

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2020 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 Mr. Jon Aldrich  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name St Francis Of Assisi School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 7075 Ashworth Road  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City West Des Moines State IA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 50266-2416

County Dallas

Telephone (515) 457-7167 Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Web site/URL http://www.sfawdm.org/ E-mail sfaschool@saintfrancisschool.org

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\* Ms. Donna Bishop E-mail dbishop@dmdiocese.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Diocese of Des Moines Tel. (515) 243-7653

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 Ms. Katie Stock  
(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**

---

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.

1. 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, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2020 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.
3. 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.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2014 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, or 2019.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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 (2019-2020) 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. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2019 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	35	33	68
1	41	35	76
2	34	33	67
3	38	40	78
4	32	35	67
5	39	33	72
6	34	31	65
7	36	48	84
8	36	32	68
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	325	320	645

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 2.2 % Asian
  - 0.9 % Black or African American
  - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 87.4 % White
  - 4.5 % 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 2018 - 2019 school year: 1%

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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	3
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	7
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	638
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Vietnamese

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

1 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 1 %

Total number students who qualify: 8

8. Students receiving special education services: 1 %  
9 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>0</u> Autism                  | <u>2</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>7</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: 1
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	27
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	12
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	10
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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 24:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	97%	97%	97%
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 2019.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
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 X      No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.      2014

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

St. Francis is a faith-filled professional, positive, respectful, collaborative, and rigorous 21st century school for ALL students, teachers, and community members.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

---

St. Francis of Assisi is an exemplary Catholic elementary school that educates 645 students from 351 different families in grades Kindergarten through 8th with three sections of each grade. St. Francis's philosophy is to provide a safe, nurturing environment under the leadership of a faith-filled, caring and professional faculty and staff. St. Francis keeps the focus on the whole child by challenging the students academically and by preparing them for success while ensuring each student is supported and cared for.

St. Francis is located in West Des Moines, Iowa; a suburb of Des Moines, the capital and the largest city in the state. Geographically, the suburb is near rural farms as well as rapidly developing big cities. The surrounding community has ample presence in the fields of agriculture, finance, and government including multiple local opportunities for careers and higher education. St. Francis serves students from 12 different school districts. Families make the choice to commute from as far as 20 miles away to receive a challenging education in a safe and welcoming environment. As one of 11 Catholic elementary schools in the regional Diocese of Des Moines, St. Francis feeds into one nationally recognized secondary Catholic high school. Families and staff are able to connect across this community. Families come together through joint clubs and athletics, and the staff engages in monthly all-Diocesan professional development with the surrounding Catholic schools.

Derived from Iowa's largest Catholic parish, St. Francis School opened in 2000. St. Francis strives to develop learners for life through faith, knowledge and service. The goal to foster a high quality education while encouraging creative expression and critical thinking has been continually accomplished, proven through display in high Standardized Test Scores of 89-92% proficiency in reading and math respectively.

St. Francis excels in academia, but it also shines in its strong faith practice and commitment to social responsibility. These are displayed in various ways daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. Prayer is said together as a whole school at the beginning and end of every day. All school, student-led Mass is celebrated weekly. A different student-chosen Mission collection is held monthly. This allows the students to learn about and support needy causes on a local, regional, and global level. Examples include purchasing sweatshirts for local inner city students from a partner school, making and serving food at an inner city homeless food program, and supplying communities with animals through Heifer International. Many students serve the community by working in the on-campus garden where all of the produce is donated to local food banks. The students work to plant, weed, and pick the produce. In the lunchroom, compostable waste is collected and reused to fertilize rather than adding to the landfill. Middle school students log service hours yearly totalling an excess of 3,000 hours.

Leadership is displayed by middle school students' involvement in leading the daily announcements and the Student Ambassadors program. The St. Francis buddy program pairs middle school students with elementary students. Buddies meet weekly to accompany each other to Mass and assist each other in class projects.

