr. Berndt Photography, to provide us with new photos for the website and marketing materials and for updates for the exterior banners on our building. As part of our retention goals in our marketing grants, we hosted a fun event in having a "traveling scientist" teach the preschool children about wind. They were thrilled with the lesson and demonstration!

A theme that we adopted years ago was one of Beautification. A small committee of volunteers and employees sought to identify areas that needed improvement and beautify our school environment. This beautification process also serves to effectively market the school and parish. Recent additions by this team are new pieces of Catholic artwork and redecorating the St. Francis Room. We also select student artwork each year to frame and display for years to come. This year, we intentionally sought out art pieces that depicted persons of color to

reflect the students' heritage. We have also resurfaced the gymnasium floor each year in order to maintain its beauty. This past year we added excellence to our gymnasium by replacing all of the pads throughout the entire gym.

Through donations from Friends and Alumni of ICS, we installed new bleachers in the gym which was very exciting! With EANS funding we have added a divider curtain which allows more participation in the gym space with separation of teams and activities.

The playground equipment that was put in during 2014 has continued to maintain well with the addition every year or two of new mulch. We did replace the banner on the south wall of the school one year ago and are very pleased with the photograph! All of these pieces of equipment and marketing banners make a strong statement that we are a vibrant school!

A tremendous addition to the school is our sports field that was added during the late summer and early fall of 2018. Soccer continues to gain strength as the students have great interest in this sport.



Marketing, Outreach and Advancement

As stated earlier, one of our strategic planning goals is to strengthen the school's sustainability through communication, marketing, advancement and governance. With that goal in mind, there is work to be done in creating a plan for an Annual Fund along with an analysis of our various fundraisers. Forming a Development Committee may be helpful for the upcoming years. Earlier in the school year, we received a grant which will allow us to hire a Director of Advancement. An individual has been hired and will begin working with the school and parish at the end of the summer, 2023. Once this person is in place, we are confident that more time and energy will be focused on fundraising and development for the school.

We also ask for the alumni to support the school by asking for contributions to our Marathon for Nonpublic Education. The monetary goal for the 2022 Marathon was \$32,500.00, which we did surpass! Our alumni have given generously. We invite them to visit the school and parish for the IC Summer Jam Fun Fest which is scheduled for August 4-6 We sent a beautiful Christmas email home to our school families and alumni this past December of 2022.

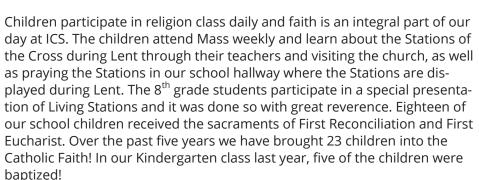




Faith









As a school, we prayed the Rosary in October and May in church and it is prayed regularly in classrooms. Mrs. Pender has taught the 7th graders to find deep meaning in this beautiful devotion. Father James Peterson visits the classrooms preparing religion lessons, answering questions about faith, and assisting in any way possible to increase the Catholic Faith experience for our school community. The children have grown considerably because of his Holy presence.



To add further beauty to the school hallways and entryways, Catholic artwork was added and we continually seek sponsors for the artwork. It is an opportunity for an individual or family to leave a legacy for the school by donating artwork. These beautiful artworks have been important to the strengthening of our Catholic Identity.

Academics

This is the ninth year that we have continued implementing a Blended Learning Model with our students. Nine years ago, we had the tremendous opportunity to work with the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) with the University of Notre Dame to learn about the model. As part of a grant we received from the GHR Foundation, ICS has been able to continue this work with renewed energy through the Higher Powered Learning initiative that the University of Notre Dame is leading. Four of our teachers visited other Catholic schools to observe and learn how to improve our blended learning program. With personalized learning as a part of our new strategic plan, we are focused on continued improvement for the future.

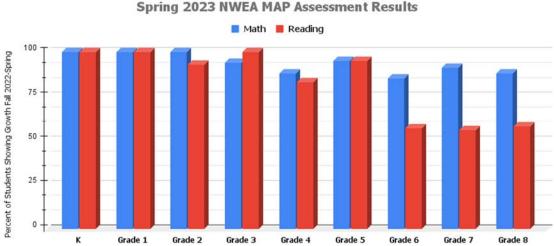
This exciting program challenges our teachers in positive ways to work on integrating technology so we can find the "just right level of learning" for every child. This is accomplished through studying the data made available to us from the assessments we have in place and the software that students work with in class for portions of the school day. Our students have made academic strides in this model and the teachers have had opportunities for professional development.

