

U.S. Department of Education
2018 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[] Public or [X] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [] Title I [] Charter [] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Ms. Joanne Kowit

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name St. Thomas The Apostle School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 333 State Route 18

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

Old Bridge NJ 08857-1459
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Middlesex

Telephone (732) 251-4000

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Web site/URL http://www.sttaob.com

E-mail jkowit@sttaob.com

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Mrs. Ellen Ayoub E-mail edayoub@diometuchen.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Metuchen Tel. (732) 562-2446

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mrs. Peggyann Feehan

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

1. The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2018 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2012 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2017.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
10. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
11. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2017-2018) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - Middle/Junior high schools
 - High schools
 - K-12 schools
- TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban
 - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2017 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	19	25	44
K	7	16	23
1	16	27	43
2	26	27	53
3	25	14	39
4	14	21	35
5	30	27	57
6	27	17	44
7	21	15	36
8	27	13	40
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	212	202	414

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 16 % Asian
 - 12 % Black or African American
 - 13 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 58 % White
 - 1 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2016 – 2017 school year: 6%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain.

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	16
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	25
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	397
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.06
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Spanish, Arabic, Tagalog, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Italian

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %
1 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 0 %
 Total number students who qualify: 0

8. Students receiving special education services: 3 %
13 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>8</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>12</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 6

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	22
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	4
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	16
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 22:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2012	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	97%	96%	97%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2017.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

Saint Thomas the Apostle School educates minds and hearts through the integration of a challenging curriculum and a firm faith in our Lord and our God. We do this for our students by supporting diversified achievements, respectful leadership, and Christian service to God and Community.

PART III – SUMMARY

Saint Thomas the Apostle Roman Catholic School is located in Old Bridge, New Jersey. The school is under the auspices of the Diocese of Metuchen and is a ministry of Saint Thomas the Apostle Church.

During the 1950s, thousands of young families, many of whom were Catholic, moved into the Old Bridge area from northern New Jersey and New York. Father Walter French, then Pastor of Saint Thomas the Apostle Church, became committed to serving the children of the community by establishing a Catholic elementary school.

Construction of the new school building began in July, 1959. In the meantime, under the guidance and supervision of the Daughters of Divine Charity, the old parish hall in East Brunswick was renovated to house temporary classrooms. Classes began on September 15, 1959 with 154 children comprising grades one, two, and four.

The new school, with sixteen classrooms and additional Divine Charity Sisters, opened on September 19, 1960. This building which is still used today, accommodated grades one through six. Transportation was provided by a school bus acquired with 8,000 S&H Green Stamps.

Saint Thomas the Apostle School, continues to grow in enrollment and currently serves students in grades pre-K to eight and to attract a culturally diverse student body. The racial and/or ethnic composition includes sixteen percent Asian, thirteen percent African American, thirteen percent Hispanic or Latino, and fifty-eight percent Caucasian students from numerous surrounding towns within a bustling suburban environment. To meet the challenges of our diverse community, an ESL (English as a Second Language) instructor is available. Additional support in all areas is also provided by classroom Aides that help serve all students from pre-school through grade three.

To meet the demands of a 21st century education, Saint Thomas the Apostle embarked upon a rigorous restructuring of curriculums, instruction, assessments, scheduling, educational initiatives and even classroom design. Understanding that students must be both actively engaged and responsible for their learning, teachers refocused their efforts to individualize instruction. This included providing accommodations for some, modifications for others, and challenging learning opportunities for all. This educational transformation has enabled teachers to provide student-centered instruction and opportunities for cooperative learning.

A block schedule replaced the traditional 40-minute per class schedule in grades five through eight. Math and Language Arts meet for 60 minutes, five days per week, while ancillary subjects meet for 120 to 180 minutes per week. This allowed for more time on task and a more flexible and productive classroom environment. It also allowed teachers to use more process-oriented strategies. Students are able to participate more actively in the learning experience, share stronger relationships with their teachers, and enjoy participating in cooperative grouping. This schedule also permits time for class projects, "hands-on" instruction, and additional flexibility in assessment.