St. Francis students are expected to work hard to reach their highest potential. Teachers provide rigorous coursework presented through a variety of teaching styles. Some classes are co-taught in order to provide students with extra support or to extend students' learning. Kindergarten through 2nd grade have teacher associates in every room. There are four dedicated staff members specifically for student support needs. There is one full-time enrichment teacher. To proactively promote a successful environment, the school uses PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) strategies. Students are rewarded for positive behavior choices, resulting in respect becoming a natural habit. Every student not only has access to school counselors, but these counselors also teach whole-group classes. Other related arts classes include music, band, visual art, technology, physical education and Spanish. Most graduates are able to test out of level one high school Spanish. The Curriculum Enhancement committee supports in-school and off-site field trips, the Talking Canvas art history program, as well as literary, musical, and cultural presenters.

Education methods materials are never stagnant and always improving to continually challenge the students. Teacher collaboration is at the forefront of supporting instruction and working with curriculum for

optimizing student success. Curriculums such as Really Great Reading, Being a Writer, and Everyday Math are benchmark inspired, and use teacher-created lessons which challenge the students. Student centered strategies learned during WIN (What I Need) time empower the students to take responsibility for their learning needs. Curriculum and instruction adhere to the Des Moines Diocesan Standards and align with Iowa Core Curriculum. Staff training and planning time is integral for the professional growth that contributes to the betterment of all students. Staff is given time during the school day to plan individually and with other team members. The yearly school calendar is built to provide full day professional development opportunities.

St. Francis' overwhelming success is not only attributed to the dedicated staff, but to the involved group of parent volunteers. Volunteers are a vital part of the daily operations including serving in the lunchroom, playground, library, and art class. Parents are a strong presence on a great number of school improvement committees, as well as leading fundraisers such as Track-a-thon and the Auction, hosting Grandparents/Grandfriend Day, planning Career Day and more. The strong relationship and collaboration between the volunteers and the school ensures every child's needs are met.

St. Francis of Assisi is a distinguished and honored recipient of the 2014 National Blue Ribbon School Award. Since receiving the award, the image and presentation of the school has forever changed for the better. The award flag is proudly hung, serving as the first visual you see upon entering the building. The logo is displayed on school stationery, email signatures, websites and social mediums, as well as clothing and advertising materials.

St. Francis maintains high staff retention. Receiving the National Blue Ribbon School Award provided validation to the staff then, and now 5 years later, still serves as motivation to continue to teach well beyond the ordinary. Expectations and standards are continually advancing. St. Francis has updated the areas of curriculum, instruction, materials, and environments to maintain the high level of excellence expected of a National Blue Ribbon School recipient. In the field of technology, there has been an increase in instruction time and an additional staff member has been added. Students are also equipped with 21st Century technology skills through technology class and 1:1 use of Chromebooks in the middle school classrooms. Elementary classrooms instruct with SMART TVs, Ipads, and Chromebooks. St. Francis has renovated the Media Center and Technology labs, creating spaces with flexible seating and screens for virtual conferences and Skype field trip capabilities. In addition, St. Francis has fundraised to build a STEM lab to be utilized by all grades. St. Francis' known exemplary teaching practices have been sought after by other local schools as a resource to model and mentor in the training of certain programs such as the Dyslexia Barton Reading Program.

St. Francis embodies the competitive, high level of instruction and education required of a National Blue Ribbon School. When it comes to education, there is mediocrity, and there is excellence. St. Francis is excellence.



## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

---

### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

**1a.** Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas

St. Francis of Assisi School follows the Diocese of Des Moines Standards and Benchmarks. These standards focus on the Iowa Core Curriculum. Grade Level Expectations guide instruction and assessment toward the end goal of student proficiency or exceeding proficiency at each grade level.

Religious instruction is an integral part of daily schedules, and the school environment promotes the practice of Christian beliefs. Students focus on serving the community, their families, and each other. Students, teachers, and administrators lead daily prayer, plan liturgies, and focus on the principles of the Catholic faith throughout the day.

