

**Designing our Future
Visiting Team Report
For**

**Holy Guardian Angels Regional School
Reading, Pennsylvania**

October 27 – 30, 2009

By

**A Visiting Team
Appointed by:**

**Middle States Association
Of Colleges and Schools**

Commission on Elementary Schools

The contents of this report represent the judgments of the members of the Visiting Team, as interpreted and written by the chair. They do not necessarily represent the opinion of the Commission on Elementary Schools or of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools.

Mission & Beliefs Study

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends the Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for providing a Mission Statement and Philosophy that encourages the emotional, social, spiritual, and academic growth of the students using Jesus Christ as their model.
2. The visiting team commends the school for using various means to communicate the Mission and Philosophy to the school community.
3. The visiting team commends the school for developing Belief Statements that can be referenced to the school's policies and procedures.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends that Holy Guardian Angels Regional School continue to publicize their Mission Statement in school handbooks, update it on the website, and post it the classrooms.
2. The visiting team recommends that HGA publish the Belief Statements for the school community and its stakeholders.
3. The visiting team recommends that the annual review of the Mission, Philosophy, and the Belief Statements by the faculty, staff, Home and School Association, School Advisory Board, and Student Government continues.

Comments:

The visiting team observed a loving Christian environment in which students, faculty, administration, staff, and parents interact. The mission statement, which is posted in every classroom, is proclaimed every day along with morning prayer. The Student Handbook and the school website include the mission statement. Self-discipline and a sense of social responsibility are part of every child's development. Teachers work with each student while meeting his/her unique individual needs.

Community Study

Comments:

The atmosphere at Holy Guardian Angels Regional School is one of caring and respect. The brightly decorated classrooms invite the students to be actively engaged in the learning process. The visiting team observed that cooperation, respect and dignity are integral parts to everyone working and learning at the school. The Mission Statement is not just displayed in every classroom, but it is lived by the students, faculty and administration. The property and building were found to be in immaculate condition. The school is clean and in good working order.

Student Services and Student Activities Study

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for their commitment to having the presence of a registered nurse on a full-time basis.
2. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for implementing an Instructional Support Team to assist students who may be struggling in a particular area.

3. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for providing an enrichment program that challenges gifted students.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School study the possibilities of funding opportunities in order that they can continue to benefit from additional support staff.
2. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School explore the idea of implementing a bar code scanner as an efficient way to track payment of cafeteria lunches.
3. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School to make an effort to follow-up on recent graduates to assist in the determination of the effectiveness of the school's educational program and services.

Comments:

Students are well behaved in the lunchroom. They interact with their peers and are responsible for cleaning their lunch area when finished. Profits are made from the lunch program and they are added to the annual budget. The flow of traffic in and out of school during arrival and dismissal is well organized. Students are transported to school by car or bus. Bus transportation is provided by the surrounding school districts. The school's privately hired nurse has established guidelines for obtaining the emergency equipment from the nurse's office when a crisis should arise. She has also created and donated a first aid kit for each classroom. The nurse is present at all faculty in-services and provides input and training on several medical and emergency procedures. Due to financial limitations, the Berks County Intermediate Unit provides limited services; therefore Holy Guardian Angels Regional School has hired private support staff as well as using in-house resources. The guidance counselor was unavailable to meet with the visiting team; therefore the information in this report is limited to what was written in the self-study with regards to counseling services.

Student Life and Student Activities

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends initiatives for developing community awareness for the benefit of students, families, and neighbors near and far.
2. The visiting team commends the diversity of family-friendly, student-centered opportunities for personal development, service, and recreation.
3. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School's vision to solicit students' opinions regarding activities.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends the pursuit and implementation of data related to current and proposed student activities.
2. The visiting team recommends generating options for providing some "middle school type" experiences for the seventh and eighth grade students.
3. The visiting team recommends further continuation of the initiatives to seek funds for the enhancement and diversity of student activity options.

Comments:

Upon finding an increase in the Spanish speaking population within the school area, Rosetta Stone has been installed as a vehicle to develop some proficiency for students and staff in Spanish. Rosetta Stone is a foreign language learning program.

Programs Study - Mathematics

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends the faculty for providing Compass Learning in order to assist students' specific academic needs.
2. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for implementing the Math Meeting Board developed by Saxon in order to maintain mathematical reasoning.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School research the possibilities of providing additional instructional time in mathematics for students in grades 6-8.
2. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School investigate ways to better integrate technology into the mathematics curriculum.