In an effort to prioritize improving our students' emotional and physical well-being, a tumbling gym was built for the youngest students where social skills, music, and rhythm are optimized daily. In this program, students engage in activities that focus on all intelligences from interpersonal to linguistic and visual/spatial to music. Every element of development can be addressed through a quality movement program. The Saint Thomas the Apostle tumbling curriculum strengthens the students' physical abilities (gross motor skills), their ability to listen, follow directions, and socialize. Incorporating dance and music into the program further enhances agility, coordination, and confidence.

A significant accomplishment for Saint Thomas the Apostle was becoming the first Catholic school in New Jersey to declare itself a Stephen Covey Leader In Me school. This international program engages every student and staff member in creating a culture that celebrates personal and interpersonal leadership skills. It also complements many of the tenets of the Catholic Church with regard to values, self-discipline, kindness,

and a passionate, faith-based commitment to service. Religion classes taught on a daily basis emphasize knowing Christ and following His example in word and deed. As a result, students feel safe and cared for in a loving Christian environment.

Based on the "7 Habits of Highly Effective People", the Leader in Me is predicated on the premise that every child has the ability to be a leader. The implementation of The Leader in Me program has been transformational for Saint Thomas the Apostle. The program has allowed teachers opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge to empower students. As a result, the school culture of top-down responsibility has been completely transformed. Students are allowed and encouraged to take on new roles traditionally filled by staff. Activities and routines are now delegated to the students. From student-led morning prayers and announcements to student-led school events, a new, shared vision for the school has been created that celebrates personal leadership development.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The Language Arts program is based on a rigorous curriculum and differentiated teaching practices designed to foster active learning and critical thinking. Beginning in kindergarten, specific, evidence-based recommendations are utilized to teach foundational skills that support reading and comprehension. Developing an awareness and recognizing sounds of speech and words, decoding, vocabulary knowledge, linking letters, reading comprehension, and fluency all contribute to the eventual goal of empowering students with the skills necessary to become independent learners and critical thinkers.

Through collaborative conversation, students learn how to strategize various techniques during the reading process. Emphasis on the “essential question” at the beginning of each lesson focuses and engages the student in a series of fiction and non-fiction stories and articles. Additionally, students are given opportunities to respond in writing, so they become proficient in writing conventions and sentence formation to create meaning in all types of writing from persuasive writing, expository, and narrative.

The repetitive and foundational nature of Language Arts instruction demands that basic skills and standards be addressed at all grade levels. It is imperative students learn strategies and skills and have the ability to apply them in all curricular areas throughout the course of their educational career and beyond.

Probably the most significant change in curricular standards and outcomes have been in the math program. Saint Thomas the Apostle’s math curriculum was updated in 2012, incorporates the Mathematics 12 Learning Standards beginning in kindergarten, follows the logical structure of mathematics, and culminates with every eighth grader completing Algebra I. Adding two highly qualified math teachers for grades five through eight have significantly increased the standardized scores and enabled graduates to qualify for Honors Algebra I and Geometry in high school.

Students begin acquiring foundational skills as a result of teachers implementing and facilitating hands-on math lessons. Additionally, math lessons include group work and multi-sensory centers geared towards tactile, auditory, and visual learners. Students are encouraged to work cooperatively to explore and solve multi-step problems. This approach includes moving the focus in math from computation to problem solving strategies and requires students to demonstrate a greater depth of understanding of a math concept and its application.

Students also participate in weekly technology-based IXL math assessments, as well as daily assessments, such as warm-ups, and interactive white board activities. These activities contribute to students’ understanding concepts on a daily basis.

Saint Thomas the Apostle’s science program uses scientific inquiry and application to help students achieve a solid foundation in scientific literacy. The comprehensive curriculum includes life, physical, and earth science. The science classroom is equipped with individual laptops, a Promethean Interactive Board, and both an instructional area and a dedicated lab where STEM activities are incorporated into the lessons.

Concepts are introduced and engage students by using power point presentations, interactive lessons, and an online text. A fully equipped lab for grades five through eight promotes multiple sensory instruction through readings, online videos, and both virtual and actual labs. Creating illustrations, researching, organizing information, writing assignments, and informal assessments reinforce concepts.

Students have also enjoyed the educational program offered at the Sea Grant Consortium, which identifies marine species native to New Jersey. Additionally, online web-based virtual labs and activities are used as additional reinforcement of these key concepts.