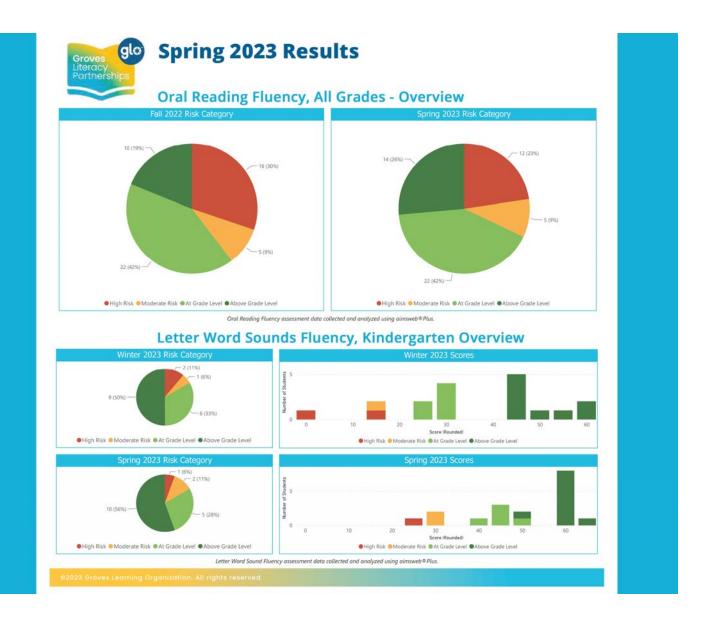
Our students are assessed in their academic growth and achievement in Reading and Mathematics by the NWEA MAP. This Measures of Academic Progress is a unique assessment in that it adapts to each student's learning level as they are taking the computerized test. The data points provided through the NWEA MAP are measured

by national norms and have become invaluable to us as we make instructional decisions for each child, seeking their "just right learning level". A major professional development activity for our staff in this area is our work with an educator through Bluum and initially sponsored by the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence. Our data coach meets with us three times per year and assists us in adjusting our instructional choices to boost student learning.

We completed our fourth year in implementing the Groves Literacy Framework, which is a comprehensive four-year program for reading and spelling instruction designed to prevent reading problems using evidence-based practices supported by educational research. This is an excellent program sponsored by the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence. Our teachers in Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2 and 3 have weekly visits from an on-site coach, Marissa Kinzer, who specializes in this literacy program. Our Groves Coach continues to contact and assist us regularly as well. The evidence is showing growth in our students' literacy scores assessed three times per year with a reading fluency assessment entitled AIMSweb.

A unique feature to our school location is the proximity to the Columbia Heights Library, which is within five blocks. We utilize a Bulk Loan Program for projects in which teachers request a wide selection of materials that enhance a unit of study.





Service



Reaching out to the local and global community is part of our school's mission. In 2022-23, students and staff collected food that was donated to the SACA food shelf. This Advent Season project has become a happy tradition for our school. The food collected is enough to feed hundreds of families. One of the highlights is when the children help pack and load the food onto the SACA vehicle. It makes the experience a bit more real.

During Lent we collected monetary donations from staff and students to donate to Catholic Relief Services for the earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria. This year, our donation of \$1,029.38 will assist the families suffering.

Service

We have not returned to the pre-Covid weekly visits to Crest View on 42nd however, teachers had students create artwork for the residents and delivered these items. These intergenerational bonds are examples of service, and also make a lasting impact on the students' understanding of outreach. The children serve as cantors, lectors, altar servers and help in additional ways when asked.

Students were asked to serve as Ambassadors for our school at our Queen of May Dinner and Auction and the Preschool and Kindergarten Play Date. 8th Grade did an excellent job of raking leaves for a parishioner and helping with Highway Clean-Up through the Lions Club.