St. Francis makes it a priority to attend to students' abilities, interests, needs, strengths, preferences, and learning styles. Differentiation is an important part of our curriculum, teaching strategies, and assessments. As a school we are able to accomplish this through our Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). In all grades, teachers collaborate in teams of three within their grade level. These teams meet often to determine the answers to the four questions surrounding their work as a PLC. They will continuously work to improve as a unit on these four things: learning targets/goals, assessment, intervention, and enrichment.

### **1b.** Reading/English language arts

The St. Francis Reading/ELA program is based on the Iowa Common Core for ELA. Students learn to and are expected to read, write, draft, revise, publish, listen, and speak in these classes. St. Francis has recently implemented two new programs: Really Great Reading in grades K-5 and Springboard in grades 6-8. Grades K-5 continues to use the Being a Writer program. All students are given FASTBridge Reading assessments three times per year. Adaptive Reading (aReading) measures decoding and word identification skills as well as comprehension in a computer-administered assessment given to all students. Curriculum-Based Measurement for reading (CBM) is an evidence-based, one-minute fluency assessment used for universal screening. Student results are analyzed and groups are formed (Tier 2 and Tier 3) to focus on building reading skills where needed. Students who fall under fluency goals are also Progressed Monitored each week to graph data points and track gains made in fluency and accuracy.

All reading lessons in grades K-5 teach the sub-skills that lead to strong decoding and fluent reading. Evidence indicates that teaching these skills to all students has both immediate and long-lasting positive effects on overall scholastic achievement. Specific reading comprehension strategies are taught during the whole class reading block time as well as during small reading group time and center work time. Guided reading groups are based on need as well as skill levels and meet various times per week.

All writing lessons in grades K- 5 are based on the writer's workshop model from the program Being a Writer. These lessons work to build a community of writers immersed in rich literature and high-quality trade books that spark both social and writing development.

Grades 6-8 integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking into the Reading/ELA daily lessons through the Springboard program. Students are expected to produce a variety of written products, such as personal narratives, illustrated myths, short stories, biographies, literature responses, informative essays, research papers, persuasive speeches, and argumentative letters. Other examples are the Greek Living Museum and participating in the Cultural Exchange Project. Throughout the year, students practice writing for a variety of purposes and audiences. Their writing curriculum includes daily journal writing with small and whole group discussions surrounding relevant topics.

The writing process is utilized to create, edit and revise, and ultimately publish final draft quality products. Students also participate in class novel studies, Socratic seminars, and small group literature circles.

Students learn to define, identify, and apply grade level and higher strategies to their reading and writing. Reading engagement strategies such as metacognitive markers, focused reading, and steps to close reading are the focus for independent reading in order to help students become lifelong readers.

### **1c. Mathematics**

The math curriculum at St. Francis is aligned with the Iowa Core of Mathematics Standards. The overall focus for teaching math is to develop strong number sense which allows the students to be flexible in their thinking and develop a deeper understanding of numbers. Mathematical concepts are often presented using a Concrete Representational Abstract (CRA) instructional approach. The students are challenged to use metacognition skills with further emphasis on students' ability to communicate their thinking. Lessons are designed for students to collaborate with peers and to apply math skills to real-life problem solving situations. Math lessons are differentiated according to assessment results which include standardized testing, as well as more frequent formative classroom assessments. Support staff, the enrichment teacher, and classroom teachers collaborate to develop lessons to meet the individual needs of all students. This process begins within our teacher team which is a Professional Learning Community (PLC).

In multi-step problems students are encouraged to use mathematical vocabulary and drawings as well as explain their thinking to ensure their understanding. The students participate in STEM activities to enhance their creative thinking, problem-solving, and their ability to work in a team while applying math skills. For example, Spheros are used in middle school math classes to learn how to code. Students are tasked with a maze that their robot must follow. This must be done using only pre-programmed code that the students create. The students must collaborate and use critical thinking skills to persist and make their robot succeed. Elementary students also complete engineering design projects. For example, in 1st grade students collaborate to construct a three-dimensional haunted house using toothpicks and various supplies. Students must plan and cooperate to build a successful project.