In social studies, students utilize a multimedia approach. The textbook is internet-based, giving students access to relevant videos and presentations. This allows students to apply 21st century, critical thinking

skills in their learning. Students are further engaged by participating in debates, video and audio presentations, role-playing, collaborative learning, and public speaking with regard to politics and local interest stories. Collaborative learning is an essential component of the curriculum, as it encourages students to be not only learners, but also active participants in their world.

In addition to conventional teaching methods, Saint Thomas the Apostle participates in Junior Achievement's Biz Town program. Every year the fifth grade students are able to experience how to apply what they learn in a series of classroom lessons with real life application. This off-site program allows students to participate in an interactive simulated town. Running a business, earning a paycheck, voting in elections, and learning about banking and personal finance are included in this experience. Through this experience, students are able to develop a practical understanding of participation in a real life economy.

Saint Thomas the Apostle's pre-K 3 and pre-K 4 year-old programs promote the healthy development of the whole child across all learning domains. Instruction is designed to address school readiness skills while complementing a vast range of interpersonal relationships. Providing predictable and purposeful activities further allow students to learn through play in both indoor and outdoor environments.

Cognitive and language skills, social skills, math readiness, fine and gross motor skills, and spatial awareness are optimized daily through developmentally appropriate activities. Classes in Spanish, music, and physical education have also been added to the traditional curriculum.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Music and art classes take place in the fine arts classroom for pre-school to grade five. Grades pre-K, kindergarten, one, two, and three meet twice a week. Grades four and five meet once a week. The pre-K classes are thirty minutes long. Grades kindergarten through fourth have forty-minute classes. Grade five has a one-hour block class. Music classes meet from September to mid-January. Art classes meet from mid-January to June. Additionally, Saint Thomas the Apostle hosts an art club, spring musical, talent and art show, and middle school choir.

In music class, students sing, clap, and play rhythm instruments such as boomwhackers and kazoos. In art, each child has the wonder of looking at his or her own personal creation and taking pride their artistic accomplishments. Art class affords them the opportunity to "play" as they paint, squeeze clay between their fingers, or create their own personal statement through design and collage.

Music and art classes also provide opportunities to enjoy the creative process through active engagement. They experience this musically through songs and dance routines performed onstage at holiday shows, faith rallies, and all leadership events throughout the year.

Brain-based learning is considered at Saint Thomas the Apostle to be a comprehensive approach to all instruction. Movement and cognition are closely tied to learning; therefore, physical education is regarded as a relevant and necessary class in the curriculum.

The middle school student schedule allows for two hour-long classes per week. A separate tumble room was built for pre-K through fourth grades for thirty- to forty-minute classes in a sequential, noncompetitive approach to skill development and fitness. Physical education provides an effective, standards-aligned program for all grades and promotes a healthy, active lifestyle to further enhance cognition with movement to engage the mind and the body.

Students attend health classes for one quarter per year. Peer pressure, healthy lifestyles, stress-related topics, bullying and first aid are all included in the 5th through 8th grade curriculum. Additionally, students are also able to attend the local hospital's Fitness and Wellness center for educational seminars.

Saint Thomas the Apostle is in compliance with the program's foreign language requirements. The students are exposed to Spanish beginning in pre-K with thirty-minute classes, which increase in time, scope, and sequence through middle school, where students receive 120 minutes of instruction per week.

The Spanish language program targets the four key language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students engage in simple conversations and immerse themselves in the diversity of the Spanish-speaking world. The program is designed to accommodate varying levels of language learners. Instruction is modified in the classroom to differentiate instruction in a way that ensures every student meets his/her potential. A variety of activities are planned to address different learning styles. The course provides a multimedia approach, which engages students in learning through the use of text, audio, video, and images. Frequent assessments are done to ensure students are on track. In the end, the students will gain skills needed to learn any language and develop an appreciation of the diversity of cultures.

With a clear understanding of the impact of technology on learning, Saint Thomas the Apostle has effectively integrated both instruction and seamless utilization of technological skills in every classroom and in all curriculums.

