

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

Official School Name Our Lady Of Mercy School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 9222 Kentsdale Drive  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Potomac State MD Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 20854-4529

County Montgomery

Telephone (301) 365-4477 Fax (301) 365-3423

Web site/URL https://www.schoololom.org E-mail jpalmiere@olom.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. Kelly Branaman E-mail branamank@adw.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Archdiocese of Washington Tel. (301) 853-4508

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. Christine Green  
(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
<b>PreK</b>	16	20	36
<b>K</b>	14	14	28
<b>1</b>	6	11	17
<b>2</b>	6	11	17
<b>3</b>	9	11	20
<b>4</b>	11	6	17
<b>5</b>	4	16	20
<b>6</b>	9	12	21
<b>7</b>	11	13	24
<b>8</b>	9	9	18
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	95	123	218

\*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
  - 1 % Asian
  - 5 % Black or African American
  - 22 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 43 % White
  - 29 % 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: 5%

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	8
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	3
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	11
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	227
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

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

Spanish, French, German, Korean

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 6 %  
13 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 3 %

Total number students who qualify: 7

8. Students receiving special education services: 13 %

28 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>2</u> Autism                  | <u>2</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>25</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>4</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>10</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>2</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>3</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>2</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 5

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.	13
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	8
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	4
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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 18:1

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	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%
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  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2009

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

Students reach full potential of mind, body and spirit. Individualized and innovative instructional methods teach students to think, question, collaborate, and lead in modern society.

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**

---

Our Lady of Mercy School (Mercy) is a co-educational parochial school located in Potomac, Maryland. Mercy was opened in 1960 under the authority of the Archdiocese of Washington (ADW) and the Sisters of Mercy. Mercy has a tradition of promoting academic excellence, strong religious and moral values, and an atmosphere of respect, service, and acceptance. The foundation of our daily work is illustrated in Mercy's mission to fully develop each student, mind, body, and spirit.

Mercy parents and guardians place great value on education and provide the home support that enables students to reach their academic potential. The challenge, at times, is balancing the exceedingly high expectations from the parents with a student's ability and self-esteem. Although people of all faiths are welcome at Mercy, admission to the school is based on supporting our Catholic environment and its extension to our service activities, discipline approach, conflict resolution policies, and respect given to every individual. The recognition and acceptance of this Catholic presence is the foundation of the collaborative and respectful relationships we maintain with families.

Mercy's enrollment and faculty have evolved to better represent the diversity of the greater Washington, D.C., region. The student population is 85 percent Catholic with the majority of families representing an upper middle income level. A full scholarship program established in 2017 and an increased financial assistance program have diversified the socioeconomic student profile as assistance is awarded to 21 percent of enrolled families. Mercy maintains inclusion and educational extension programs which support diverse student academic needs. Of the entire student population, 13 percent of students have diagnosed disabilities designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 28 percent of students achieve in 95th percentile for reading or math in grades 2 through 8, and 6 percent of students are considered English language learners. Fifty-seven percent of students represent minority populations. The faculty full-time equivalent represents a 28 percent level of racial and ethnic diversity.

To ensure faculty meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, teachers completed a cultural sensitivity workshop in 2018. Teachers are keenly aware of addressing diversity issues in the daily curriculum, particularly through our religion program, literature and reading series, and chosen novels. Similarly, our new social studies series captures the importance of the interdependence and interconnections of communities and nations.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and data-driven instruction are two consistent Mercy initiatives that enable teachers to meet unique learning needs of all students. Teachers are supported in these efforts with routine, on-site professional development, a mentor and instructional coach, and an ongoing requirement of evidence of implementation. Faculty extend their learning through the national educational community by participating in conferences hosted by Loyola University Chicago Andrew M. Greeley Center for Catholic Education, National Catholic Educational Association, Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), and the Catholic Coalition of Special Education (CCSE).

Mercy's principal served on the ADW teacher evaluation committee in 2017 which was responsible for designing a comprehensive teacher evaluation tool based on Charlotte Danielson's framework for teaching. The Danielson framework evaluates planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities, thereby setting a standard for rigorous, high-quality instruction by connecting teaching and student learning. Mercy instituted the evaluation tool in 2018 and has incorporated both the UDL and data-driven instruction projects into the evaluation rubric for teachers.

Mercy's administrative team supports Danielson's framework expectations by providing for a collegiate, collaborative working environment among faculty. Teachers meet weekly to review student needs and collectively address instructional challenges, team planning time is scheduled, lunch and learn sessions are hosted, and our instructional coach frequently visits classrooms to give feedback.

