

## Selections from the April 2014 St. Francis School Progress Report

### 1. MAJOR CHANGES

Regarding major changes, I first must start with the fact that this is a combined report on the former Reaction Reports and Visiting Team Reports for what were formerly St. Francis High School and St. Francis School, Goshen (PS-8<sup>th</sup> grade), two separate schools that were merged on July 1, 2012 and are now known as St. Francis School, Inc. As such, there have been quite a few changes on both campuses. Having become one Preschool-12<sup>th</sup> grade school has been extremely beneficial to the School overall in a variety of ways, and we have accomplished a number of things in the last nearly two years:

- We merged our Boards as of July 1, 2012. This was a difficult process, but we created a survey that outlined what we would be asking of Trustees and asked them for their preferences. Any Trustee who wanted to continue as a Trustee was allowed to continue, but we instituted a tiered term system – new officers or committee chairs would serve three-year terms and existing Trustees' terms stayed in place, so that had about a third with three-year, a third with two-year terms and a third with one-year terms. We had 33 Trustees in 12-13, and now we are down to 24 in 13-14, along with four Emeritus Trustees, one ex-officio Legal Counsel, one non-voting faculty representative from each campus, plus me and three staff attendees.
- We created new Mission and Vision Statements for the new School and both were adopted by the Board in January 2013: Mission: St. Francis School cultivates a joyful, compassionate, intellectual community that celebrates individuality and inspires independent thinking for life. Vision: St. Francis School is the regional center of progressive learning where students grow into mindful, informed young people.
- The merged School had a balanced budget in its second year that incorporates raises (both performance in some cases and a minimum 2% across the board), a 2.5% 403(b) match (the first since 2008), increased professional development spending, and significant capital expenditures. We are forecasting being able to cover CapEx through operations for 2014-15 for the first time, as well as bring the 403(b) match back to the pre-recession level of 5%.
- Both schools had been in separate Capital Campaigns when we merged. The summer of the merger, we conducted a Feasibility Study with a consultant and the results were that we confirmed all of our existing pledges and determined that we could raise \$6-12MM total. We re-started the Capital Campaign last spring, and we have now raised \$4.7MM.
- We determined the future locations of all of our campuses: we will be moving our Preschool from its current location in Harrods Creek, KY in St. Francis Episcopal Church (our founding namesake Church) to the Goshen Campus; the Goshen and Downtown Campuses will remain where they are permanently – in other words, we intend to remain a two-campus school.
- We hired Lake:Flato Architects out of San Antonio, TX to conduct a Master Facilities Plan for both of our major campuses. The plan was completed in the spring of 2013.
- We prioritized our various facilities projects and determined that first we needed to re-carpet and re-paint the entire Goshen Campus, as this had not been done in a very long time. We also demolished the High School's decrepit garage, as it was falling down, and constructed an attractive, landscaped parking lot that allows for 24/7 revenue from non-school parkers as well as ample parking for the school community.
- Of our major capital projects, we determined that the Goshen Gym should go first. Construction began on the gym in the spring of 2013 and is due to be completed summer 2014 in time for the 14-15 school year.
- The Preschool will be moving in the summer of 2014 to Goshen and we will be making renovations to the three classrooms it will occupy, as well a building a separate, fenced natural playground for which funds had been raised several years ago. We will also be completing some updates to the Lower School playground at the same time.