Every classroom boasts interactive technology (Promethean, Smart, or Mimeo boards). The science lab utilizes individual laptops, and iPads are used throughout every early childhood classroom. Middle school language arts classes use Kindles for reading. Additionally, math, social studies, and science books have digital licenses allowing for unlimited access from any location.

Classes in digital technology begin in kindergarten with forty-minute classes per week, increases to one hour for fifth grade, and doubles to hour-long classes twice weekly for middle school students. The youngest students learn to use age-appropriate online tools and resources, desktop icons, windows, and menus to open applications and documents. They gain proficiency and speed in typing by using a word processing application to write, edit, print, and save assignments.

Student in grades six through eight, with more time on task, are proficient in creating spreadsheets, adding animation to text and graphics, editing color schemes and layout arrangements in a document, creating photo journals, using Google Earth for geographical and mapping tools, and utilizing coding concepts to create animated web pages.

Saint Thomas the Apostle follows the Diocese of Metuchen directives with regard to the religion curriculum in pre-K through grade eight. This includes daily religion classes and sacramental instruction for students receiving Penance, Communion and Confirmation. As a result, students feel safe and cared for in a loving faith-filled environment. Additionally, Saint Thomas the Apostle teaches and encourages students to contribute to the community by becoming active in service projects and volunteerism.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

The faculty at Saint Thomas the Apostle recognizes that not all students learn in the same way or at the same rate. Based on this understanding and combined with creating a learning environment that maximizes a student's success, all teachers engage in differentiated instruction at all levels. Saint Thomas the Apostle also engages students with brain-based learning techniques by combining learning with movement to enhance mood, increase brain mass, and improve cognition.

Teaching schedules for early childhood and intermediate grades allow for extended time on task. Language arts, for example, is scheduled for ninety minutes per day; however, a self-contained classroom allows for additional instructional time if needed. This flexibility allows teachers to create tiered assignments that address student groups according to their readiness and comprehension skills. It also allows students to engage in authentic learning in heterogeneous groups while at the same time benefiting from an intensive and individualized learning environment. The students work at a rate with materials best suited to their individual needs.

Teachers also use a variety of teaching strategies that give a student multiple options for taking in information and making sense of ideas. Each teacher uses whole class and small group flexible grouping. Students with specific learning styles are frequently grouped for instruction. Teachers model instruction for students who then work cooperatively in pairs or small groups to complete activities. Opportunities also

exist to encourage independent practice.

An invaluable asset at Saint Thomas the Apostle is the addition of instructional aides present in every class from pre-K through third grade. This enables teachers to provide more opportunities for small flexible groupings, allowing for differentiated instruction, remediation, or challenge activities to meet the needs of all students. Decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills are better individually addressed with another adult assistant in the classroom.

Classroom teachers closely monitor the progress of all students during direct and independent practice. As a result, varying means of students' assessments are included to measure authentic learning. Assessment techniques include standardized tests, rubrics, and performance-based assessments. By reviewing students' progress each day, teachers are able to plan and re-teach concepts to students who need further assistance while providing extension activities for more advanced students.

The middle school increased class time to accommodate a modified block schedule. This type of scheduling increased learning time in language arts and math classes from 160 to 300 minutes per week. The change in time also increased time on task for religion, science, and social studies. Electives in the middle school (physical education, Spanish, and digital technology) were also able to increase class time to twice weekly for a total of 120 minutes. By increasing class time, teachers are able to vary teaching strategies, address individual needs, and incorporate group activities.

In addition to classroom informal assessments, Saint Thomas the Apostle uses the Terra Nova standardized test as an authentic measure of the Common Core State Standards. Administered once per year in the spring, teachers use the results to evaluate learning gains. It also helps to identify students with achievement gaps and to improve instructional strategies. Technology-based support is offered to students needing intervention. For example, Fast ForWord, by Scientific Learning, is an online intervention program made available to students who are underperforming in reading and comprehension.

The protocol for this web-based program is thirty minutes per day, five days per week, for one calendar year. With parental permission, students are able to access this program in school using iPads with earphone attachments, and at home on the technology of their choice. Fast ForWord aims to remediate the underlying difficulties that keep struggling readers from making progress. It addresses cognitive skills such as memory, attention, and processing speed and is built upon research that shows that the brain has the ability to change itself. Frequency and repetition are key components in this learning process.