Activities

Students have opportunities to participate in activities beyond the classroom in athletics. Our school hosts teams in Soccer, beginning in grade 1. Volleyball and Basketball continue to be very popular sports, beginning with grade 4! This school year, our Athletic Director, Andrew Case, worked hard to recruit children to join teams and find more coaches.

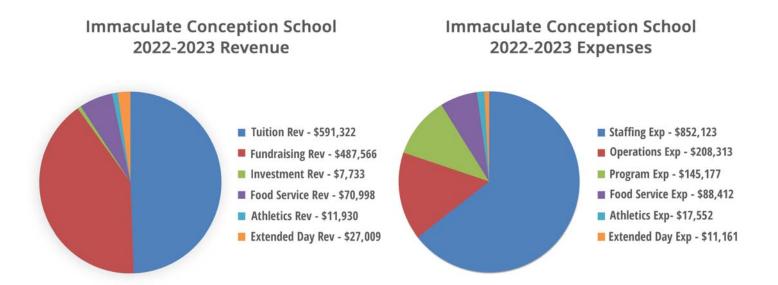


Chorus is a very popular activity this year with approximately 25 students. They sing at our school Liturgy each week, along with being an excellent place for our cantors to develop. Our music teacher Audrey Powell has worked with the singers so they experience joy and growth in their musical talent!

Students may elect to participate in an instrumental band program once they enter 4th grade. We are pleased to offer band lessons through the Totino-Grace Fine Arts Academy. We are grateful for our band teacher from Totino-Grace, Jason Andriano, who worked extremely well with our students!

As part of the music curriculum, students perform in two concerts, Christmas and spring. We did enjoy amazing concerts this year in which Ms. Powell did a great job of integrating the theme of *Be the Light* into the musical selections. Many parents and grandparents attended. These artistic performances and course opportunities enhance the students' educational experience!

Financial Statement



Governance



Our School Advisory Council met throughout the school year. The council's main focus is to make decisions that will benefit the school. The following parents and parishioners were members during the 2022 -23 school year: Chairperson-Michon Felicetta; Vice Chairperson-Meghan Cox; Secretary-Judy Haeg, Members – Jim Boufford, Jennie Fremling, Beth Gauthier, Maria Manoli, John Roche, and Joe Sturdevant. Jane Bona and Fr. James Peterson also serve on the council. As the School Advisory Council membership transitions, there are openings. Please contact Jane Bona to learn more about the work of the council. The school community is grateful for these volunteers who give of their time and talent!

Looking Ahead

Our professional development work with the Higher Powered Learning initiative is sponsored by the GHR Foundation, and we are grateful for these opportunities. This will assist us in growing our work in Blended Learning. We will be purchasing a new religion curriculum during the summer to implement in the 2023-24 school year.

We are also very excited to continue work with the Groves Academy in a literacy partnership sponsored in Archdiocesan schools through CSCOE called Believe and Read. The monthly coaching with a Groves Academy coach is invaluable! This year, our on-site coach is Marissa Kinzer who visits her colleagues' classrooms regularly and facilitates monthly meetings. She has been highly effective in this role. The program is proving achievement gains in K-3 literacy. Congratulations to all five teachers who are certified in this program: Marissa Kinzer, Kathy Kurt, Susan Kulikowski, Keegan McSherry and Amanda Wallrich!

This summer we are offering an at-home Summer Learning program that will be monitored remotely. Students are encouraged to read, practice math skills, attend functions at the local library and utilize the online learning options such as DreamBox, RAZ Kids. All middle school children have learning opportunities posted by their teachers in Google Classroom.

During the summer months, the school is being cleaned along with several special projects. With a grant received from the Catholic Services Appeal Foundation, we are able to repaint four student restrooms, three classrooms and update window shade blinds in a number of rooms. We are grateful for the time and resources to accomplish these tasks to update and beautify!

As principal, I participated in professional development that was offered through the Archdiocese entitled *Educating in a Digital Age.* We have many opportunities for growth offered at our own school site on teacher inservice days throughout the entire school year. CSCOE offers options for all principals to grow in their knowledge and skills in order to serve effectively. We also are part of the Higher-Powered Learning Network through ACE at the University of Notre Dame. This addresses our continued goal to grow in how we provide Blended Learning instruction for our students. Four of our teachers visited other Catholic schools to observe their classrooms in action.