To further meet the needs of students who are advanced in mathematics, St. Francis offers the opportunity to accelerate. Students in grades 6, 7, and 8 are enrolled in coursework that is tailored to their ability. This allows students to proceed through the curriculum at a pace that is appropriate for them upon entering high school, which for many is an advanced track.

Middle school students take an Algebra readiness test to determine what math skills they have mastered and whether they are ready for a more challenging subject. If a student qualifies to participate in the Algebra program in the 7th grade, they are able to take Geometry at Dowling Catholic High School in 8th grade. Students in 8th grade who take Algebra are able to advance to Geometry as freshmen. These students are then placed on the advanced math track where they will take AP Calculus as seniors.

### **1d. Science**

Science classes at St. Francis are based on developing an understanding of science concepts through direct instruction, labs, projects and problem based learning. Regardless of the topic covered, there is an emphasis on applying the scientific method to understand concepts. This involves experimental design, recognizing variables, analyzing data, drawing conclusions, and communicating results. Classwork is differentiated based on the needs of each individual student.

In grades K-5 teachers use formative assessments, such as pretests, labs, quizzes, think-pair-share, and exit tickets to guide instruction. Formative work is analyzed and graded and students are given feedback as quickly as possible. Instruction is adjusted as needed based on the formative assessments. Summative assessments such as written or oral tests, projects, and papers are used at the end of a unit. The data from these summative assessments are used to analyze progress and guide instruction. Data from Iowa assessments and other standardized tests are also used to guide instruction.

In grades 6-8, the science curriculum is spiraled, meaning that students receive instruction in Life, Physical and Earth science each year. Recently, St. Francis has been working with the other Diocesan science teachers to create unit overviews that will align with the Next Generation Science Standards and the Iowa NBRS 2020

Science Standards. These teachers are also working on developing common science summative assessments across the Diocese. The goal is to have each school in the Diocese of Des Moines teach the same topics, in the same order and on the same pacing schedule. St. Francis piloted the 6th grade curriculum in 2018-19 and is currently piloting the 7th grade curriculum.

#### **1e. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement**

The social studies curriculum allows students to showcase their different creative abilities and make connections to their lives. Differentiation is also provided through project choices, modified notes, and dictation of answers. Classes use a variety of technology, such as Google slides, Haiku Deck, and videos. Formative assessment data throughout each unit helps guide instruction to plan for the summative test.

Students in grades K-5 social studies participate in a variety of instructional approaches, such as hands-on learning, research based projects, inquiry, and discussion to learn about government, history, geography, and citizenship. In different grade levels, students will learn about regions of the U.S., political structure, financial responsibility, and how to use maps.

Students in grades 6-8 are learning with Iowa's new social studies standards. Students demonstrate their knowledge in Contemporary Global Issues and U.S. History by showing they have mastered the basic information discussed in the unit. Then, each student answers the same question but gets to choose from a variety of options to present the knowledge they have learned. Finally, the curriculum is differentiated to allow for those students that are ready to work above grade level. Students also take ownership of their learning through self-reflection, sitting in a place best for his or her learning style, and using technology daily.

#### **1f. For secondary schools:**

#### **1g. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:**

### **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Students in grades K-5 attend Art class once a week while students in grades 6-8 attend Art during one trimester each year. They have 42-minute class periods four days a week during this trimester. Students are exposed to a variety of mediums including drawing, painting, clay, and digital art. Students are encouraged to explore the artistic process incorporating the principles of design, drawing inspiration from art history as well as their own personal interests.