Because how students learn is as essential as what they learn, every classroom has been updated to promote a movement-rich environment. Flower, round, or kidney-shaped tables are now available in every classroom, having replaced or complimented the traditional freestanding desks. This encourages a collaborative and cooperative learning environment. Additionally, standing desks and stability ball seating have also been added to allow all students, including those with special needs, to combine movement with cognition, which further encourages engagement and improves learning.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Saint Thomas the Apostle began the process of becoming a Leader in Me school in 2015. This program is an international initiative developed by Franklin Covey and based on "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" by Dr. Stephen Covey. As a Leader in Me School, our educational paradigm shifted from a top down leadership model with some student leaders to an intentional belief that all students have gifts that can be nurtured to promote leadership. This completely changed the culture, the climate, and the academic, social, and emotional growth of both teachers and students.

Beginning in kindergarten and continuing upward through every grade, opportunities were developed for students to incorporate the 7 Habits into their lives. As students began to take ownership, a deliberate, shared commitment for continuous improvement was recognized. Traditionally, a school's success depends upon the strength of its teachers. At Saint Thomas the Apostle, it is the strength of its students that matter.

Students are now responsible for most classroom and office routines and procedures. These include leading prayers and announcements, running assemblies, greeting guests in with a firm handshake and a smile, answering classroom phones, leading service opportunities, and taking ownership of all jobs created within the school.

The faculty received training on how to develop leadership and to understand that every student is capable of becoming a leader. As the school community began to take ownership of the program, they also became involved in all aspects of school leadership. This involved creating a Lighthouse Team of teachers to develop programs and opportunities within the school for both students and each other. Meaningful collaboration exists as an outgrowth of a shared commitment to raising standards and creating leaders. Teachers meet with regularly to share ideas and successes within their classrooms. Through professional development and shared communication, a culture of excellence has been established.

In addition to student recognition, teachers are also valued for their contributions and shared commitment to their students and each other. Every month a teacher is chosen by his or her contemporaries for being kind and sharing their ideas, accomplishments, and support for each other. That recognition, with a certificate and gift, is publicly announced in church at a school-wide Mass.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Teachers at Saint Thomas the Apostle are always eager to share moments, classes, and events with our school and community. Effective partnerships between these groups create supports that enable students to develop self-confidence, raise self-esteem, and enjoy a sense of accomplishment. This partnership also helps develop leadership skills when students participate in service activities and charitable fund-raisers.

Engaging families and community has a two-fold positive effect on the overall success of a school. Students feel supported and encouraged and community members feel invested in the school's success. In the Catholic school tradition, students actively participate in food drives throughout the year for the local soup kitchen, as well as coat drives during the winter months. On a more personal level, and with the help of parents, a Thanksgiving meal is served in the school cafeteria for less fortunate members of the community. During the Christmas season, the eighth grade and the kindergarten visit the local soup kitchen to sing Christmas songs. Parents and students also participate in the mayor's street and park cleanups.

Various programs throughout the year help to further strengthen family and community relationships. Grandparents' Day allows for attendance at a school Mass where students sit with their grandparents, followed by a reception, a student performance, and classroom visits for the special guests. Saint Thomas the Apostle also presents both a Christmas and spring concert, which are open to all friends and family

members.

The fifth graders participate each year in the Old Bridge Police Department's Too Good for Drugs program. This is a local officer-led series of lessons that teaches about drug use, and how to resist peer pressure and live drug and violence-free.

In addition to these specific programs, monthly liturgies for students are also attended by family and parish members. Students create programs, lead all the prayers, and sing in the choir.

As a Leader in Me School, there are numerous presentations and programs for parents and guests to attend throughout the year. These offer opportunities for students to showcase their talents, from public speaking to song and dance routines.

Lastly, there is always active involvement at school by the Home and School Association (HSA) which is comprised of parent volunteers. These selfless and child centered parents organize fundraising activities and social family events such as our Halloween Trunk or Treat, Breakfast with the Easter Bunny, and Pictures with Santa. The HSA has always been the strongest and most consistent advocate for the students of Saint Thomas the Apostle School.