Comments:

The current textbook series, Saxon, has been adopted in all mathematics classes as the primary program for instruction. Each classroom is provided with a grade level kit. Math teachers have incorporated a math meeting board with a student helper in order to practice and apply mathematical skills and thinking. Compass Learning is utilized in order to customize assignments for students.

Programs Study - Social Studies

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends the faculty for providing a hands-on approach within the social studies instruction.
2. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for providing opportunities for field trips in order to enhance the social studies curriculum.
3. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for identifying social studies as a school-wide strategic goal.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends the faculty integrate technology into the social studies curriculum.
2. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School maintain diverse academic experiences for the integration of social studies across the curriculum.
3. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School formalize a school wide scope and sequence chart for the instruction of geography skills.

Comments:

The social studies curriculum at Holy Guardian Angels Regional School is project-oriented. Students participate in field trips to enhance the hands-on approach. Students in grades 6-8 participate in the National Geography Bee. A social studies goal is part of Holy Guardian Angels Regional School's strategic plan.

Programs Study - Language Arts

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for incorporating writing components such as rubrics, models, and journaling across curriculum concentrations.
2. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for integrating more diverse selections of literature to enhance the correlation between reading and written expression formats.
3. The visiting team commends the purposeful and consistent use of the Saxon Phonics Program in grades K-2 to create decoding skills which enable beginning readers.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends the incorporation of the Six Traits of Writing as proposed in the Strategic Plan.
2. The visiting team recommends attempting to provide regular opportunities for the improvement of listening skills, and enjoyment of aural /oral language to enrich creative and functional uses of language.
3. The visiting team recommends stressing the fulfillment of current writing guidelines for each grade, with particular attention given to categories of writing products designated for that grade level.

Comments:

A rich Language Arts program is evidenced in this school. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills are modeled, enjoyed, and practiced. Products of students' self-expression are prominently displayed throughout the classrooms and hallways.

Programs Study - Religion

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends the pastors and administration for their spiritual leadership.
2. The visiting team commends the faculty and staff for the respect and caring they demonstrate toward the students.
3. The visiting team commends the students for living the values that are stated in the Holy Guardian Angels Regional School's Mission Statement.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends making use of the parish and Diocesan resources to implement a vocational awareness program.
2. The visiting team recommends involving the students in the planning of the weekly liturgies.
3. The visiting team recommends that the administration and faculty continue to be involved in the various outreach and service projects in the community.

Comments:

Respect, care, and compassion were observed throughout the visit. Religious instruction is planned to convey the message of the Gospel and to teach students to reach out to people in the community. Teachers are required by the Diocese to acquire certification for catechists. Social justice and awareness of others is more than acquired knowledge. Students are led to look outward to community and global needs. Interviews with the faculty, students, and parents affirmed the strength of the Religion program as indicated by the Middle States Study. The importance of Religion, as well as care and respect, were observed by the Visiting Team. A prayer table was visible in each classroom with a variety of religious articles.

Educational Program

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends the school's procedure for identifying students with special needs, both remedial and enrichment.
2. The visiting team commends the faculty and principal for monitoring the curriculum at monthly meetings using pacing sheets.
3. The visiting team commends the school for effectively communicating its assessment policies and practices to the total school community.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends the school continue to find ways to provide writing opportunities across the curriculum.
2. The visiting team recommends the school provide experiences that prepare students for a successful transition to middle and secondary school settings.
3. The visiting team recommends the faculty continue to find ways to incorporate technology into the curriculum at all levels and disciplines.

Comments:

The educational guidelines of the Diocese of Allentown appear to be followed carefully and implemented daily. Appropriate age and grade level lessons are being used and the students are actively involved. Technology is being incorporated into the lessons across the curriculum.

Assessment and Evidence of Student Learning

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for efforts in analyzing the standardized testing results on an annual basis.
2. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for the use of pacing sheets.
3. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for the use of the Compass Learning program in order to track students' progress.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School implement assessments that use writing across the curriculum that support the writing traits.
2. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School continue to incorporate assessments that reflect understanding of the unique needs and backgrounds of each student.
3. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School continue to study results from students' assessments in to order to develop appropriate strategies for student learning.

Comments:

Holy Guardian Angels Regional School displays materials that provide evidence of student learning. Assessments are aligned with the curriculum guidelines and instruction. Records of students' learning and performance are maintained. Pacing sheets are used in every grade level and turned into the curriculum coordinators on a monthly basis.