St. Francis employs a full time physical education (PE) teacher for grades K-5 and a part-time PE teacher for grades 6-8. Students in grades K-5 have PE twice a week and an additional fitness time of twenty minutes once a week. Students in grades 6-8 have PE twice a week for 42 minutes. A new initiative in our physical education classes is the use of heart rate monitors to track student data and growth in a meaningful way.

The vocal music program includes students from Kindergarten through 8th grade. Students in grades K-5 attend class two times per week for 30 minutes. Students in grades 6-8 have music twice a week for 42 minutes. Students spend time creating music with their voices, body percussion, and instruments. Students learn the skills of music notation, symbols, and music literacy. The goal is that each student finds a unique way to connect with music and share in the joy of making music with others.

St. Francis employs a full time K-8 librarian who holds a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science. This teacher teaches weekly K-5 classes using the AASL Standards Framework for Learners as the foundation. Students in grades 6-8 utilize the library for presentations, research, and check-out.

Curating materials for all learners is imperative at St. Francis. The library supports over 25,000 print materials, 25 audiobooks, 25 Chromebooks, and many AEA digital resources. The school librarian collaborates with teachers to broaden the classroom work with digital resources, technology, and print materials as well as extracurricular groups such as Battle of the Books, SKYPE, cultural events, STEM

activities, Makerspace, and community events.

The Spanish program includes students from 1st grade through 8th grade. Students in the elementary grades 1-5 attend class one time per week for 30 minutes. Students in grades 6-8 attend Spanish during one trimester each year. They have 42-minute class periods four days a week during this trimester. Students are exposed to a great deal of comprehensible input during their class time and actively practice speaking, listening, writing, and reading Spanish. Each year students build upon the concepts they learned in previous years and learn the equivalent of Level 1 high school Spanish upon completing 8th grade.

St. Francis employs an elementary (K-5) and middle school (6-8) counselor. The counselors provide individual and small group counseling in addition to collaborating with parents and teachers. Students in grades K-5 participate in Guidance Class once a week for 30 minutes. 6-8th grade students have unit-based guidance class throughout the year. During the school year, guidance class covers 3 major areas of development; academic, personal/social and career. As a result of the school counseling program, our students will have the academic, emotional, social, and career-readiness skills to be faith-filled, productive members of society.

Students in grades K-5 attend Technology class once a week for 30 minutes. Students in grades 6-8 attend Technology during one trimester each year. They have 42-minute class periods four days a week during this trimester. At St. Francis, we are constantly striving to incorporate new and innovative technology devices and software to further support and enhance our curriculum as well as keeping students engaged and prepared for the future.

The core of Religious Education at St. Francis is the continued development and growth within our relationship with Jesus Christ. Students are given opportunities to promote their faith through class service projects, such as Meals from the Heartland which give back to the less fortunate. A strong Catholic faith comes from understanding the who, the what and the why of our beliefs. This is shown daily in every classroom, whether it is beginning with prayer, researching the history of our faith, or giving back to the community.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

#### **3a. Students performing below grade level**

St. Francis has implemented policies and programs to address the needs of students who are performing below grade level. Staff utilize assessments to inform instruction, design interventions, and monitor progress.

Core instruction is provided to all students. Students are given formative assessments to monitor learning in all subjects. The data from formative assessments guides reteaching and determines which students may require a small group for additional instruction within the classroom.

Universal screening is administered three times a year to students K-8. Teachers and support staff use the data from FAST reading assessments to identify students who require a Tier 2 intervention. Students who have scores labeled some risk and high risk are assigned to a WIN group. WIN groups are teacher-led intervention groups. These groups meet 4 times a week for 20 minutes. The groups are differentiated by skills, monitored weekly, and adjusted as needed. Decisions are entirely data driven for these intervention groups.

Students who are identified as high risk by the universal screener are assigned to a Tier 3 intervention. A diagnostic assessment is administered to high risk students. The results of the diagnostic assessment are used to target skills, create goals, and form groups. High risk K-5 students receive direct and supplemental instruction from a support teacher in a pull out program. Support teachers work with students in small groups or 1-1. The support teachers frequently review all progress monitoring data, collaborate with classroom teachers, and design interventions for Tier 3 students. This is an important part of the process as it ensures that students are making adequate progress to attain year end goals. In grades 6-8 the support

teacher works collaboratively with the classroom teacher and uses a push in model for working with high risk students. This middle school teacher also provides 1-1 or small group instruction.

**3b. Students performing above grade level**

St. Francis provides enrichment opportunities for students who are performing above grade level. Classroom teachers differentiate lessons based on reading levels and the results of formative assessments. Students may be involved in ongoing groups or projects that allow them to use higher order thinking skills. Many projects are open-ended and allow students to complete the project at their own level. Teachers implement STEM lessons which often allow for students to perform the task at various ability levels and use different styles of learning.

The enrichment teacher meets with students who have been identified through CoGATS and Iowa Assessments. These groups utilize higher order thinking skills as they complete projects. These projects may incorporate writing, discussion, debate, and technology. All activities are created using above grade level standards in order to challenge these high performing students. Students may be pulled from their classroom during WIN intervention time or from a different time of the day.

The enrichment teacher often pushes into the classroom, especially in the primary grades and certain middle school subjects. Approximately once a month, the enrichment teacher will create a lesson for the entire class in grades K-2. These lessons can help to identify some of the students who are thinking more creatively. In grades 6-8, the classroom teacher collaborates and co-teaches with the enrichment teacher for certain grades and subjects.

**3c. Special education**

**3d. ELLs, if a special program or intervention is offered**

**3e. Other populations (e.g., migrant), if a special program or intervention is offered**

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

---

### **1. Engaging Students:**

“Developing learners for life through faith, knowledge, and service” captures the essence of the core belief at St. Francis and drives all aspects of the school.

St. Francis has high classroom expectations that prepare students to be successful learners. Due to the rigorous academic programming they receive at St. Francis, students are well-equipped for their secondary school experience. Evidence of this is shown by the approximately 90 percent of students that make the high school honor roll their freshman year. St. Francis offers academic programming beyond the expected curriculum such as Spanish class, WIN time for support, Barton techniques for children with dyslexia, 1:1 technology in grades 6-8, and technology classes for K-5 students that maximizes individual academic growth.

St. Francis engages students in social opportunities that promote their academic, social, and emotional growth. Examples include Band, Choir, Mock Trial, Lego League, Chess Club, Battle of the Books, Girls on the Run, Catholic Math League, Spelling Bee, Geography Bee, National History Day, Science Bowl, School Newspaper, Go Further STEM Conference, and athletic/cheer teams.

Through faith, St. Francis focuses on mission awareness and raise funds for local and international causes that promote the betterment of the world. Each grade level chooses a cause to support one time during the year and helps draw awareness to the needs of that cause. The Student Ambassador program’s mission is to make all feel welcome and to spread joy. The Ambassadors serve the community of St. Francis by engaging the students and local community. Examples include surprising new families with “Welcome to St. Francis” yard signs, welcoming and directing visitors during special events held at St. Francis, and cheering on students during the fundraising effort, “Track-a-thon.”

St. Francis is fortunate to have two counselors for our 645 students to support both the elementary and secondary grades. All St. Francis staff is trained in social emotional learning practices to better meet the needs of the students. Staff and students are informed about social emotional learning through the Second Step and the Connections Matter for Trauma-Informed Care programs. Positive behaviors are encouraged through the using the PBIS program, building relationships with families to build high expectations for all students, and including our community-church, family, and grandparents in activities throughout the school year to support our students’ learning. St. Francis of Assisi School is a rigorous, respectful, collaborative, charitable, and faith-centered environment which strives to meet the needs of all students.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

St. Francis engages families and the community to maximize student success and school improvements through a variety of methods and opportunities. These include a variety of teacher and parent committees, parent volunteer opportunities throughout the school, professional development opportunities, and workshops.

