

**St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic School**  
Grand Rapids, MI  
Strategic Intent Map  
January 4, 2023

- Diocesan Catholic Schools**
- 26 elementary/5 high schools with 6,250 PK-12 students enrolled (2021/22)
  - Enrollment stabilized over 7 years; rebound from 5% pandemic decline

- New elementary school (2018); 11 parishes in north deaneries and many students in SE/SW parishes with no Catholic schools
- 36.2K school-age Catholic children in diocese; 16.99% attend Catholic schools
- Students outperform local, state, national peers on standardized tests (MAP, SAT)
- Our high school college attendance rate for two- and four-year colleges is 95%
- 9.3% of our students have identified learning needs that are being served
- In last five years, racial/cultural diversity in our schools is 19%; enrollment of Hispanic/Latino students has remained steady
- Families pay average of 47% of elementary cost and 68% of H.S. cost; remainder covered by parish/development efforts
- Diocesan shared services model to support schools implemented
- Unprecedented amount of short-term federal/state funds available to private schools via pandemic stimulus funding with restrictions

# Environment

## 1 Direction (Snapshot of current practices)

### St.Thomas the Apostle School

- Largest enrollment of diocesan elementaries for 6 years (332 in 2021-22)
- 90% of eighth graders continue onto Catholic high school
- Student body is 12% multicultural; 10% Non-Catholic
- Student to staff ratio: 7 to 1
- Exceeds diocesan & national MAP scores in every category and in nearly every grade level; Exceeds district and state in PSAT eighth grade scores
- St. Thomas Education Foundation endowment and Tuition Angel are significant contributors to defray annual tuition and operation costs
- Technology is an intentional tool: All 1-8 students have a ChromeBook; assistive devices for ESS; all staff are updating to Microsoft Surface devices
- Very active board, board committees, and Home and School
- Development and outreach activities back in full swing after COVID
- Challenges include inflation, finding new staff, getting new families involved, space, and overcoming residual learning loss/mental health issues from COVID

## 3 Trends (Economic, social, technological, religious, etc.)

- Economic uncertainty
- Political and community polarization
- Economic, political and social trends impact mental health
- Security of children and school safety are parental concerns
- Increasingly secular world
- Role of schools has expanded to encompass responsibilities formerly the role of parents
- Recognition of social injustices
- Increase in non-traditional families
- Parents/students have many school options
- Parents have high expectations
- Social media plays significant role in our lives
- Attitudes of relativism and individualism
- Post pandemic mental health challenges remain for students, families, staff
- Continued influence of remote work and learning

## 11 Vision Metrics (5 years)

(Quantitative indicators that we reached our vision)

- Teacher compensation:** Our teachers have a transparent and competitive pay scale
- Teacher professional development and support:** Increased PD offered to faculty annually
- Enrollment:** Maximum capacity maintained year on year
- Academics:** 10% more of our students reach their projected MAP growth scores
- Curriculum:** Vertically and horizontally aligned curriculum
- Student Development and Support:** K-8 co-curricular programming expanded
- Faith Formation:** Catechesis of the Good Shepherd offered in grades 4-6
- Security and ADA:** Enhanced plan developed and implemented
- Early Childhood Center:** Business plan developed and implemented
- Development:** Development plan, driven through the St. Thomas Ed Foundation, is current, well managed (including alumni) and well communicated (accreditation 13.3)
- Board:** Board regularly participates in ongoing formation, training, annual self evaluation (accreditation 5.6); increased to 15 active members
- Technology:** Sustainable financial plan for up-to-date technology
- Marketing:** Activities/plans across all channels are updated, maintained and documented
- Brand:** Guide is developed and implemented
- Community Engagement:** Community outreach and partnership program is developed
- Volunteers:** Plan for robust volunteer network is developed/maintained
- Athletics:** Relationships and clear communication between school staff, board, athletic director, boosters are established/strengthened
- Inclusion:** Program is sustainable based on strong leadership, staff, enrollment criteria, adequate budgets
- Finance:** Funds are identified/secured to support all strategies

## 8 Responsibilities (What we do)

- Educate children to be creative actors in the world
- Model the active practice of our faith in daily life
- Rigorously prepare students for the next level of education
- Meet the individual learning needs of each child
- Develop the leadership potential of all children with an emphasis on servant leadership
- Support, respect and encourage the unique gifts of each child
- Provide a safe environment that allows each child to have optimum development
- Partner with parents and recognize their role as the primary educator of their children
- Make Catholic education accessible to all who desire it

## 9 Philosophy of Education (What we value)

- Modeling the active practice of our Catholic faith in daily life
- Developing our students' core skills to achieve their full potential
- Affirming and fostering the unique gifts of all individuals

### Characteristics of Catholic Schools

- Centered in the Person of Jesus Christ
- Contributing to the evangelizing mission of the Church
- Distinguished by excellence
- Committed to educate the whole child
- Steeped in Catholic worldview
- Sustained by gospel witness
- Shaped by communion and community
- Accessible to all students
- Established by the expressed authority of the bishop

## 7 Mission (Why we exist)

**Saint Thomas the Apostle School delivers a dynamic education centered in Christ**

## 6 Graduate Profile (What our graduates look like)

- Committed to Catholicism in word and action
- Grounded in morality, virtuous
- Academically prepared
- Problem solver
- Independent thinker while being collaborative
- Leader in the community
- Personally responsible
- Service oriented
- Inclusive and empathetic
- Aware of his/her gifts

## 5 Competitive Landscape (Why parents make other choices)

- Schools of choice
- Free vs. tuition-based education (East Grand Rapids, Forest Hills, City)
- Themed schools (Blandford, Zoo, Museum schools, Spanish immersion, etc.)
- Other Catholic and Christian schools
- Parent financial quality of life choices
- Convenience/geography
- Greater diversity
- Homeschooling
- Remote learning

## 4 Catholic Educational Practices (How we are similar/different from others in Diocese)

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|--|---|
| <b>Typical</b>   | <b>Atypical</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standardized curriculum</li> <li>Shared platforms: learning management system, student data, financial systems</li> <li>Three typical parent decision points to keep children in Catholic school: Pre/K, middle school, high school</li> <li>Use public school shared time teachers (Brighton)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Charism of hospitality, innovation, creativity</li> <li>Welcoming to difference</li> <li>Multi-age classrooms</li> <li>Inclusion support staff</li> <li>Morning chapel</li> <li>Student leadership development program</li> <li>Robust parish/school organizational structure</li> <li>Strategically engaged education foundation</li> <li>Very strong administrative team</li> <li>Consistently strong enrollment</li> <li>High functioning boards across the parish</li> </ul> |

## 14 Strategies (Our shared agenda for success)

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| <b>Teacher Compensation:</b> Research and create a "step compensation" plan; implement a timetable for increases  |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Professional Development:</b> Identify external PD opportunities; empower faculty to participate annually; include culturally responsive teaching  |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Academics:</b> Use student data and research-based best practices to inform and guide student learning   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Curriculum:</b> Establish expectations and increase time for teacher collaboration to regularly align curriculum   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Student Development/Support:</b> Develop a comprehensive plan for current and new co-curricular offerings  |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Faith Formation:</b> Identify teacher, space and funding to enable Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for grades 4-6  |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Security, ADA:</b> Update facility and security components of facilities assessment  |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Early Childhood Center:</b> Define space and develop business plan; implement  |   |   |   |   |
| <b>2</b>  |   |   |   |   |
| <table border="1"> <tr> <td>S</td> <td>W</td> </tr> <tr> <td>O</td> <td>T</td> </tr> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enrollment growing but likely capped by limited classroom space</li> <li>Funding can be unstable (tuition is enrollment dependent; fluctuates based on parish offertory, limited to 35% of a varying amount)</li> <li>Facilities are shared with parish, both spatially and financially</li> <li>Aging facilities</li> <li>Gym is not regulation size</li> <li>Playground is a city park</li> <li>Increasing programming = increasing costs</li> </ul> | S | W | O | T |
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| <b>Development:</b> Collaborate with Foundation board to create/implement a 5-year plan; communicate with key stakeholders  |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Board:</b> Mature the annual board operating calendar to include succession, recruitment and training efforts  |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Technology:</b> Develop comprehensive plan that is financially sustainable: collaborate with parish finance council technology committee   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Marketing:</b> Maintain, update, document all marketing activities/plans across all channels   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Brand:</b> Identify expert resource; develop brand guide; make rolling updates   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Community Engagement:</b> Identify internal resource and develop community outreach and partnership program  |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Volunteers:</b> Create infrastructure and develop plan for robust volunteer network in collaboration with Home and School leadership   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Athletics:</b> Establish and strengthen relationships and clear communication among school staff, board, athletic director, boosters   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Inclusion:</b> Codify current practices; communicate program vision and practices; generate financial support  |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Finance:</b> Develop school budget to include cost for all strategies; identify resources for securing additional funds needed   |   |   |   |   |

## 10 Vision (What we aspire to achieve)

**Be a leading, innovative, Catholic school that invites all students to love and serve Christ and engage culture with a saintly passion**

## 12 Stakeholder Perceptions (How we want to be known, and by whom)

- Parishioner:** "St. Thomas students and staff embody the Catholic faith."
- Teacher:** "I love my job."
- School parent:** "My children are receiving a high quality, Catholic education."
- School student:** "St. Thomas gives me the opportunity to know Christ and achieve my potential."
- Prospective parent:** "I'm choosing St. Thomas so my children will receive a high quality, Catholic education."
- Board member:** "I am impressed with the mission and see the fruits of my labor carried out."
- Alumni:** "I love supporting St. Thomas school because it keeps getting better."
- Catholic leader:** "I see Christ present in St. Thomas students and staff; it's a school others can emulate."
- Community neighbor:** "They are the best neighbor and our neighborhood value is higher because of St. Thomas school."
- H.S. teacher:** The most academic, faithful and respectful kids come from St. Thomas."