3. Professional Development:

A deliberate shift in professional development began in 2011 with a new administration and a focus on improving our national standardized test scores. This coincided with New Jersey's adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which provided the impetus to revise the curriculum, reading lists, and lesson plans. New texts were purchased for all core subjects in all grades followed by the addition of current web-based programs, online books, and upgrading technology. A partnership between what should be taught and how students learn was quickly incorporated. This led to the implementation of best practices with development of expertise in the area of student learning, professional speakers, and web-based learning opportunities.

The school's professional development goals are intended to promote student learning. This requires keeping abreast of and adopting best practices to create the conditions that allow that to happen. It also demands that our teachers rethink how students learn. Because of this, the school's emphasis has been on current educational topics including differentiated instruction and diverse teaching strategies, brain-based learning, and combining cognition with movement. Additionally, many of the teachers have adopted the practice of whole brain learning because of ongoing professional development and best practices.

Although in many cases our professional development is provided through the Diocese, some opportunities and current educational practices are a result of the use of various platforms. Even grade level meetings have an enormous influence on disseminating information on literacy placement, approaches, and intervention practices to help students with special needs. Sharing information on student learning has created a connection between grade levels that benefits all students.

Saint Thomas the Apostle teachers are also required to visit and observe other classes. Lessons shared are lessons learned, which is why observations and classroom visits personalize the learning experience for educators, helping them improve practice and, in turn, raise student achievement. In addition, this practice further encourages updating lessons and keeping current with educational trends. The faculty also provides professional development in after school training by sharing their expertise in educational technology applications, such as Google Docs, IXL, Fast ForWord, and Letters Alive.

Saint Thomas the Apostle provides a deliberate and comprehensive curriculum that challenges students to demonstrate high academic achievement through goals that are aligned to the CCSS. At its heart, however, is targeting individualized growth through differentiation, brain-based learning, active engagement, informed citizenship, leadership skills, accessing complex texts, engaging in collaborative conversations, and a coherent progression from grade to grade.

4. School Leadership:

The administration at Saint Thomas the Apostle consists of the Pastor and Principal who share a common vision with regard to creating and maintaining a productive, faith-filled, challenging learning environment. However, becoming a Leader in Me School resulted in a significant transformation from a top down leadership model. A typical model begins with an idea or vision that starts at the highest performance level and moves downward to the details. A Leader in Me model, however, favors shared leadership and governance that allow all stakeholders opportunities to begin with details and work up to the highest conceptual level. Teachers are encouraged to share best practices, including individualized instruction.

Based on the principles of discipline, integrity, independence, and prioritization, students and teachers embarked on a mission of respectful effectiveness. Under the supervision of the faculty, students are empowered and encouraged to take responsibility for leading all activities and events that were once led by teachers. This has resulted in a greater sense of accomplishment, pride, confidence, self-esteem, and more importantly, ownership. Students learn to deal with obstacles and challenges as they continue to apply these skills in both personal and academic areas.

The new leadership model created opportunities for shared leadership among the teachers, staff, students, and administration. It further cultivated a culture of unity and leadership by forming committees, delegating responsibilities, and encouraging all members of the Saint Thomas the Apostle community to be active participants in learning process. This was accomplished by building professional communication networks and sharing best practices. In addition, it has been reported by parents that the leadership skills learned by students at Saint Thomas the Apostle have carried over into family life. Teachers have also reported a paradigm shift in their professional and personal lives.

Working effectively with other stakeholders is a priority with the administration. The Home School Association (HSA) and the School Advisory Council (SAC) are instrumental in affecting change, offering counsel, reviewing the budget, and raising funds for advancement and development. Both of these organizations are fully invested in providing adequate resources for student learning.

PART VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

An examination of standardized test results helped to identify the need to update both the process and the product with regard to textbooks, technology, and instructional methods. Static, traditional schedules, insufficient time on task, outdated resources and texts, insufficient technology, and teacher-directed lessons were not meeting the needs of students.

Major changes were deemed necessary to remain competitive with 21st century schools. These included changes in teaching positions, teaching tools, and teaching times. Teachers hold grade level meetings and participate in Professional Learning Communities that identify the difficulties that existed in the learning process. Time was devoted to determining academic content that was substantially worthwhile rather than teaching all information available in a text. Possibly the most important academic and assessment difficulty was the insufficient amount of time, and with the lack of time was the lack of differentiated instruction and in-depth learning. Addressing that issue led Saint Thomas the Apostle to research and implement the most meaningful and transformational change in the learning process: block scheduling.