To address students' social and emotional growth, Mercy employs a school counselor who rotates through all classrooms. Presentation topics highlight character education, friendship, social media, bullying,

tolerance, and respectful communication. As needed, individual students and families are supported as social and emotional needs arise. This effort is complemented by an advisory program for middle school students.

Faculty lead groups of 8 to 10 middle school students and meet throughout the year to discuss topics such as social media, communications skills, goal setting, and study skills. These connections with students and families serve to alert us to conflicts and stressful situations that previously were not identified and addressed with adult guidance.

Mercy's past National Blue Ribbon School awards are used as symbols of educational excellence routinely referenced with pride. This award and the past application processes have established a remarkable benchmark for achievement among all stakeholders that Mercy incorporates into strategic planning and self-evaluation. The Blue Ribbon achievement level was the motivating force of both the UDL and data-driven efforts in the years that followed. In essence, the Blue Ribbon has become encouragement for continued excellence throughout the Mercy community.

## **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

The curricula, instruction, and assessment approach at Mercy is anchored in the school’s mission to provide all students with opportunities to reach full potential academically, physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Teachers at Mercy incorporate daily opportunities for students at all levels to think critically, question concepts, collaborate effectively, creatively problem solve with their peers, and lead with innovative 21st century skills.

As a member of the ADW, Mercy is guided by their rigorous standards that promote academic challenges for all students. Each grade level has developmentally appropriate expectations. Furthermore, teachers at Mercy have a strong understanding of the vertical alignment of these standards in order to extend the learning of the many students who are performing above grade level.

Mercy is dedicated to providing a challenging, appropriate education to all learners of varying abilities. Small language arts and math classes are a hallmark of Mercy and support all learners. Each grade level, which consists of one class, has a minimum of two math and language arts groups taught by certified teachers. This small class instruction allows for customized learning, targeted lessons, individualized observations, and appropriate assessments. In addition, parental contact is easily attainable which promotes communication and a strong partnership between home and school to support students.

The population of students is ever-changing and Mercy has prioritized the importance of equipping teachers with the resources and skills to teach the diverse students who enter our doors. Recently, we have studied and began implementing UDL, which is a framework dedicated to eliminating barriers to learning and creating pathways for all students to access the program at Mercy. Teachers have also increased collaboration with common planning times, cross-curricular projects, and data-driven analysis. There has been a particular focus on partnership as it relates to developing appropriate and differentiated work and assessments throughout all grade levels.

The Scantron Performance Series (Scantron) is an online standardized testing system used at Mercy. Scantron is a research-based, criterion-referenced, computer-adaptive test that enables teachers to identify the instructional level of students in reading and math through immediate results, and then to access standards-based reports including suggested learning objectives for each student. As teachers strengthen their skills through independent study, professional development, collaboration, and daily implementation of new research-based and data-driven approaches, students of all abilities will continue to thrive at Mercy.

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

Mercy takes pride in its strategic reading and English language arts program. Teachers utilize various resources to ensure that standards are being met across all grade levels. In grades kindergarten through 2, the “Superkids Reading Program” uses a cast of lively characters to present reading, spelling, writing, grammar, speaking, and listening lessons. In grades 4 through 8, the language arts curriculum consists of literature, vocabulary, various forms of writing, grammar, and mechanics.

Teachers base their instruction on meaningful formative and summative assessments ranging from student observations to Scantron. The results are continuously reviewed in order to monitor progress, tailor teaching practices for a more effective learning experience, and to understand the many different learning styles in the class. Rather than enforcing one curricular approach, teachers use differentiated instruction and problem-based learning to meet the needs of all students. With UDL at the core of our instruction, we ensure that students reach their potential and also feel successful.

For students in kindergarten through grade 2, explicit phonics instruction is embedded so students reach

automaticity, fluency, and exposure to more irregular words in order to become familiar with the academic language in preparation for success in future grades. Multimodal instruction and practice is integrated as well so whenever students learn a new letter-sound correspondence or spelling pattern, they see it, hear it, say it, and write it.

As a transition from the primary to intermediate language arts curricula, students in grade 3 use a language arts program called “The Daily 5.” This program integrates multiple language arts skills as students learn to self-regulate while learning strategies to improve their reading and writing. Students work on specific skills targeting their needs in accuracy, fluency, comprehension, and expanding vocabulary independently and through small group learning. They choose their own books to read with the guidance of their teachers to ensure they are interested in their reading, challenged, and invested in their progress.

Grades 4 through 5 use “Treasures,” Macmillan McGraw Hill, and grades 6 through 8 use "Literature: Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes," Prentice Hall; both series address a wide array of genres, allowing teachers to infuse poetry units, various fictional pieces, and nonfiction texts. Beyond the textbook, novels, plays, and a variety of differentiated reading material are widely read. Some of these additional resources include high interest young adult novels as well as classic authors. These resources bolster student comprehension, allow for literary analysis, and create a classroom climate centered on discussion and higher-level thinking.