St. Francis has numerous parent, teacher, and community committees including the Board of Education, Welcome, School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC), Auction, Home and School, Buildings and Ground, Finance, Track-a-thon, and Used Uniform Sales. Parents volunteer a large number of hours in the cafeteria, library, art room, as homeroom parents, and leading the Talking Canvas program.

Some of the family and community engagement activities include Grandparents Day, parent teacher conferences, mission days, grade level parent socials, volunteer luncheon, and middle school service hours. Parent socials are hosted per grade level. This develops not only a close-knit community of parents and families but also prompts more participation in school and community volunteer opportunities via parent networking. Grandparents Day is hosted once a year and invites all grandparents or special friends of students to have an opportunity to explore their student’s classroom and actively engage in the student’s

learning and curriculum. Parent teacher conferences also engages parents to not only be a part of their child's education but also offer support to teachers by open lines of communication. The school and staff allow for flexible conference scheduling that has proven to be successful in parent attendance at a rate of nearly 100 percent. Mission days engage and encourage the students, teachers, and families every month by focusing on a mission the students are passionate about to raise awareness and funds for others in need. Some missions St. Francis supports are Meals from the Heartland, Habitat for Humanity, Furry Friends Refuge, ChildServe, New Chapters, Youth Shelter, Heifer International, The Connection Café, Casa Mea, and Meredith Middle School. Students of each grade engage the entire student body and families to maximize fundraising efforts.

Parents and communities are informed of students' success through multiple outlets. Parent teacher conferences and other parent-teacher communications through Google Classroom, email, phone calls, and written notes are common and occur regularly. Social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the school website highlight student achievement as well as school-wide and classroom activities. School-wide, weekly, electronic newsletters are sent to parents as well. Within each classroom, teachers utilize Google Classroom to share daily updates and other information with families and send weekly newsletters to communicate student progress and classroom information with parents.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

The professional culture of St. Francis is built around two pillars of focus; all students can learn at high levels with the support of highly qualified teachers and teachers maintain a growth mindset of powerful learning. Teachers are empowered through the training they receive in building initiatives, the time allowed to them to collaborate, and the various types of ongoing professional development. These opportunities are job-embedded or are provided through classes, conferences, and district and building level professional development sessions.

Administration has identified areas where the staff want to grow and develop their skills and relationships with peers. This is used to guide professional development endeavors for the year. St. Francis facilitates teacher learning through the PLC process, Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS), and Connections Matter. These systems develop skills and confidence in supporting the whole child. As teachers collaborate they are able to make data-driven decisions to enrich and support students. Connections Matter provides greater insight into students' social/emotional development.

Teacher retention remains high. Teachers feel valued as employees and professionals. Teachers are encouraged and supported to be growth mind-set risk-takers with the support of their peers and administration. Teacher schedules are built to allow for ample personal planning and collaboration time for teachers to build rigorous lessons, assess student work, and plan future lessons for academic growth. Teachers are allowed and encouraged to take professional leave to attend conferences and classes to deepen their learning. While teachers are away from their classrooms, a reliable, highly-qualified, well-compensated substitute teacher is continuing to teach the lessons the classroom teacher has begun.

Teacher leadership is valued, and teacher voice guides decisions made in the school through committee work in both small and large groups. These committees are at both the building level and the Diocesan level. Committees include safety, curriculum, technology, PLC, and faith. Multiple teachers have been inspired to return to school to earn additional education degrees, including administrative degrees. Teachers with advanced degrees have been requested to serve on Diocesan administrative teams to learn from principals across the system. Teachers also have administrative opportunities at school, such as being the acting assistant principal for the day and leading content PLC groups.

### **4. School Leadership:**

St. Francis's philosophy is to provide a safe, nurturing environment under the leadership of a faith-filled, caring and professional faculty and staff. St. Francis keeps the focus on the whole child by challenging the students academically and by preparing them for success while ensuring each student is supported and cared for.

St. Francis's school leadership team structure involves the principal, assistant principal, and teacher leadership team. There is also strong leadership from the St. Francis church community and families through the SFA Board of Education and the Home and School Committee. St. Francis believes that all students can find academic success at high levels with the support of high quality teachers, family, and community involvement.

St. Francis works collaboratively with family volunteers to provide multiple opportunities for students. This allows the school leadership to focus on teacher and student academic success. Families help supervise recess and lunch, allowing our teachers more time for planning and collaboration.

The principal leads our school with a focus on what is best for students with the support of the assistant principal. The role of the principal is to create and maintain an environment most conducive to student learning. The principal hires well-qualified staff that receive mentoring through a program developed by the staff. Evaluations are conducted based on the Iowa Teaching Standards for all teachers and are used as a way to grow and improve. The principal utilizes many resources for professional development, curriculum improvement, and technology enhancement to improve educational quality.

The teacher leadership team is involved in providing input for decisions, bringing concerns and successes forward, and taking learning back to their team. The teacher leadership team utilizes data to make decisions on where resources are used. An example would be identifying "less than proficient" students on standardized and benchmark assessments. Once these students are identified, the team determines whether more resources such as a support teacher are needed to help build skills in a particular grade level. The progress of students are tracked twice a month by this team to determine outcomes and to re-evaluate.

The teacher leadership team balances the management of the school with the engagement of teachers and students in the classroom to experience how programs are taught, which supports staff in the development of their skills. Working collaboratively is the best way to support teachers, which in turn will lead to more success for the students.



## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

---

St. Francis is an exceptional school that serves as a successful educational model. While many strategies contribute to St. Francis's success, the most instrumental strategy is collaboration. Collaboration occurs between all stakeholders in the school community. Administration collaborates with staff. Classroom teachers collaborate with the resource teachers and the support staff. Teachers collaborate with other teachers. Teachers collaborate with the students. Students collaborate with other students. And parents collaborate with staff. This communication and collaboration develops and contributes to a high academic experience and climate at St. Francis.

St. Francis is a team. While it is a competitive school, the staff is not in competition with each other. St. Francis is one unit that rises or falls together. Staff members are grouped in multiple teams such as grade level, grade band, curriculum, and committees. The grade level and curriculum teams plan for instruction together. Each K-5 grade level teaches the same material at the same time. Staff members also use these teams to collaborate about ideas that enrich or support students' academic or behavioral needs. Teachers readily seek out other resources to support their teaching. Administration and resource teachers are present and willingly offer additional support. Teachers conference with the students to identify individual learning styles. Students work individually and collaboratively to learn, prepare, and present material. Group rotations are a common practice throughout the school day. The skills students gain from working with a variety of groups are beneficial in enhancing their social skills and interactions with each other. Parents and teachers collaborate to provide curriculum enhancement opportunities. All of these teams working together is what makes St. Francis a high achieving academic school proven through high Standardized Test Scores of 89-92% proficiency in reading and math respectively.

Currently St. Francis has extended collaboration efforts to include all the schools in the Diocese of Des Moines in order to develop vertical alignment, common curriculum, and common assessments. Many St. Francis teachers have been chosen to be the PLC leaders in this collaboration due to their high level of knowledge, dedication, and experience.

St. Francis was built around the inclusive vision of teamwork, collaboration, and community. Every student, teacher, parent, and administrator knows, values, and contributes to this vision. The strength of each individual contributes to the dynamic team culture. This excellent working and learning environment is ever present and clearly visible each time a person enters St. Francis. Collaboration by all clearly has contributed to the success of all students at St. Francis.

## 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?      \$5926  
(School budget divided by enrollment)
4. What is the average financial aid per student?      \$1999
5. What percentage of the annual budget is devoted to scholarship assistance and/or tuition reduction?      32%
6. What percentage of the student body receives scholarship assistance, including tuition reduction?      100%