

February 22, 2017

Dear Family of Faith,

Over the past eight months our parish engaged in a thorough, data-driven, and highly participative process to clarify the mission of our parish school and strengthen the positioning of our school for years to come.

The strategic mission clarification process addresses all levels of schooling at St. Benedict Preparatory School – from reflecting on the grade structure we offer, to creating a bold, vibrant, and differentiated plan for each level of schooling that we support. We appreciate the time and effort our community has given to support this process by participating in focus groups and online surveys.

This communication is the beginning of the output of the decisions made through the strategic plan process.

Early Childhood – 8th Grade Program

Our parish education mission will be focused on providing a world-class, Catholic education in a vibrant and faith-filled community for early childhood - grade 8. We will continue our dedication to providing an excellent academic foundation and experience that is enlivened and distinguished by

our commitment to a strong Catholic identity, service, and faith development. We will continue to provide an inclusive environment. There will be technology supported differentiation of instruction and assessment with a focus on academic rigor for all students. In addition, we will concentrate on developing the skills of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication.

Grades 6-8 will continue as a distinctive middle school program, focused on the unique needs of the young adolescent learner, with a diverse range of classes and extracurricular activities. Our parish has been blessed with a unique campus and we will look for ways to leverage “the Block” as valued programs are not only continued, but further developed and expanded. We will continue our offerings such as advanced math, Agora, foreign language, fine and performing arts, and build exciting programs around integrated STEM, formal leadership training, our beloved house system, and a distinct high school prep program.

We plan to share more information on the mission of our early childhood – grade 8 school in March/April and will begin implementing these enrichments for the 2017-2018 school year.

High School Program Grades 9-12

Through this process, we have also come to acknowledge the data and financial realities of our parish high school. The results of these findings are that our high school program is no longer financially sustainable due to market trends, demographic shifts, and declining enrollment. The financial challenges and declining enrollment make it impossible to sustain the superior four-year college preparatory academic experience that our bright and deserving high school students seek.

Therefore, our parish school will begin to phase out our ministry of high school education. Our parish will not be admitting a freshman class for the 2017-2018 school year. Over the next two years, we will be transitioning to an early childhood - grade 8 school. St. Benedict Preparatory High School will graduate our last senior class in June 2019. This decision, while difficult, is final.

High School Program Conclusion Plan:

We will be providing transfer assistance to another Catholic high school for the accepted, **incoming** freshman applicants and **rising** sophomore class. Given the relatively small student population at these grade levels, we realize that offering an excellent and extensive college preparatory program through their high school graduation is not realistic. We are committed to partnering with these students and their families as they find a new school. A transition team has been established to answer questions and provide personalized recommendations to high school students.

Our parish community will remain committed to our **rising** junior and senior classes and will continue the academic program here so that they may graduate from St. Benedict Preparatory School. We will continue to offer a quality academic program that prepares students for college entrance, and we will continue to help all students to identify and achieve success in entering the colleges or universities of their choice. We are also committed to continuing the Protégé and Agora program. We know that this can only be financially viable if the majority of **rising** juniors and **rising** seniors return. We expect to have their intent to return forms by March 21st and then have a definitive answer about our commitment to these students by March 27th.

The decision to phase out our high school ministry impacts the entire St. Benedict Parish and Preparatory School community, as well as thousands of our Alumni. We ask for your patience and your prayers during this difficult time of transition. We know there will be many questions and we are committed to being transparent in this process. Although our high school ministry is being phased out, we are proud to remain committed to a dynamic youth ministry for all high school aged teens of our parish.

From the first graduating class in 1954 until today, we are grateful to God for each parishioner, family, student, faculty member and alum who have enriched St. Benedict Parish and Preparatory School with their faith, gifts and talents.

Fr. Jason Malave Ms. Rachel Gemo

Pastor Head of Parish School



**Can you tell me more about SBPS’ strategic plan process?**

St. Benedict Preparatory School hired consultant, Catholic School Management (CSM), in the fall of 2015 to help guide us in preparing our 5 year strategic plan. The strategic plan was approved June 2016. The primary goal of the strategic plan was for the School Advisory Board and Administration to undertake a data-centric approach to identifying what grade structure the school should support and how to differentiate each level of schooling. We continued the engagement with CSM to assist us in a formal process to gather the data. From internal and external data, focus groups, interviews, financials, etc. the School Advisory Board, Administration and CSM compiled an extensive report on the status of the school, demographics and competitor schools and ultimately developed a recommendation for the future of the school. This recommendation was presented to Fr. Jason and Ms. Gemo for review and approval. The outcome of the recommendation is outlined in the letter above. More details will be forthcoming later this spring.

**Is there any chance that something will change and the high school will remain open?**

The decision is final. The results of these findings are that our high school program is no longer financially sustainable due to market trends, demographic shifts, and declining enrollment.

**Why is phasing out the High School over the next 2 years the best option? In order to save money and resources why not just close the doors at the end of this school year?**

First and foremost we want to continue to provide a high school education to the rising juniors (26 students) and rising seniors (34 students). At the same time this allows the Administration along with the School Advisory Board to have time to implement the enhancements to early childhood – grade 8. It allows SBPS the chance to retain the high school teachers to support grades 6 -8 (currently 100% of high school teachers are teaching a 6-8 class) as well as the opportunity to use grade 6 as an additional entry point for growing middle school enrollment. Secondly, we have analyzed financial data under several different scenarios and this option makes the most financial sense.

**What kind of differences can we expect with the new strategic direction for early childhood – grade 8?**

We want to differentiate ourselves in our neighborhood and on the north side of Chicago with a bold and exciting mission and plan for our school. While some of the high level concepts are outlined in the letter above, further details will not be available until later this spring when we communicate the strategic planning outcome to the community.

**When will the new strategic mission be implemented?**

We will start to implement enhancements for the 2017-2018 school year. However, some changes make take several years to fully implement. We intend to communicate a three-year plan to provide a high-level view of our goals later this spring.

**The Forward in Our Faith capital campaign assumed the high school was going to exist when we created our plans for the campus. Will these plans be revisited with the decision on the high school?**

Yes. We will be re-evaluating the facility needs in light of the changes to our mission. Proposed changes to the capital campaign plans, sequencing, and spending amount will be communicated when the information becomes available.

**How does the phasing out of our High School impact our “Parish Education Endowment Fund?”**

Interest from the Parish Education Endowment has helped many families over the past few years afford secondary school tuition. This has been a true blessing for these families. We expect that the Parish Education Endowment will continue to help parish families afford a Catholic education for their child(ren). More information will be shared at the end of March after a meeting with the board of the Parish Education Endowment Fund.

**The new strategic mission for the parish school sounds exciting! How might I offer my own gifts and talents in the planning and execution of this vision?** The school advisory board is charged with supporting the parish and school leadership in the implementation of this plan. Each year we invite members of our parish and school community to apply for a board position or work on one of the 8 advisory board committees. For more information on how to join the board or a board committee, please contact current Advisory Board Chair, Aileen Blake at [abblake@comcast.net](mailto:abblake@comcast.net).