Additionally, vocabulary and writing are emphasized across all grades. Vocabulary is taught using Sadlier-Oxford "Vocabulary Workshop" and integrated through instruction of novels and core subject content areas. The vocabulary curriculum is designed to help students build a working vocabulary by identifying meanings through roots, prefixes, suffixes, and word associations.

The English program centers on the writing process. Students work through planning, drafting, and editing with both peer and teacher, revising, and publishing. Teachers weave lessons on grammar and mechanics throughout the process. Students compose various writing pieces that range from expository to persuasive writing. Summative writing projects and assignments in the middle school may be comprised of multi-paragraph essays as well as research reports that require Modern Language Association (MLA) citation. The writing program culminates in student-led portfolio conferences with parents and teacher in grades 1, 3, 5, and 7. In grades 2, 4, 6, and 8, the portfolios are sent home with a parent and student evaluation survey.

Teachers employ a comprehensive, integrated approach to language arts that encompasses UDL by targeting kinesthetic, audio, visual, and tactile approaches to teaching. Furthermore, group discussions, audio visual presentations, skits, and other interactive learning modalities are used throughout the school. Students are encouraged to make choices, set goals, and become autonomous learners who know their teachers will always be there to support and guide them.

Technology is often at the forefront of instruction, with teachers using Google education apps in the classroom. Each student in grades 3 through 8 has his or her own Chromebook; therefore, they can utilize a plethora of interactive educational websites to enhance learning.

### **1c. Mathematics**

Mercy uses the Harcourt "HSP Math" series for kindergarten through grade 6 and the Holt McDougal "Mathematics" book series for math instruction in grades 7 through 8. The math program typically culminates in 8th grade with Algebra I, although accelerated programs are available. Teachers also utilize online resources, software programs, manipulatives, videos, and technology to immerse students in complex math concepts and rely on small group instruction to accelerate learning.

Differentiated instruction takes place in all grade levels with math instruction divided into smaller classes based on students' skill and concept acquisition. Due to the low student-teacher ratio, teachers are familiar with student progress and may quickly support or enrich the curriculum.

When students achieve mastery of the current grade level standards, we advance them into the next grade

level math class. For example, eight 5th grade students are in the 6th grade math curriculum. Two 8th grade students work at an 11th grade level. Many students will complete a high school level Algebra I class in 8th grade and place into geometry their freshman year of high school. Additionally, Mercy offers a geometry extension class that affords qualified students to test out of high school geometry and enter Algebra II.

Students with diagnosed learning needs who are performing below grade level in math, which is 3 percent of Mercy's enrollment, meet in small groups that allow for additional scaffolding and modified instruction to promote learning skills. Manipulatives and technology are integrated into the lessons allowing students to fully engage in the understanding of math concepts.

Mercy has an "IXL" subscription, an online independent math program, and students are frequently assigned modules to reinforce the current unit or to review a previous skill. The algebra classes use computer programs that simulate a graphing calculator. "Khan Academy" is also utilized as a resource to improve mastery of complex math concepts.

As with language arts, student math progress is closely monitored throughout the year using a wide variety of assessments. Teachers measure student performance using Scantron scores. The scores collected in the first weeks of school form a baseline of student skills and direct planning for growth and enrichment. Formal assessments are conducted for each chapter and informal assessments such as exit tickets, graded assignments, group projects, and oral quizzes are employed throughout the year to measure student understanding.

The program at Mercy is designed to fully immerse students in math concepts and engage students in ways that meet their individual needs. Small group instruction, acceleration integrated into daily lessons, and the emphasis on UDL supports math mastery as evidenced by student achievement on Scantron assessments.

#### **1d. Science**

Science is taught an average of twice a week in the primary grades and includes a weekly science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) class through 4th grade. The STEM oriented "Mystery Science" website is used as the basis of instruction. The activities allow students to use critical thinking to creatively solve real-world problems. For example, after learning about extreme weather, students create a house made out of paper that will stand upright when facing high winds. Students test their designs in front of a fan and, through trial and error, they learn strategies and techniques to strengthen houses that are located in parts of the world that experience extreme weather. Students are placed into small balanced groups for these activities allowing the teacher to make individualized formative assessments that direct future instruction.