Block scheduling already existed in the early childhood classes, in that a teacher could spend as much time as necessary for a student to comprehend or learn an idea or a concept. The antiquated model of forty-minute self-contained classes, however, continued through the upper grades. Teachers strategizing on how to improve academic success by providing more time on task eventually led to adopting a block schedule. As a result, class time was increased from forty-minute to sixty-minute classes, and major subjects such as math and language arts were able to increase class time from 160 minutes to 300 minutes per week, almost doubling times and eventually test scores as well. Even ancillary subjects were able to extend class time, thereby providing more substantive significance. This not only enabled teachers to become subject specific with better continuity between grade levels, but also provided an immediate measurable outcome of an increase in learning opportunities.

Some of the benefits of the schedule change were immediately obvious to teachers. For example, this schedule led to a total re-creation of the learning environment by allowing both cooperative and collaborative opportunities within the classroom. Teachers were also better able to teach for understanding by providing more in-depth information. And finally, it also allowed additional time for teachers to explore different methods to address a student's learning style and to accommodate students with special needs by using different instructional techniques.

PART VII – NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL INFORMATION

1. Non-public school association(s): Catholic

Identify the religious or independent associations, if any, to which the school belongs. Select the primary association first.

2. Does the school have nonprofit, tax-exempt (501(c)(3)) status? Yes X No

3. What is the educational cost per student? \$5489
(School budget divided by enrollment)

4. What is the average financial aid per student? \$795

5. What percentage of the annual budget is devoted to scholarship assistance and/or tuition reduction? 42%

6. What percentage of the student body receives scholarship assistance, including tuition reduction? 42%

PART VIII – ASSESSMENT RESULTS FOR NORM-REFERENCED TESTS

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Math

Test: Terra Nova 3

Grade: 3

Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Publisher: CTB/McGaw-Hill

Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	706.7
Number of students tested	36
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES:

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Math
Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Test: Terra Nova 3
Publisher: CTB/McGraw-Hill

Grade: 4
Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	688.3
Number of students tested	57
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES:

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Math
Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Test: Terra Nova 3
Publisher: CTB/McGraw-Hill

Grade: 5
Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	691.9
Number of students tested	36
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES:

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Math
Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Test: Terra Nova 3
Publisher: CTB/McGraw-Hill

Grade: 6
Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	717.7
Number of students tested	40
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES:

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Math
Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Test: Terra Nova 3
Publisher: CTB/McGaw-Hill

Grade: 7
Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	717.7
Number of students tested	35
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES:

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Math
Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Test: Terra Nova 3
Publisher: CTB/McGraw-Hill

Grade: 8
Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	736.3
Number of students tested	38
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES:

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Reading/ELA
Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Test: Terra Nova 3
Publisher: CTB/McGraw-Hill

Grade: 3
Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	675.5
Number of students tested	36
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES:

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Reading/ELA
Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Test: Terra Nova 3
Publisher: CTB/McGraw-Hill

Grade: 4
Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	674.8
Number of students tested	57
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES:

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Reading/ELA
Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Test: Terra Nova 3
Publisher: CTB/McGraw-Hill

Grade: 5
Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	688.1
Number of students tested	36
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES:

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Reading/ELA
Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Test: Terra Nova 3
Publisher: CTB/McGaw-Hill

Grade: 6
Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	711.2
Number of students tested	40
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES:

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Reading/ELA
Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Test: Terra Nova 3
Publisher: CTB/McGaw-Hill

Grade: 7
Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	701
Number of students tested	35
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES:

REFERENCED BY NATIONAL NORMS

Subject: Reading/ELA
Edition/Publication Year: 2010

Test: Terra Nova 3
Publisher: CTB/McGaw-Hill

Grade: 8
Scores are reported here as: Scaled scores

School Year	2016-2017
Testing month	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES	
Average Score	747.4
Number of students tested	38
Percent of total students tested	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0
SUBGROUP SCORES	
1. Other 1	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
2. Other 2	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	
3. Other 3	
Average Score	
Number of students tested	

NOTES: