

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[ ] Public or [X] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Philip E. Repko  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Saint Mary Elementary School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 40 Spring Mount Road  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Schwenksville State PA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 19473-1739

County PA

Telephone (610) 287-7757 Fax (610) 287-2562

Web site/URL https://smsk-8.org/ E-mail PRepko@smsk-8.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\* Mr. Andrew McLaughlin E-mail amclaughlin@archphila.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Archdiocese of Philadelphia Tel. (215) 587-3500

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 Mr. Robert Bartle  
(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, leave .blank*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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The electronic signature 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 2021 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 must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
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

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Data should be provided for current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

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

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

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

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, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

| Grade                 | # of Males | # of Females | Grade Total |
|-----------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| PreK                  | 13         | 4            | 17          |
| K                     | 10         | 15           | 25          |
| 1                     | 3          | 11           | 14          |
| 2                     | 6          | 9            | 15          |
| 3                     | 5          | 11           | 16          |
| 4                     | 8          | 14           | 22          |
| 5                     | 11         | 10           | 21          |
| 6                     | 7          | 19           | 26          |
| 7                     | 10         | 8            | 18          |
| 8                     | 21         | 15           | 36          |
| 9                     | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 10                    | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 11                    | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 12 or higher          | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| <b>Total Students</b> | 94         | 116          | 210         |

\*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
  - 2 % Black or African American
  - 2 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 93 % White
  - 2 % 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 2019 - 2020 school year: 4%

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

N/A

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, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year   | 3             |
| (2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year | 5             |
| (3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]  | 8             |
| (4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019   | 210           |
| (5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)   | 0.04          |
| (6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100  | 4             |

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 5 %

Total number students who qualify: 11

8. Students receiving special education services: 4 %  
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. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>2</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>6</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>0</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. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

|  | <b>Number of Staff</b> |
|--|------------------------|
| Administrators   | 1                      |
| Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher, CTE teacher.   | 12                     |
| Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.  | 4                      |
| Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.   | 2                      |
| Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc. | 3                      |

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 17:1

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

| <b>Required Information</b> | 2019-2020 | 2018-2019 | 2017-2018 | 2016-2017 | 2015-2016 |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Daily student attendance    | 97%       | 98%       | 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 2020.

| <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.

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

St. Mary's Catholic School promotes Catholic identity through the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, empowering students to become capable, lifelong learners motivated by their relationship with Jesus Christ Our Savior.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

St. Mary’s has been in-person, with some remote learners, for all but 2 weeks of the current school year. The Montgomery County Office of Public Health recommended a two week virtual-only platform around the Thanksgiving holiday. Fewer than 10% of the students have been virtual throughout the majority of the term.

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

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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St. Mary's Catholic School is a suburban school with some geographically close rural areas and characteristics. The families are predominantly professional people with post-secondary credentials, and a significant percentage of the school families are supported by small businesses, often with one or more parents in proprietary roles. The immediate area where the school is located is part of the Perkiomen Valley School District, a large public school district that has grown considerably in the past 20 years. Similarly, two of the neighboring public school districts, Spring-Ford and Souderton, have also transformed from more rural communities to definitively suburban ones. This suburban sprawl has influenced the socioeconomics of the area, and so too the demographic nature of the school community.

The school's curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular programs have been part of a larger sensibility in which the cultivation and development of their Catholic faith is a primary force in the school's environment. Classes begin with opening prayers and the Pledge of Allegiance, and the afternoon is begun with a community prayer. Students repeat a pillar of daily faith before dismissal: a student on the public address systems asks the student body, "What do Christians do?" Throughout the building, all students reply, "Christians practice kindness and courtesy to foster respect." This exercise is intended not to be a formality, but to serve as reinforcement of the mission statement mentioned above.

Moreover, after the 2014 Middle States Accreditation process, the previous administration and the extended staff pursued enhancement to the St. Mary's student experience. The most critical change may have been the development and growth of an instructional support program which maintained the services provided by the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, but which expanded dramatically the academic supports provided to students in need. The addition of a full-time teacher has allowed students with identified needs to receive supplemental and remedial services.