The intermediate and middle school science programs are taught daily and all programs include a weekly STEM activity or lab. There is an emphasis on tiered instruction, with multiple forms of class materials made available for use with each unit. Standards-based science content integrates specific language arts and math concepts highlighted by Scantron results. The "Science Fusion" textbook, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, is used along with its online version that allows for text-to-voice and the use of audio-visual media to meet the learning styles of individual students. The teacher designs content in a multi-modal format that incorporates the school's expansive science resources and technology into daily lessons and hands-on labs. The teacher uses formative assessments on an ongoing basis, including the evaluation of daily work, and multiple types of summative assessments to guide future lessons.

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

Focusing on the topics of communication, transportation, innovation, culture, and economy, Mercy's social studies program highlights these themes by civilization and era. They become the link between past, present, and future. Consistent focus on the cause and effect relationship of decisions that have been made throughout history also plays an important role in our studies, helping to reinforce to students that every action has a consequence. Students understand that we study history to learn from the triumphs, near misses, and failures of those who have come before us. Teachers emphasize that while some coincidences may exist in history, most major events throughout history are the result of decisions made by people as students make

daily decisions in their own lives.

Active instructional strategies are critical for learning and retaining the information in the two new social studies series utilized at Mercy: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's "Into Social Studies" (grades 1 through 4) and Pearson's "myWorld Interactive" (grades 5 through 8). Some approaches include lecture, student discussions, inquiry sessions, themed research projects, text analysis, and active note taking practice. Resources used in class also include technology resources and age-appropriate magazines.

The middle school program is enhanced with the "Medal of Honor Character Development Program" which explores the values of courage, commitment, sacrifice, citizenship, integrity, and patriotism. The objective is to teach Mercy students that people can meet great challenges and make the world around them a better place.

Formative and summative assessments include traditional quizzes and tests, homework, essay writing, oral presentations, classroom observations, cross-curricular group and individual projects, debates, and online research. Assessment data is evaluated by individual teachers and discussed during team meetings in order to provide an accurate understanding of the students' needs across the curricula.

**1f. For secondary schools:**

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

Mercy's prekindergarten follows the ADW academic standards which align vertically with the standards for the primary grades. The program provides instruction, activities, and recreation that promote physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and language development within a nurturing Catholic environment. Teachers help children discover that learning is enjoyable through songs, games, movement, arts and crafts, cooking, technology, independent play, field trips, and science experiments. Teachers also expose students to the Catholic faith through Bible stories, prayers, attending weekly mass, activities and projects based on religious holidays, and by encouraging family prayer time.

Prekindergarten teachers use the "DIG: Develop, Inspire, Grow" curriculum from Frog Street Press to guide instruction. The curriculum is structured to balance developmentally appropriate skills with academic standards in the areas of social and emotional development, oral language, math, and literacy. Teachers supplement "DIG" with interactive centers, play stations, independent activities, and group activities that reinforce the skills presented. Teachers use assessment checklists to monitor student progress and to determine needed support or enrichment.

To ensure students are building a foundation for future school success, teachers in grades prekindergarten through grade 1 meet monthly to review student progress and make adjustments in the curricula as needed. Students are evaluated using multiple means of assessment in order to test their language development, social and emotional skills, use of vocabulary, and motor skills. This includes the "Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test," "Developmental Asset Profile Assessment," and "On the Way to Success with Early Prevention of School Failure." Each test provides an understanding of the student's current academic level. In 2018, 34 students were evaluated with the average achievement level at 72.6 percent. The kindergarten curricula were accelerated accordingly. The strength of the prekindergarten foundation and accelerated kindergarten program continues into grade 1 where the baseline Scantron test results showed that 73 percent of students read at an above average level in the fall of 2019.

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Students at Mercy are engaged in a variety of curriculum areas that complement and strengthen learning experiences. Our offerings are taught by teachers who specialize in a particular content area.

Mercy offers comprehensive music and art programs to all students. Mercy's music program focuses on analyzing, performing, creating, and responding to music. The benefits of music class transfer to other academic subjects by way of teamwork and presentation skills as students prepare performances for the

Christmas Pageant and Grandparents' Day in the spring. Additionally, the program includes recorders, choir, and various instruments in the school band. Lower school students attend music twice a week, while students in grades 6 through 8 attend once a week.

All grades attend weekly art classes where they are introduced to a host of materials, techniques, tools, and styles in order to use creativity as a means of expression. Students in prekindergarten through 3rd grade learn printmaking, ceramics, painting, drawing, and sculpture. Projects strengthen artistic abilities and fine motor skills. Grades 4 through 5 explore international art from Kenya, Mexico, Japan, and Egypt. Grades 6 through 8 study the work of famous artists throughout history and complete independent research as a source of inspiration for their projects.