- Prior to the merger, the Schools had three separate Galas. In the first year of the merger, we had just two Galas – in October we hold the “Our Good Earth” Gala on the Goshen Campus under a gorgeous tent with a Farm-to-Table gourmet meal; in February we host the “Imagine Scholarship Fundraiser and Fine Art Auction” downtown in a historic venue.
- We added the totals of the two Annual Funds from 11-12 as our 12-13 merged goal, and we slightly exceeded that goal, also achieving 98% parent participation in our first “Five-Week Annual Fund,” which we implemented in the fall for parents. We are ahead of our Annual Fund goal in this, our second year.
- We did a massive survey of our constituents and gained input on our tagline, logo, school mascot, colors, and school name in November 2012. We received nearly 800 responses to the survey, which was incredible. The results determined that we stay with the High School’s “The School of Thought” tagline and exclamation point logo, but update the look of the logo for the new school; we adopted the High School mascot, the Wyvern, as our all-school mascot; we chose red and blue as our colors, a hybrid of the two schools’ former colors; and, despite the fact that the name “St. Francis” is confusing, as we are non-denominational and in a huge Catholic market, we are not changing our name from “St. Francis”. The survey responses also indicated an overall high level of satisfaction with the school, with 94% reporting that they were highly to somewhat satisfied.
- We completed the re-branding project and launched a new advertising and marketing campaign in 2012-13; we also created all new “Wyvern Swag,” including cups, water bottles, bumper stickers, and a variety of clothing, among other things.
- We created a brand new website that launched in the fall of 2013.
- We created a new merged Student and Parent Handbook as well as a new Faculty Handbook for 2012-13.
- The merger allowed us to bring one of the High School’s curricular offerings to the Middle School: we began offering Chinese in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade in Goshen in 12-13, and offered it in 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> this year; next year, we will offer it in all four Middle School grades. In addition, the merger allowed us to add Music to the High School curriculum with an instrumental band class and after-school activity in 12-13 and 13-14; next year, we will be adding an additional music class in High School and it will be a choice that will fulfill our Fine Arts credit requirement. We also added back a period a week at the Goshen Campus, no longer closing early on Wednesdays, which allowed us to add an extra science period per week at all grade levels.
- One of the more gargantuan tasks of the merger was the merging of our many databases. Fortunately, both business offices used Peachtree, so we continue to use it. The Development, Admissions, and Registrar functions from both schools, however, used a combination of Senior Systems, Donor Perfect, and Education Edge (Blackbaud). We decided to go with Blackbaud for all of these systems, and this has been the most difficult and frustrating process of the merger.
- We created a Learning Resource Center (LRC) in partnership with the Langsford Learning Acceleration Center, the local leading experts on reading and writing remediation and learning differences in general. Their co-founder became the Director of the LRC and works four days a week on the Goshen Campus. We added a full-time academic support person, as well as two to three Langsford consultants (on whom we revenue share), as well as content tutors, who are contractors (again, we get a share of their revenue). This has been incredibly successful in every way: we are at full enrollment in the LRC; it has exceeded our revenue forecasts by a good deal; we have retained students we otherwise would not have; and we have attracted students that we otherwise would not have. We are starting a mini-version of the LRC on the High School campus next year by hiring a Coordinator, who will report to the Director and also provide academic support, including executive function and organizational management assistance, as well as some content tutoring and overseeing other content tutors and standardized test preparation.
- We instituted the evaluation system and the rung compensation system at the Goshen Campus, which the High School had been using for almost a decade.

- We moved the Goshen Campus to quarters from trimesters in 13-14.
- Finally, our enrollment has increased dramatically since the merger occurred. The High School was at 135, and it is currently at 150 – the largest enrollment in its history. The Goshen Campus was at 235, and it is currently at 258, the largest in almost a decade. The Preschool has shrunk in recent years and we are intentionally shrinking it to 50 next year when it moves to Goshen, but we are almost at full enrollment for next year now, which is early in the year for Preschool.

## 2. UPDATE ON MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

### Major Recommendations for the Goshen/Preschool Campuses

1. Devote time to thoughtful analysis and planning of its future. The school responded to the recent economic downturns and the resulting decline in enrollment with care and appropriate action. Decisions were difficult and not without pain and sacrifice, yet they were needed and have prevented the school from incurring any debt. However, the budget cuts, e.g., freezing salaries, suspending retirement contributions, cutting professional development, deferring facility repairs and capital needs, eliminating positions and combining jobs, are unsustainable and detrimental to the long-term health and success of the school. Planning for the future should include discussions around increasing enrollment; developing a comprehensive marketing plan; ensuring fundraising incorporates operational, capital, and endowment needs; and developing contingencies should enrollment not increase.

**Response:** *This recommendation is exactly what led the Goshen Board to hire a consultant upon the resignation of the former Head of School, John Delautre. The consultant's first recommendation to ensure the sustainability of St. Francis School and Preschool was to merge with St. Francis High School. Since the merger, every aspect of this recommendation has been addressed: we re-instituted 2% salary raises across the board, and greater raises in many cases due to implementing the High School's rung system; we added back a 2.5% retirement match and have currently budgeted a 5% match for 14-15; we re-painted and carpeted the entire Goshen Campus, and replaced many HVAC units, which greatly improved the heat in the Goshen buildings this winter; we took down the gymnasium and are nearly complete with the new gym; we enhanced professional development spending; and we increased faculty and staff. We also spent a considerable sum on marketing and instituted a new advertising campaign; we conducted a feasibility study and re-started the capital campaign, which incorporated both capital and endowment; and enrollment is the highest in over a decade on the Goshen Campus.*

2. Strengthen internal communication among the constituent groups of the school. All constituent groups are deeply committed to the school mission and program yet need to work in a more collaborative, supportive, and transparent manner. Faculty, administrators, and board of trustees need to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities as well as others'. Timely communication positively affects school morale and prevents misperceptions, false assumptions, and erroneous conclusions. In order to foster a respectful and trusting environment, the school needs to ensure that school community members understand why, how, when, and by whom decisions are and will be made.