Another crucial component of student life at St. Mary's involved the typically wide range of civic, cultural, and performance activities that are afforded. Students attend weekly Mass, celebrate Catholic holidays and feast days, and also help to coordinate and participate in celebrations which commemorate Patriots' Day, Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, and others. Student plays, concerts, pageants, and processions are integral parts of the school year, heavily attended and supported by the school community as well as the Parishioners. [I should name specifics for some of these.]

In a non-COVID environment, St. Mary's supported a range of athletic teams through its CYO organization. Those teams have represented the school and parish with enthusiasm, integrity, and success. Athletics has not been the only forum for the augmented development of the student body. Our school added a Makerspace room last year, with an intent to incorporate STEM opportunities for as wide a range of students as possible. While that resource has been suspended during the pandemic for obvious reasons, the intent is to continue to expand the range and scope of academic activities for the students.

In the spirit of providing well-rounded educational opportunities, students in grades 5-8 are enrolled in Spanish language classes using the Rosetta Stone digital learning platform. Younger grades receive weekly Spanish lessons through a creative use of time with the current Kindergarten teacher providing foundational instructions. Students throughout the building are also enrolled in the Accelerated Reader program, which provides benchmarking and progress monitoring data throughout the year. St. Mary's students are also participants in Mathletics, a competitive support and acceleration program that is monitored by the classroom teacher. The school maintains a functioning library, with students having access to a catalog being built and updated to accommodate a wide range of readers.

Naturally, St. Mary's students have participated in a wide array of students competitions in language, math, public speaking, writing, art, and music. Our students have also historically competed for academic awards, especially those designed to support secondary education in Catholic high schools. This year, St. Mary's boasted three Neumann Scholars, the only elementary school in the Archdiocese to have more than two award winners. Again, historically, St. Mary's has nominated students for scholarships at Pope John Paul, Villa Maria Academy, and the Hill School. The school has been remarkably successful in these endeavors,

a testament to the professional commitment and skill of the staff, as well as the unwavering support of the school community.

Finally, the school's fantastic response to the difficulties and restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic very pointedly characterize the composition of the parish and school community. In September of 2019, the parish opted to pursue the development of a Board of Limited Jurisdiction to support the creation of a broader agency to help nurture the health and growth of the school. That group, when faced with the overwhelming task of preparing for a CDC approved adoption and implementation strategy to accommodate in-person learning for the 2020-2021 school year, has crafted a plan that must be evaluated as remarkably successful. St. Mary's has reported no cases of coronavirus transmitted in the building. Among the successful metrics are mitigation efforts, enrollment, safety precautions, technological infrastructure, and agile transition from in-person to remote learning platforms. In addition, some classrooms have maintained an efficient hybrid learning platform throughout the year. In short, the group created a plan, and to-date, those plans have met with tremendous success.



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

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

St. Mary's Catholic School is aligned with the academic standards adopted by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. In turn, those adopted standards are closely aligned with the standards required by the state of Pennsylvania's Department of Education.

At St. Mary's, the PK3 – 2nd grade curriculum is focused on meeting grade level standards for reading, math, and language skills as articulated by the AOP Curriculum guides. Classrooms from PK3 to grade 4 are largely self-contained, with students receiving weekly 'specials' instruction in physical education, art, music, Spanish, and technology. (Technology instruction for the younger grades PK-3 has been suspended for this year in accordance with COVID restrictions. Plans are underway to expand 1:1 technology to these grades within the next year or two.)

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia mandates a uniform number of instructional minutes for the weekly schedule. The AOP also maintains a standards-based curriculum which is evaluated, updated, and implemented annually. Curriculum guides are available on the AOP website <https://aopelementary.org/curriculum-assessment/curriculum-guidelines-2/> - with guidelines and support materials also readily available. St. Mary's course schedule is built to observe the recommendations as directed.

St. Mary's uses conventional texts and workbooks to deliver instruction. Instruction is also supported by digital resources and supplementary materials that aligns with the curricular standards for each grade in Reading, Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Religion. The fifth through eighth grade Science curriculums are designed to meet the Next Generation Science Standards adopted by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Saint Mary's has specialists in three areas, with a dedicated science teacher for grades 5-8, a dedicated Social Studies teacher for grades 6-8, and an accelerated Math teacher for grades 5, 6, and 8. Accelerated Math instruction is also available for grade 7.

St. Mary's participates in Terra Nova/InView testing each Spring (excepting 2019), with students in grades 3 to 8 accountable for all testing components. Those assessment results are recorded and reviewed at the Archdiocese level using the DRC Online Reporting System as the clearinghouse/platform for acquisition and evaluation of testing results. Within the school, the results are used to evaluate those students who qualify for Accelerated Math, as well as those that may qualify for learning support services. Moreover, Terra Nova scores are used for monitoring progress and promoting improvement and achievement as indicated by the performance scores.

For the 2020-2021 School year, the BLJ, Parish, and community researched, assessed, adopted, and implemented a range of adaptations to support remote/hybrid instruction – as these platforms have been required as part of pandemic mitigation efforts. All faculty has been equipped with a laptop to facilitate on-line learning (synchronous) instruction opportunities that were not well-supported by previous technology.

Students in grades 5-8 have been supplied with Chromebooks prior to this year, but the BLJ approved the purchase of devices for grades 3 and 4 as well. Those devices arrived in late fall. The BLJ and its committees also agreed to purchase two Swivls, devices to more effectively provide synchronous instruction to the PK4- Grade 2 classes. However, those devices just arrived, and have not yet been put into action.

Noteworthy preparations and provisions were coordinated by the BLJ to provide effective strategies for maintaining social distance, sanitizing high touch areas, monitoring stakeholder health on a daily basis, and adjusting and restricting campus access and movement. The BLJ held town hall meetings via Zoom to gather, weigh, and utilize group expertise in preparation for this Fall's opening of school. Consequently, the St. Mary's plan for opening this fall mirrored the Archdiocese CSO Plan in all possible areas.

In accordance with the AOP, St. Mary's has made few concessions to the need for rigor and relevance in the delivery of instruction, or the expectations for students. Of course, inherent in the process of providing

flexible and adaptable platforms and environments, the current pace and volume of hard copy work product is reduced.

The students at St. Mary's who are virtual or remote students – whether by choice or by agency recommendation for all students to transition to the virtual platform – are expected to follow a daily course schedule that closely mirrors the in-person school day. Likewise, the expectation for marking progress and completion of curricular standards is reasonably consistent with past practices in a non-COVID environment.

Teachers have employed Google Classroom functionality at all grade levels 3-8 to post, record, collect, evaluate, and chart student academic progress. For the lower grades, which need more overt and consistent parental support in the remote environment, the teachers have stayed with the BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) approach that was implemented at St. Mary's a few years ago. Google Classroom is also used by these teachers and students wherever possible.

**1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):**

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

Agnus Dei Academy partners with parents to develop the whole child. We foster a love of learning, encourage independence, imagination, and inspire each child to become a thinker, explorer and a life-long learner. We do this by combining academics and structured play in a safe, fun, nurturing environment. Our curriculum embraces the development of the whole child: physical, cognitive, social emotional and spiritual.

We focus on social skills and develop a child's ability to interact with teachers and peers through small/large group activities, learning to play well with others, fostering conflict resolution and develop an understanding of appropriate behavior and social cues.

We develop cognitive and language skills through group discussions, sharing ideas, asking questions, predicting/retelling stories and introduce handwriting. In doing this we enhance listening, speaking, pre-reading and writing skills.

We teach age appropriate mathematical and problem-solving skills such as 1:1 correspondence, number recognition, basic introductions of addition, subtraction, measurement, comparison and time - season, months and days of the week.

In science we use Scholastic Weekly Readers to encourage environmental learning through observation, asking questions and drawing conclusions. We cover lifecycles, incorporate STEM and conduct various age-appropriate experiments throughout the year.

This year we have had to make some modifications to our program due to COVID-19. All students have individual table spots and supplies. We also assign centers to students and limit centers to 2 or 3 students. All specials, such as music, library and gym, are held in our classroom or outdoors.

Each student has their own bin of toys. Toys and other reusable resources or manipulatives are sanitized and switched each day. Areas in our classroom are designated with colored stars to mark spots allowing for social distancing. Our classroom remains fun and inviting.

In PreK 4 we assess students through observations and compile portfolios for each child. This collection of work the children produced throughout the year clearly show the progress in each child's development. These portfolios are shared with parents at formal conferences in January as well as the end of the year. We also use the formal Archdiocesan report card to evaluate students in January and May. We hold formal parent-teacher conferences in January to discuss kindergarten readiness, prior to kindergarten registration. Through both program-developed child assessment (observations and portfolios) and published child

assessment tools (Archdiocesan PreK report card) we are able to determine each child's development and kindergarten readiness; therefore, we set them up for success in kindergarten and beyond.

The Preschool 3 program guides children (and parents!) through the transition from home to school to establish a life-long love of learning. Our program focuses on the physical, social, emotional, literacy/language, and cognitive development of young children. Through creative play, hands-on exploration and discovery, structured and free time, interacting with classmates, teachers, and aides, the child becomes a student. Lesson plans emphasize interconnected learning, which exposes the child to multiple subjects and multiple skills in a single activity. Helping each child grow and improve fine and gross motor skills, listening, self-discipline and social skills at their own pace is so rewarding. These are essential elements for entrance into the Preschool 4 program and establish a firm foundation for a lifetime of learning.

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

Prior to the COVID crisis, St. Mary's augmented its academic programs with the following "specials" learning opportunities: Physical Education, Fine Arts, Music, Technology, Media Arts, Spanish. The Spanish program for the younger grades is supported with conventional instruction as managed by the kindergarten teacher on a weekly basis. Language instruction for the upper grades functions on a Rosetta Stone digital curriculum platform. Students engage in digital lessons on a weekly basis.

The Physical Education program offers Health and Wellness activities on a weekly basis. Classes run for 55 minutes, with students incrementally acquiring knowledge and skills that will allow them to develop life-long investment in healthy and active lifestyles. In those instances where facilities limit the range of physical activity, the teacher adapts instruction to focus on topics such as nutrition, health, and safety.

The Fine Arts program follows a spiraled approach, with students revisiting foundational knowledge and skill in a range of two-dimensional art activities. As opportunities arise, the students may also be presented with opportunities to work with clay/ceramics, and the school does have a kiln which will support such projects. Art instruction includes scaffolded instruction in drawing, painting, design, sketching, and architectural fundamentals. In addition, the Media Arts program was implemented in the past few years to serve a few objectives. On a concrete level, the Media Arts course for 8th grade is conceived to support the publication of a school yearbook. Using the principles of Backward Design, exposure to Graphic and Media Arts knowledge and skills are the focus of instruction in grades 5-7.

Our Music program provides a far-ranging series of curricular and co-curricular opportunities. Students in the music class learn about music theory and history, but they also may elect to be part of various events and activities that represent the school and support parish activities as well. Among the many manifestations of the performing arts opportunities, students often perform for weekly Mass accompaniment, and specific chorus and choir groups will support Parish church activities, especially around the holidays. The Seraphim and Cherubim choirs are specifically trained to provide music for church services, and they have opportunities to perform at the Christmas concert, as well as during Spring concert activities. Other events include a 7th grade play, Living Stations of the Cross, a school-wide talent show, a Christmas pageant, and periodic student performance at parish and school Masses.

A partner program in the Fine Arts Curriculum is the Instrumental Music program. Northeastern Music provides an instrumental program for our students. The group offers instruction on the instrument of their choice. Northeastern Music is a private business which affiliates itself with the school. These musical partnerships help our to grow and excel in all academic areas. . In the current environment, all instruction and performance has been virtual.

In the technology program, students in grades K-8 have historically received scaffolded, developmentally appropriate instruction commensurate with their intellectual, and academic capacity. In addition, technology instruction has been tied directly to the accessibility and availability of hardware. Grades 5-8 have been on a 1:1 platform for a few years, while the lower grades have received instruction in a technology lab. The school has supported a BYOD approach for the younger grades as well.

The adaptation that has occurred in response to the pandemic has fostered creativity in the use of technology.. The BLJ invested in the purchase of Chromebooks for grades 3 & 4, and those devices are currently assigned and used daily. Those classes participate in technology instruction.

Grades K-2 have not been engaged in Technology instruction for most of the year as a consequence of the restrictions in place throughout the state and country. The technology lab is not in use, and these grades do not have access to school provided devices. Notably, the technology program has supported the Media Arts program, and vice versa. This flexibility allows the school to maintain technology and art instruction despite some necessary accommodations brought on by the pandemic.

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

St. Mary's provides academic support that expands upon the interventions and supports provided by the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit through the State's Title I program. Students who meet criteria established at the IU level are afforded supports that are generally pull-out, small group instruction on a bi-weekly basis. Students may receive supplemental instruction in reading and math at a level determined by the diagnostic assessments that are administered at intervals specifically for the purpose of identifying those with academic needs.

Student services provided by the IU include math, reading, and speech support this year. In addition, the IU provides a school counselor who provides individual and/or small group support or services as needed. This year, the counselor is providing instruction weekly for our 8th grade population. Both 8th grade classes participate in the 2nd Step program, a personal development and social skills program. For the 2020-2021 school year, the MCIU provides services to 30 students – 22 learning support and 8 speech therapy.

In addition to those supports and services provided through the Intermediate Unit programs, St. Mary's has a full-time dedicated academic support teacher who serves students from K-8th grade. In the regular classroom, modifications vary for students according to their specific needs. Teachers strive to utilize various modalities of instruction and assessment in order to accommodate those differences: that is student may receive multisensory instruction, enlarged font, and/or less text on assessments

Students in Grades 1-6 who struggle in Math or Reading are recommended, assessed, and receive twice weekly support through the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit.

Students with learning disabilities are identified through teacher observation and assessment and when available, prior documentation. Formal evaluations are initiated to identify students' strengths and needs, and a plan and program are developed through an ongoing collaborative process with classroom teachers, the support teacher, parents and students.

Depending on student need, as determined by IU testing and teacher discretion, students receive academic support through push-in or pull out practices. In some instances, the learning support teacher assumes a co-teaching posture. In others, she provides small group instruction in her classroom. At this time, students in all grades K-8 benefit from services provided by the dedicated academic support teacher. Most students with needs - identified formally or informally - are served through a program where the academic support teacher pushes in or pulls out for focused support directly connected to the learning areas in need of attention.

At this time, St. Mary's is not serving an ELL population, nor has the school needed to respond to any other specific population in need of services or support. In total, 41 students receive specific

instructional supports through the IU and our academic support program. 22 students are accessing reading and math support through the IU, with 19 students receiving support from the academic or instructional support teacher. 8 students receive speech therapy.

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

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

Families who have attached themselves to the St. Mary's Catholic School community have often touted the family atmosphere that pervades the daily routines and the campus atmosphere. Staff members historically make concerted effort to engage not just students, but entire families. Consequently, the relationships with alumni and their parents remain strong. St. Mary's is not just a school. We are a family.

St. Mary's, as noted previously, has tried to create an academic environment that focuses on the positive perpetuation of past practices and historical expectations. That is, the focus on the part of the faculty and staff has been to emphasize the positive, and to keep the school experience as consistent with non-COVID era experiences as possible.

For instance, the requirement to maintain social distancing and to implement mitigation efforts prompted a split of a large 8th grade class into two sections. (The other grades have one class per grade.) The personnel who determined the assignment of students to sections made every effort to acknowledge optimal demographics. Teachers and staff built the sections with an eye toward maintaining gender ratios, even splits of new students with legacy students. Moreover, careful consideration was made to include the 8th grade cohorts in contact with one another, even if physical proximity was not achievable.

In one notable instance, the fine arts teacher prepared students for a Christmas pageant, with each 8th grade class maintaining cohort integrity. However, a shift to virtual learning was directed by the Archdiocese. The performance was cancelled, but the hard work and preparation had already been exerted. Thus, the performance did not take place, but all the foundational effort remained in place.

This fidelity to history and tradition, despite the restrictions of a pandemic world, has extended to other areas as well. For instance, the school year has always kicked off with a school-wide student Mass. This year, with gathering restrictions in place, the parish and the community worked hard to move the Mass outdoors, in accordance with all recommendations for social distance and safe interactions. The students have certainly experienced some different circumstances, but every effort has been made to keep as many student experiences and traditions in tact.

On September 11, with some extra planning, the school maintained its tradition of recognizing Patriots' Day. Students gathered at safe distances and made proper recognition of a national tragedy. The ceremony was built upon student participation and contribution, and was supported by all staff. Father Bellopede added proper solemnity with a pastoral contribution of prayer and blessing.

Despite the limitations in place, the school maintained its tradition of holding a Race for Education event, shifting to an electronic platform to support the fundraising, while managing to hold a genuine outdoor 'race.' to honor the mechanics of the event. Just recently, students participated in a virtual choral event, a Christmas tradition that lives on in the digital world. Northeastern Music also broadcast a virtual instrumental recital that was broadcast via the school's and parish's Youtube and Facebook pages.

We plan to continue to keep all student engagement activities in place throughout the year. The year may be different, but the staff is committed to ensuring that it is not lesser.

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

The strategy the school has found most successful is implementing a Saint Mary Catholic School Board of Limited Jurisdiction. The Board's responsibilities include reviewing all aspects of the governance of the school, including development, enrollment, marketing, and finances. The BLJ researches, discusses, adapts and executes strategies to insure the school's improvement. This focus assures the school's future and provides for a better student experience and success. The Board is composed of community members, parish members and school families and is divided into committees. The principal sits on this board as an ex

officio member and academic advisor.

To foster input and a sense of shared commitment, a family survey is conducted twice a year. This gives families a chance to discuss the school's efforts in academics, extracurricular activities, facilities, etc. The survey also provides an opportunity for stakeholders to voice concerns. All families that request a call are called and resolutions are discussed. The survey results are shared with administration as needed and concerns are addressed and actions taken when possible.

To ensure successful communication, The Board of Limited Jurisdiction engaged the faculty and school parents in forming committees in order to compile plans on how to reopen Saint Mary Catholic School for in person learning in the fall under the COVID-19 restrictions. These committees worked throughout the summer via Zoom. The Board of Limited Jurisdiction held parent townhall Zoom meetings in order to provide updates throughout the process. A formal reopening document was compiled and posted on the school website and distributed via our Option C messaging system. The Principal continues to communicate daily with parents through Option C with school updates and information.

In regard to business and community partnerships, Saint Mary Catholic School continues to partner with Business Leaders Organized for Catholic Schools (BLOCS), the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia and the BRIDGE Foundation who provide financial assistance. These community partners have helped many of our needy families who desire a Catholic education for their child(ren), but who have encountered financial hardships during the pandemic.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has partnered with the Connelly Foundation, which has provided grants to assist elementary schools. Saint Mary Catholic School has received grant funds for technology and plexiglass dividers on wheels to provide safe in-person instruction in the classroom.

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

The principal at St. Mary's was hired in July, while the Board of Limited Jurisdiction and community-wide stakeholders collaborated to create a COVID responsive reopening plan. That constituency, charged with such a far-ranging responsibility, kept professional culture in mind in all facets, while the Parish House simultaneously searched for a principal. This is pertinent because a multitude of assumptions and preconceptions were part of the planning process.

For instance, teachers in the spring of 2020, when faced with the shift to virtual learning, encountered a significant facility and feasibility gap. One part of bridging that gap involved provisions of digital capabilities. All the classrooms in the building were equipped with SmartBoards, and students in grades 5-8 were assigned Chromebooks. Grades K-4 had no such personal technology. Consequently, the BLJ focused on acquisition of resources to enable hybrid – or full virtual – platforming for the 2020-2021 year. In simple terms, the professional staff – and the students – were the targets of efforts to provide the proper tools.

Additionally, the AOP actively encourages professional development for all the teaching staff. Not only does the AOP support PD opportunities, especially through partnerships with the area Catholic universities, but the infrastructure at the archdiocese also offers professional development activities – some free of charge – throughout the year.

The current principal plan is to continue to use in-service opportunities and contractual time to encourage professional development. The current administrator has periodically shared artifacts and points of emphasis from Danielson's Framework, the AOP supervision tool, in an effort to promote teacher empowerment. The locus of control will lie with the professional being evaluated to as high of a degree as possible. The strategy is to promote professional development and teacher improvement specifically by placing teachers in primary control of their development of knowledge and skills regarding the art of teaching.

To the credit of the current teaching staff, professional advancement and development have not been neglected in the past. Of the 13 teachers with full-time assignments, 5 have advanced degrees. One teacher

is currently enrolled in courses to obtain an administrative certification. All of the teachers have pursued skills acquisitions by enrolling in individual seminars, webinars, or workshops dedicated to the refinement and development of their expertise

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

The current administrative model consists of a single principal with no assistant principal, learning coaches, deans, or titular leaders. However, the school does have identified departmental leaders in the areas of language arts, math, religion, social studies and science. Those leadership duties are an extension or added responsibility of the respective teachers teaching assignments.

As the principal was newly-hired in July of 2020, some of the philosophy and structure are in the process of being adopted and implemented. Moreover, the existing policies, programs, relationships, and resources are being reviewed and shaped by the new administration to reflect a continued focus on student achievement.

To illustrate this objective, a noteworthy achievement for the St. Mary's student body may be highlighted. In December, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia recognized the 2020 Neumann Scholars. This prestigious award is presented to the highest achieving 8th graders in the AOP. The accomplishment is also valuable, as the scholarship to an AOP high school may be worth as much as \$32,000 cumulatively for each successful student. For 2020, St. Mary's was the only K-8 school to have three scholarship winners. In fact, St. Mary's has boasted of multiple winners regularly throughout the last two decades.

Other aspects of school leadership are also important. At St. Mary's, because we are a small school with a lean administrative model, some components of administration are managed by the Parish business manager, and the parish bookkeeper. Additionally, the enrollment director and custodian are overseen by the Business Office. This is important to the question because some elements of leadership are simply not within the purview of the principal.

Prior to the arrival of the new principal, the Board of Limited Jurisdiction formulated plans, provisions, and protocols for maintaining safety through the creation and construction of a reopening plan that was developed during the summer months, and which was heavily influenced by the AOP's Catholic Schools Onward (CSO). In simple terms, all expendable furniture and equipment was removed from classrooms to maximize the ability to maintain distance among the students and staff. Specials teachers, and disciplinary specialists were re-purposed into 'drop-in' roles to maintain the integrity of grade level cohorts. A cleaning service was hired to provide daily overnight maintenance and sanitation according to the highest/most cost-effective degree. The school custodian was assigned to specific tasks to maintain the highest attention to high use surface areas. All of these decisions have been successfully implemented.

#### **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

Acknowledgement and responsiveness to the diverse needs and backgrounds of students, staffs, and families are embedded in the culture and practices of the school. A strength of the community is that sensitivity to differences in ethnic, racial, socio-economic, or household dynamics are never highlighted or exposed in an overt manner as they pertain to any individual person or family. Rather, individuals are included in expansive manner, with individual groups having latitude to celebrate their differences or points of pride in the natural manifestation of the activity. For instance, earlier in the year, students were invited to honor their families for their efforts and sacrifices in service to our country. On Veterans' Day, students submitted the names of their honored family members, and select students in 8th grade created a wall of honor by adding those names to certificates. While St. Mary Catholic School is not as highly diverse as some other schools, the wall of honor was comprised of a wide range of cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds.



Traditionally, one of the signature activities of Catholic Schools Week involved a Career Day, where students in grades 4-8 selected presentations from various professional tracks to attend during an afternoon carousel of careers. Younger grades were presented with a narrower range of career options which visited their classrooms during the same time frame.

Another cultural event which is widely celebrated at St. Mary's is Memorial Day. In this instance, the school has dedicated a significant amount of time and attention to respectful remembrance, as well as robust celebration of the American experience and those who have made the greatest sacrifices to the cause of freedom.

Also of some note, the socio-economic diversity of the school community is not striated or segmented to the highest degree, but a full 20% of the population are eligible for and receive tuition assistance or financial aid of some type. Though it is not documented in any formal fashion, there does seem to be an interesting split in composition, with somewhat equal proportions of the community engaged in traditionally white-collar professional jobs, or a similar segment being small business owners who may have been severely affected by the closures and restrictions imposed in response to the COVID -19 virus.

Unrelated to COVID, but noteworthy in its own right is the development and construction of an outdoor classroom to provide flexibility and innovation in the delivery of instruction. While the pandemic has prompted attention on the availability of this outdoor setting, the impetus for the creation of the classroom supersedes the current restrictive environment.

The Parish is truly a partner of the school in regard to providing support, with a very active and enthusiastic outreach series of programs. The Parish actively campaigns for funds and services for needy families, groups, within and without the parish and the school. Likewise, the Church ministries are available and accessible for all families and staff members.

Though the incorporation of class trips and field trip experiences has been curtailed by the COVID crisis, we feel compelled to note that St. Mary's has long supported programs and activities that augment and cultivate an altruistic and socially-aware set of cultural pillars - charity, respect for others, the sanctity of life, and love of country. Eighth grade students have annually participated in the March for Life, and all students have contributed to service projects which promote or support these ideals.

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

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The strategy most integral to the successful management of the COVID era adjustments, restrictions, and challenges involves two divergent concepts – collaboration and autonomy.

Somehow, an urgently assembled series of committees have managed to coalesce their multi-faceted, divergent, but collective efforts into a cohesive strategy that is equally dependent upon the push and pull of collaboration and autonomy. Maintaining the delicate balance has not seemed to be an arduous task from the outside looking in. Perhaps the adherence to a common goal and outcome has made this possible.

For instance, the task forces created by the BLJ consisted of a group for Logistics, a group for Technology, and a group for Facilities. These groups were able to smoothly and seamlessly present the results of their independent research, determine where the divisions and lines of responsibilities coincided, and make decisions on how best manner in which to implement their plans. The two coordinators, whose responsibility included maintaining the delicate balance between collaboration and autonomy, were remarkable adept at meeting that challenge.

This tacit understanding that success will lay in keeping the people and processes supported and empowered has been especially important. For instance, the answer in how best to deliver virtual instruction, given the resource disparity between 1:1 classrooms and our earlier grades, was determined to be to allow divergent mechanics while simultaneously expecting congruent outcomes and parameters. More specifically, the conduit for the exchange of student work for progress monitoring and assessment for the upper grades has been Google Classroom. Grades 5-8 started the year with individually assigned Chromebooks, and Grades 3 and 4 added those tools recently as they arrived via a sluggish supply chain. Grades PK – 2 have not universally adopted Google Classroom, because some students did not have capability with their BYOD devices.

In this same vain, individual teachers have been given autonomy to implement apps and resources that are unique to their assignments. The best example for this is the Science curriculum, where the grade 5-8 teacher has purchased a primarily digital curriculum – as conventional workbook and textbook platforms were not conducive to the COVID restrictions. Specifically, our science teacher ‘drops in’ to grade level sections, rather than those students traveling to a science classroom. The teacher has truly collaborated with administration and the technology director to make delivery of instruction particular to the science class, thereby finding success in a degree of autonomy that is critical.

## **PART VII - NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL INFORMATION**

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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?      \$6268  
(School budget divided by enrollment)

4. What is the average financial aid per student?      \$1662

5. What percentage of the annual budget is devoted to scholarship assistance and/or tuition reduction?      0%

6. What percentage of the student body receives scholarship assistance, including tuition reduction?      20%

## PART VIII – NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL ASSESSMENT RESULTS

### FOR NORM-REFERENCED TESTS

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*Non-public schools must report norm-referenced test (NRT) results in reading and mathematics for students tested in grades 3 and higher in the most recent administration of the test within the most recently completed school year (2019-2020)<sup>1</sup>. Each school must obtain grade level summary reports from the test publisher for students tested in reading and mathematics for each of these grades.*

These reports must include:

1. the number of students tested;
2. the average student scale score or the national percentile equivalent of the average scale score in reading and mathematics **for all students in each tested grade; and**
3. the average student scale score or the national percentile equivalent of the average scale score in reading and mathematics **for each sufficiently large subgroup<sup>2</sup> in each tested grade.**

Please make notations on these reports to explain results that represent fewer than 95 percent of the students enrolled at the time of testing (e.g., the number of students who took alternative assessments<sup>3</sup>).

A copy of these reports (in a PDF file) must be uploaded through the National Blue Ribbons Schools Portal.

Also, one hard copy of these reports must be submitted by mail to CAPE with two hard copies of this application.

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<sup>1</sup> Because of school closings due to COVID-19, schools may use test results obtained in the fall or spring of 2019 or the fall of 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Possible subgroups are those identified in Items 4, 6, 7, and 8 in Part II of this application (racial/ethnic groups, ELL students, students eligible for free or reduced meals, and students receiving special education services). A sufficiently large subgroup is one that represents at least 10 percent of the school enrollment as reported in these items.

<sup>3</sup> Alternate assessments are used to evaluate the performance of students who are unable to participate in a school's norm-referenced test (NRT) even with accommodations. These assessments are based on the grade-level content covered by the NRT, but at reduced depth, breadth, and complexity. (adapted from National Center on Educational Outcomes)