Mercy offers a diverse physical education curriculum with most grades having class twice per week, and grades 5 and 6 meeting three times per week. The development of movement skills, a healthy lifestyle, and physical fitness are taught at all levels, including the school's extracurricular Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) sports teams. The physical education curriculum units are designed for students of varying ability levels and encourage the growth of fitness, self-confidence, positive sportsmanship, respect for self and others, empathy for classmates, and an understanding of how the Catholic faith is reflected in the actions of all participants. At Mercy, students have access to outdoor courts and fields for soccer, flag football, softball, baseball, and basketball, as well as an indoor gymnasium.

The value of speaking a language other than English and understanding different cultures has increased as society has evolved into an interconnected, global community. Subsequently, Mercy's foreign language curriculum is designed to offer students in kindergarten through 8th grade the opportunity to develop their Spanish speaking, listening, writing, and reading ability and to explore the rich Spanish culture including their practice of the Catholic faith. Kindergarten through 3rd grades have one Spanish lesson a week, 4th through 6th grades have two Spanish lessons a week, and 7th and 8th grades have three Spanish lessons a week. Through grade 4, lessons are supported by songs, storytelling, activities, and games in Spanish. In the middle school, students have the opportunity to put into practice new grammar and vocabulary by participating in cultural projects. The students work in class on these projects and they present their final product to their classmates in an oral presentation in Spanish. Students expand their learning and practice through online practice resources and, in grades 5 through 8, they use Google Classroom to access homework, videos, and study guides. Upon completing the middle school program, Mercy graduates are typically prepared to enter Spanish II in high school.

Media, technology, and library classes are woven into the fabric of Mercy's program through enriching curricula integration, project-based learning, and instruction. Students in preschool through 5th grade attend technology classes once per week, where the teacher follows the International Society of Technology in Education standards to teach skills which support students in becoming positive digital citizens, knowledge constructors, innovative designers, computational thinkers, creative communicators, and global collaborators. Our 1:1 middle school Chromebook program connects technology to all areas of instruction providing students with opportunity to practice the 21st century skills of communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity.

Prekindergarten through 5th grade participate in library class where standards are met through academic instruction, storytelling, and hands-on, project-based learning. Library instruction includes cross-cultural storytelling, fact-based learning about countries, mapping skills, and, in grade 5, research skills. The librarian hosts authors and guest readers, while students have access to award winning books. During recess, the librarian oversees student led book clubs and provides a warm and inclusive place for all students to gather.

Students in grades 7 and 8 are involved in a yearlong leadership seminar where they explore the qualities of an exceptional leader, gain an understanding of leadership, examine the seven themes of Catholic social teaching, and plan, design, and implement community service projects. In addition, valuable life skills are presented such as financial literacy, public speaking, and high school interview preparedness.

Our Peer Mentoring Program is a hallmark of our Inclusion Program. Students in grades 7 and 8 volunteer to

prepare, design, and lead engaging activities for our inclusion students. Activities include art projects, scavenger hunts, bingo, and various sports games. Through the Peer Mentoring Program, students with needs are able to fully embrace opportunities and experiences along with typical peers.

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

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

The director of inclusion works in collaboration with the classroom teachers to prepare Individualized Catholic Education Plans (ICEP) based on a student's psycho-educational evaluation results. Thirteen percent of Mercy's student population has an ICEP. The ICEP documents the student's strengths and needs, diagnosis, standardized test scores, accommodations, modifications, and unique learning goals. Parents are invited to meet with their child's team of teachers in the spring to review the plan for the following school year. Quarterly, a student's individual goals and progress are updated and communicated with parents.

An ICEP may include accommodations for assessments, homework, and classwork based on the evaluator's recommendations. These accommodations may include extended time, read aloud, one-on-one or small group testing environment, and use of a calculator. Other accommodations may include reduced homework, copies of notes, frequent teacher check ins, and preferential seating.

Resource class is available to students with an ICEP in grades 4 through 8. This class is offered in lieu of Spanish two times per week in grades 4 through 6 and three times per week in grades 7 through 8. During resource class, students work in a small group to review and practice skills and concepts taught in content area classes. There is a strong emphasis on test preparation, study skills, and organization. We strive to teach strategies that students can apply throughout their academic career.

Students who need additional assistance beyond the resource time may have academic support built into their schedule. Students receive specialized help with skills such as math computation and problem solving and/or writing composition. Each lesson is tailored to meet the student's specific academic needs. The success of this support is demonstrated by the 2018 Scantron year-end school results, which with no disaggregated student scores, qualified Mercy for the National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Teachers meet weekly to share student progress and discuss strategies successfully utilized in the classroom. In addition, the Student Assistance Team, which consists of Mercy special education and classroom teachers, may be called together to support teachers in designing support strategies for struggling students.

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

Students who perform above grade level are identified by a criterion checklist completed by teacher, classroom evaluations, Scantron test scores, and parental input. Qualified students are recommended for the Educational Extension Program after evaluation. The extensions coordinator develops an individual enrichment plan that may include differentiated instruction, independent study projects or assignments, compacting lessons, and one-on-one academic instruction.

For gifted high achieving students, individual and schoolwide schedules have been adjusted annually so that identified students can reach their full potential without scheduling barriers. As mentioned in the math section, we have a number of students participating in mathematics beyond their grade level.

Mercy offers a variety of enrichment activities through our Educational Extension Program. Offerings include, but are not limited to Chess Club, Robotics, Drama Club, Art Multimedia Studio, Yearbook, and targeted classes in geometry, logic, art appreciation, and hands-on science. To hone athletic skills and increase positive sportsmanship, after-school enrichment programs are offered in tennis, basketball, soccer, and floor hockey.

To enhance and deepen learning, advanced learners and their parents are encouraged to explore opportunities in the local community. Approximately 28 percent of students in grades 2 through 8 qualified

to be identified by the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth program. Families are also apprised of enrichment programs offered at Montgomery College that highlight engaging topics such as “Black Rocket” and “Maker Day by Futuremakers.”

### **3c. Special education**

Students with more significant needs, such as those diagnosed with an intellectual disability, developmental delay, or autism spectrum disorder, are part of our inclusion program. These students represent 2 percent of Mercy’s population. While our goal is to keep students with their neurotypical peers to the greatest extent possible, all students in the inclusion program have schedule modifications in order to provide direct instruction at the student’s individual math and reading levels. For example, a 6th grader, who is currently working at a 2nd grade reading and math level according to various assessment data, receives one-on-one instruction in math and reading in order to meet her needs in those subject areas. Yet, the student attends science, social studies, religion, art, music, and physical education with her peers, with modified expectations. Inclusion in the general education setting gives students with more profound disabilities the opportunity to learn appropriate social behavior from their peers.

The inclusion team uses a push-in model for students who may need modifications and additional assistance during regular instruction. A member of the inclusion team works collaboratively with the classroom teacher. This model enables students to remain in the classroom with their peers.

Tests are designed to appropriately assess students’ knowledge while considering their capabilities. For example, rather than taking a 20 question and short essay test, a student with a significant need in the inclusion program may take a matching test with 5 questions that focuses on essential vocabulary words. In addition, students in the inclusion program often have different forms of assessment. They may answer questions orally or complete a project to demonstrate targeted skills.

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

Teachers use a variety of informal tools to assess the English proficiency, conversational ability, and reading level of English language learners (ELL). Reading material is then selected to match the student’s current level. Teachers often provide students with high-interest audiobooks to use both at home and in school. Reading comprehension websites, such as “Readworks,” have also served as an effective tool for differentiating reading material for students with limited English proficiency. In oral reading, students are given direct instruction on pronunciation, reading rate, and fluency. Students are encouraged to be active participants in class conversation and everyday language.

In content area classes, teachers focus on vocabulary, key concepts, and basic sentence structure. This is accomplished through direct instruction, often incorporating visuals and graphic organizers. In addition, students have modified writing requirements. For example, students in our 7th grade often write 5-paragraph essays. However, the initial goal for a 7th grade ELL student may be to construct one 5-sentence paragraph with a topic sentence, three sentences with supporting details, and a concluding sentence. As the student gains more skills, his or her writing requirements are gradually increased. Modifications are determined based on individual student needs.

At the middle school level, teachers initially translate notes, worksheets, and assessments into the native language as needed. The amount of content translated is slowly scaffolded as the student engages more in oral and written language development activities.

Students are also taught how to use Google Translate both on the computer and using cell phone applications. Ultimately, this allows students to independently translate single words or entire pages of text.

Teachers communicate regularly with parents to share progress, upcoming topics, and techniques being used at school in order to maintain consistency.

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

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

---

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

Mercy engages, motivates, and provides students with a positive environment that supports their academic, social, and emotional growth.

Through the schoolwide implementation of UDL, teachers now have a positive perspective towards implementing a variety of interactive learning strategies and skills to evolve and enhance their practice engaging all learners. One teacher offers students a choice for their method of demonstrating understanding of “The Odyssey” from acting to modernizing a part of the story to a formal character analysis book report. Another teacher refines lesson planning for centers by writing clear and distinct objectives for each group that caters to specific needs. An additional teacher experiments with administering verbal assessments in math to challenge a student's ability to rationalize and defend a math solution with appropriate academic vocabulary. In order to preview a large amount of content in a history class, the teacher creates active learning games where students quiz one another on different historical figures by using only descriptions of their feats. The effectiveness of these active learning strategies, just a sample of the many occurring at Mercy, has resulted in improved academic growth, but also an increase in content retention and joy in each classroom.

Socially, Mercy sponsors numerous events throughout the year including the Friday Night Lights social, Father/Daughter Dance, Mother/Son Dinner, Mardi Gras Dinner, weekly youth group, 8th grade dance, scout troops, sports teams, and more. These activities provide chaperoned, safe environments for students and families to relax, enjoy time outside of class, and build supportive relationships. For students and families new to Mercy, we host a New Family Reception as a welcome to the community. Through the Angel Family Partnership, we pair new families with an existing Mercy family to support their transition to the community.

To promote emotional health, Mercy’s counselor makes weekly classroom visits to implement a hands-on approach with art and activities which allow students the opportunity to explore current topics of social and behavioral concerns. Lunch Bunch groups allow an unstructured, relaxed atmosphere for students to meet in a caring environment to discuss a variety of issues which may come up during the day. These group sessions provide a reduced-stress platform for communication about their feelings, while integrating our pillars of Mercy: responsibility, respect, faithfulness, caring, trustworthiness, and self-confidence.

Engagement is a key factor to ensuring a successful school experience. Mercy’s multifaceted efforts allow children to be comfortable and excited in their classrooms, secure with their peers, safe in their environment, and happy. The effort also positively affects parents, whose participation and collaboration increases when they feel their children are happy, which ultimately supports all students and the Mercy community as a whole.

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

From families to alumni to parishioners, Mercy stakeholders work collaboratively across multiple channels to optimize student success and school improvement. Communication strategies include a weekly comprehensive parent e-newsletter, weekly articles in the parish bulletin, quarterly articles in regional ADW newspaper, social media presence, school website, and regular email communication.

Parents are invited to participate in the School Advisory Council (SAC) and to be active members of working subcommittees. These parents help to develop strategies for all areas of school improvement and student success. We currently have 9 school parents, 5 parishioners, 14 school faculty members, and several members of the greater business community on the SAC.

Open and consistent parent communication is enabled by regular Principal Coffee sessions. A Parent Communication Liaison works to maintain a line of communication between parents and school leadership.

Parents are actively involved in school social and educational programs through a robust Parent-Teacher Organization.

A recent Catholic identity survey for parents covered engagement and indicated their satisfaction level at 4.10 out of a possible 5. This comfort level corresponds to their trust in school faculty and leadership. This trust supports teachers in fulfilling the Mercy mission of developing mind, body, and spirit.

Mercy's full-time school counselor works to enhance mental health awareness, engagement, and cultural sensitivity in all learning spaces and offices. Concerns and needs of all constituent groups are addressed and met in a non-judgmental, safe environment. Our counselor performs onsite observations of students, implementing a variety of counseling strategies and developing comprehensive treatment plans. She performs short-term individual and group counseling services and provides outside referrals to parents as needed or requested. These services include meeting regularly with parents on issues such as peer interaction, classroom and family challenges, and social media. We frequently offer a book group and guest speakers focusing on parenting issues.

The counselor provides timely and informative articles to teachers and administrators on current topics such as special and general education, parenting, stress from academic expectations, and mental health trends. She participates in formal and informal weekly meetings between administrators and teachers to discuss current best practices, support student needs, and assist with the professional development of faculty and staff. She works closely with outside professionals, such as psychologists, social workers, pediatricians, tutors, and governmental child services, and hosts events at Mercy for school counselors on discussion and evaluation of best practices.

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

A professional culture exists at Mercy due to many factors. Importantly, our school mission and belief statements are paramount and guide the development of our faculty handbook and daily expectations. The mission is reviewed and enhanced yearly as seen in the development of our six school pillars. Faculty members embrace a genuine sense of our mission and have a strong vision for the future.

As we develop the mind, body, and spirit of our students, we recognize the need for faculty members to be whole and that self-care is essential. The administration and faculty are mindful of daily challenges and a supportive atmosphere influences the entire school culture.

An environment of collegiality is evident as annual team building activities are planned which highlight the need for strong communication, understanding, compassion, and genuine kindness. Through involvement and participation in community events, relationships are established and strengthened. Mercy faculty members are known for their outreach to colleagues and share a spirit of unconditional support.

Mentors are assigned to new faculty members who are guided as they become familiar with expectations, procedures, and culture. Group and individual meetings support teachers and guidance is offered so a successful transition occurs. Evaluations are collaborative in nature and support the objectives and goals established. Our school counselor is open to assisting staff members with professional concerns and is willing to provide direction and resources for any personal issues.

Frequently, faculty and staff members are recognized for hard work, effort, participation, contributions, and successes. Notes of recognition are highlighted in observation debriefs, our UDL updates, weekly newsletter, and verbally shared at faculty meetings. To prepare teachers for leadership roles, Mercy annually nominates a faculty member to attend the ADW's leadership institute.

As annual schedules are developed, time is set aside for faculty, team, and grade level meetings. This provides optimal time for communication, collaboration, sharing of best practices, development of academic initiatives, and reflection. Discourse of ideas is shared and affirmations are delivered.

Department of Education in conjunction with the ADW. Recent topics include UDL, the Charlotte Danielson evaluation model, teaching middle school students, understanding the nature and characteristics of gifted students, and inclusive education.

Administrators maintain an open door policy for faculty to support initiative and creativity. Through living our school mission, acknowledgement of self-care, collegiality, mentoring, recognition of work, and professional development opportunities, teachers are valued and supported, and a sense of Mercy pride is felt.

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

Mercy's leadership philosophy is collaborative and guided by the school's mission of students reaching full potential of mind, body, and spirit. The mission is displayed in the faculty newsletter, website, handbooks, classrooms, policy manuals, and literature to focus all stakeholders on this constant goal.

The principal is the school leader with responsibility for gathering feedback from stakeholders to make decisions that best support the school's students. The principal assigns faculty and staff to committees including academic, emergency, Catholic identity, division teams, community spirit, assessment, technology, finance, facilities, and student support. These committees oversee diverse school functions and make recommendations on all aspects of school operations to the principal.

The principal is assisted by an administrative team. The assistant principal shares administrative duties, oversees the extension program, and serves as a teacher mentor. The director of the inclusion program oversees all academic support and works collaboratively with the guidance counselor in meeting social and emotional student issues.

The principal and pastor are advised by the School Advisory Council (SAC). The SAC is supported by 5 active committees including academic, finance/marketing, facilities, Catholic identity, and policy and planning which oversee Mercy's strategic planning process.

The principal regularly attends team and administrative meetings, produces a weekly faculty newsletter, attends SAC committee meetings, serves on various ADW committees, and maintains an open door policy. Additionally, the principal leads a student advisory group, monitors the student council, and attends outdoor education trips. These activities keep the school leadership connected to students and abreast of current issues and concerns in the community.

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

---

Overall, Mercy's success can be attributed to the practice of data-driven analysis, which provides for our deeply reflective and appropriately responsive approach to individualized learning. In the past ten years, the administration, faculty, and staff at Mercy have become more aware of the needs of our students and teachers as our reflective and responsive approaches have grown through data analysis. Teaching performing data analysis with a contemplative mindset has helped us identify areas of growth, enhance successful strategies, and encourage necessary changes.

In 2014, Mercy moved to Scantron Performance Series Testing, as noted in the curriculum, instruction and assessment overview, which provides instant individual student testing results aligned to Mercy's math and language arts curriculum. Scantron testing occurs three times a year for our 2nd through 8th grade classes. From this standardized testing data, we were able to evaluate the effectiveness of various initiatives, curricula changes, and teachers' instructional methods and strategies. More importantly, we examined which subgroups of our student population required more intervention and which were ready to be extended in their daily coursework. Since the importance of data collection has been introduced and maintained consistently year-to-year, teachers have been able to reflect on student performance and focus on responsive strategies for all Mercy students.

Student success at Mercy stems from the success of our teachers. After implementing Scantron testing, Mercy recognized the importance of data analysis as a skill itself. We wanted teachers to build the necessary skills to analyze their Scantron data (among other student achievement data), and use that analysis to make instructional decisions in their classrooms. Mercy recruited consultant support around an in-house professional development series that focused on data analysis and translating that analysis into practice. That investment of time and professional development equipped teachers with the skills necessary to effectively respond to and target individual needs in a classroom.

As Mercy continues to monitor and analyze student achievement data, the needs of our students are strikingly evident. All students can succeed at Mercy, especially those with varying disabilities. In line with this philosophy, Mercy determined that implementing UDL and equipping all teachers with the skills and tools to succeed were effective, economical, and an enhancement of our past success.

Through a data-driven approach, Mercy's continued success has been drawn from strong reflective teaching practices and responsive implementation of appropriate strategies.

## **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?      \$12280  
(School budget divided by enrollment)
4. What is the average financial aid per student?      \$1338
5. What percentage of the annual budget is devoted to scholarship assistance and/or tuition reduction?      10%
6. What percentage of the student body receives scholarship assistance, including tuition reduction?      21%