**Response:** *With the hiring of an Advancement Director, communication is centralized, efficient and regular. The Goshen Campus now has all the publications that the High School campus has had for many years including the Wyvern Weekly e-newsletter (primarily for parents, faculty/staff, and Trustees, with weekly news and calendar info); Thoughts e-newsletter (monthly to parents, faculty/staff, Trustees, alums, friends, and donors); a quarterly alum e-newsletter; and a bi-annual printed publication, The Wyvern Report. In addition, monthly faculty meetings, smaller faculty meetings by departments or grade levels/divisions, and three or four annual all-campus faculty/staff meetings are held, as well as biweekly administrative team and leadership team meetings. The Head and leadership also conduct parent coffees on various topics frequently to allow parents to ask any questions they may have. The response to all these communication vehicles has been very positive.*

3. Continue the documentation of its curriculum. There has been a solid effort over the past few years, yet the school needs to further enhance the vertical consistency, scope and sequence, and continuity of its curriculum. Teachers are dedicated to the school mission and core values and do have many informal conversations regarding curriculum and program, yet the curriculum is susceptible to being inconsistent, haphazard, and personality driven without a formal and systematic process of discussing and documenting curriculum and program, including pedagogy and assessment.

**Response:** *Curriculum maps exist and are being updated each year. Our larger project now is to work on ensuring that the MS and HS curricula work together and that we work to eliminate both unnecessary duplication and gaps.*

### **Major Recommendations for the High School Campus:**

1. Create and implement an aggressive enrollment plan that will enable the School to enroll more full-pay students.

**Response:** *The High School's enrollment has steadily increased since the Visiting Team Report. We had one down year and that class graduated in 2012, so the enrollment increased in 2012-13 even without the merger, as we had been taking in freshman classes of over 30 (whereas the Class of 2012 was 23 students). With the merger, our enrollment increased even more, and the High School's enrollment of 150 is the largest it has been in our 37-year history.*

2. Develop an ongoing professional development plan that helps teachers reach every student in its significantly diverse community.

**Response:** *We have continued to offer and encourage professional development on differentiating. We also have instituted ESL tutors for the last several years. The addition of the LRC on the Goshen Campus has made the expertise of the Langsford Center available to the High School faculty and staff, and the Director of the LRC collaborated with our Director of Student Services and Campus Head on the accommodation plans and to discuss new students with learning challenges at the start of school this year.*

3. Increase the diversity of the faculty/staff and the Board of Trustees.

**Response:** *We have made good progress on this recommendation. We have four African-American Trustees and one Hispanic Trustee. We have also focused on increasing the diversity of our faculty and staff. The past and current Admissions Directors on the Goshen Campus are African-American (the immediate past one is now a Trustee); we have two full-time faculty/staff members who are African-American, one Indian, and one Moroccan; our one major hire on the High School Campus for 2014-15 is Hispanic, and one of our three hires on the Goshen Campus is African-American.*

4. Proceed aggressively but with prudence in the implementation of the Master Plan and accompanying capital campaign.

**Response:** *As discussed above, one of our first steps after the Merger was to conduct a feasibility study. We then re-invigorated the Capital Campaign, and we have raised \$4.7MM to date of our \$12MM goal (approximately \$3MM had been raised prior to the Merger.) We also began two of our facilities priorities: first, we took down the garage next to the High School and constructed a flat lot that earns 24/7 revenue as well as offers parking for all in our community. In addition, we began the long-anticipated gym project at Goshen, which will be completed in July 2014. We secured bank financing on all the projects that allows us to draw what we need when we need it, and pay it back with 80% of pledges collected.*

5. Devise and implement a technology plan that is mission appropriate and takes into account the needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century School.

**Response:** *Technology has been the major focus of our Parent Association grants over the last five years. Now every department at the High School has at least one SMART board, and every full-time faculty member has an iPad and projector. We also implemented the use of Google Apps. Next year, we will be eliminating the Computer Lab (although we will still have computers*

*available in the Atrium Commons and Reading Room) and implementing laptop carts (this is also the case on the Goshen Campus). One of the other benefits of the Merger is that it has allowed us to have a full-time IT Director whose job it is to not only maintain all our equipment, but also to plan for our future technology needs. Next year, we will also be adding a full-time Librarian/Media Specialist on the Goshen Campus who will be able to assist teachers in the use of technology in the classroom on that campus as well as on the Downtown Campus. In addition, the implementation of Blackbaud for all our systems except the Business Office has made the Registrar's, Admissions Offices', and Development Office's jobs much more efficient and streamlined. We implemented online re-enrollment this year for the first time, which has not only increased efficiency, but also has expedited the re-enrollment timeline.*

### **3. CONCLUSION**

It has been a truly momentous time in the history of the former St. Francis High School and St. Francis School, now St. Francis School, Inc. For those of us who have been associated with one or both schools for many years, it has been extremely gratifying. The Merger is something that was discussed and nearly occurred two previous times in the Schools' histories, but was never accomplished. In 2010-11, two Boards came together and took the very brave and bold move to change the future for these Schools. While those of us involved believed that it would prove to be beneficial to both campuses, we never could have imagined just how positive a change it would be. We are now one School with one, louder, clearer voice in the community, which has resulted in dramatically increased enrollment, successful fundraising, and momentum on our Facilities Master Plan, all of which has left us in a solid financial position that allows us to look with confidence and enthusiasm toward the bright future we see for this wonderful and unique school.