The Archdiocese has identified ten schools as Drexel Mission Schools and our school is one of these. The three criteria are having at least 50% of students from communities of color, having at least 100 students enrolled and having 50% or more of the student body eligible for free or reduced lunches. The initiative is targeted at reducing the achievement gap and providing continuous academic improvement. With this identification, we now participate in the City Connects Program. This program originated from Boston College, and is in place throughout the country and our Archdiocesan urban schools. The City Connects model offers a defined, evidence-based practice for a counselor or school social worker to collaborate with teachers and principals to support every student by assessing the strengths and needs of each student and connecting students with a tailored set of supports and resources from inside and outside the school. We see this as a great opportunity for our students and families.

Fr. James Peterson and Jane Bona were blessed to be invited on a pilgrimage with the other Drexel Mission School principals, pastors and Archdiocesan leadership to Philadelphia, the home of St. Katharine Drexel. We celebrated Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul on her Feast Day, March 3. Her Shrine is within the Cathedral. We learned a great deal about her life and her mission. The pilgrimage included tours of the national shrines of St. John Neumann and St. Rita of Cascia. We also visited the Independence Mission Schools in Philadelphia, learning about how other cities structure their mission school initiatives. It was a pilgrimage of great blessings and inspiration for each of the school leaders to return to our schools and continue our mission in Catholic education!



Celebrations and Success

Our 14th annual Queen of May Auction to Benefit Catholic Education was celebrated Friday May 5! What an incredible celebration. Attendees were thrilled with excellent auction items, a delicious menu and the mission of ICS in our hearts! Donors have been generous by providing \$35,000 in donations prior to the event beginning. We were able to achieve \$168,000 in total profits including our Fund The Future! During the evening, we honored Fr. James Peterson and acknowledged his support of the Queen of May and the school throughout his tenure at ICS. We are humbled to know that many people believe in our school and are thrilled with such a successful event!



During the summer of 2022, we welcomed new teachers, Inga Schierkolk as our 4th grade teacher and Alyssa Doyle as our middle school math teacher. Alyssa is in the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE). Both of these fine teachers have been tremendous additions to

our staff. Our City Connects Coordinator position was expanded to full time through Drexel Mission School Funding and we hired Chelsie Moore Bennett in this very important role. Having a full time counselor on staff has helped our students. We continue to learn more about the City Connects program and are grateful for this opportunity. Audrey Powell and Jason Andriano taught music and band this year, continuing our partnership with the Totino-Grace Fine Arts Academy.

We are elated to be recognized for our hard work and growth by the honor of the Readers' Choice Awards from *The Life Newspaper*. In January 2023, we were named as Best Private School.

Marissa Kinzer continues her work on a master's degree through the University of St. Thomas with an emphasis in reading. We offer congratulations and blessings to Marissa who is engaged to be married this summer. In May we were excited to offer congratulations to Keegan McSherry who was married in May. So much to be grateful for!

As always, it is difficult to say farewell to faculty members but understand when individuals move away from the area and seek work closer to a new home. We express our gratitude for the years of teaching that Ceclia Kuka and Elisabeth Pender have dedicated to our school. As staff and students, we have grown in knowing each of them and are blessed with gifts beyond measure because of their talent.

Susan Kulikowski is retiring after 24 years of teaching in our school! We are blessed to have Susan returning to us next year in a part time position as a Learning Interventionist. She will continue to teach children in small groups focusing on reading, math and writing skills.

We were notified that our wonderful pastor, Fr. James Peterson is assigned a transfer effective July 1. These transitions are always a challenge as we have grown in many ways under the kindness and wisdom that Fr. James has provided us as our shepherd. Fr. James leaves a legacy in our church and school of joy, strength and light. We will welcome Fr. Matthew Quail in the months ahead and look forward to growing under his guidance.

As principal of this growing and vibrant school, I certainly know what it is like to be a part of a bright parish and school community. I often compare our parish and school community to a beacon in the Columbia Heights Community. Thank you for believing in our school and being united with the children, families and staff in prayer, and in our mission to do the work of educating children in academics, service and the Catholic Faith.

Be the Light!

Jane Bona, Principal

Immaculate Conception School

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