Leadership & Organization Study

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for the positive working relationship between the pastors, administration, teachers, and parents.
2. The visiting team commends Mrs. Wallin for her support, dedication, and educational leadership to the faculty, staff, students, and parents of Holy Guardian Angels Regional School.
3. The visiting team commends Mrs. Wallin for her support and effort in working with the school and parish budgets.
4. The visiting team commends the faculty for their commitment to professional development in order to enhance their instruction and classroom environment.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends the school governance direct efforts to future financial planning for the continued success of the school.
2. The visiting team recommends that the school governance continue to explore additional ways to market and promote Holy Guardian Angels Regional School.
3. The visiting team recommends that the faculty attempt to establish a set routine for meetings with upper and lower grade levels to ensure consistency.

Comments:

Mrs. Wallin is visible within the school. She has a realistic vision of what has to happen in order for the school to prosper. Along with being the spiritual leader, Mrs. Wallin ensures that the Diocese of Allentown's curriculum is implemented and provides professional development based on the needs of the faculty, individual teacher, and the needs of the students. Leave time during the school day is given to the teachers to attend workshops when substitutes and finances are available.

The teachers at Holy Guardian Angels Regional School are exemplary models of the Catholic faith. Faculty members serve the school community in leadership roles such as curriculum coordinators, new teacher mentors, and the student government. The teachers demonstrate a willingness to implement new innovations and make improvements and changes which will benefit the students and the school.

School Climate and Organization

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends the faculty of Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for their commitment in meeting the needs of all children.
2. The visiting team commends the administration of Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for their commitment to staff development and growth.
3. The visiting team commends the faculty and staff for their vision in developing or adopting innovative programs.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends that the identification of classrooms be uniform and that it include the teacher's name and the homeroom number.
2. The visiting team recommends that the junior high teachers meet to brainstorm and discuss ways of extending the math time or integration of math content.
3. The visiting team recommends that a committee be formed for the purpose of writing job descriptions.

Comments:

The displays in the hall are evidence of integrated instructions that address the various learning styles with a variety of formative assessments. Teachers were using a variety of instructional tools including overhead, power point, textbooks, and small and large group instruction. The librarian/enrichment teacher uses a variety of techniques for the students she meets on a regular basis.

Information Resources and Technology

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends the school for recognizing the need for more technology opportunities for the students and the teachers.
2. The visiting team commends the school for forming a Technology Committee to offer advice and guidance when making technology purchases.
3. The visiting team commends the school for the addition of a full-time Library Services Director and a full-time Instructional Technology Coordinator.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends that the school continue to expand the use of technology in the school.
2. The team recommends that the faculty be surveyed for technology competency and in-service offered based on the responses.
3. The team recommends that the school continue to investigate additional funding sources to maintain technology.

Comments:

The team observed students in the library and in the computer lab. Computers in the classroom were being used by small groups of students working on enrichment lessons and by the teachers. Small group presentations were photographed by one of the teachers to document the activity. Wireless routers were in place in part of the school in time for the Middle States visit.

Facilities

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for a facility that supports and reinforces their educational objectives aligned with the mission/philosophy.
2. The visiting team commends the efficient flow of traffic patterns on the school property and in the building for scheduled routines and activities which provide safety, accessibility, and mobility for students.
3. The visiting team commends the widespread use of this facility for varied purposes to meet the broader needs of its school community.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends the continuing development of strategies for the provision of functional, economically feasible building security and maintenance.
2. The visiting team recommends development of procedures and policy for adequate storage/containment, and disposal of materials for adjunct and specialized school groups.
3. The visiting team recommends initiating a plan for the storage of materials for grades 7 and 8 homerooms.

Comments:

Despite the facility being slightly underutilized at 75% capacity, measures for more defined accountability of building upkeep, security, energy conservation, and designated storage of materials for school and adjunct groups are indicated.

Health and Safety

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends the administration for staffing a full time nurse.
2. The visiting team commends the administration and faculty for the steps that they have taken to insure the well being of the children and staff.
3. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angles Regional School for maintaining comprehensive and current health records for all students and staff.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends posting the fire exit routes in larger print and at an age appropriate height.
2. The visiting team recommends that the administration consider establishing a standard location and procedure for student emergency information in the classrooms.
3. The visiting team recommends that the School Advisory Board and the administration implement procedures to provide security during after school activities.

Comments:

Diagrams that indicate fire exit routes are displayed in the rooms. AED machines are located in the building. There is an information flip chart for emergency situations and there is also information in the faculty binder. Student emergency forms are kept in the office and the health suite. Copies are also given to the homeroom and special teachers. The nurse distributes a list of special health concerns to the teachers and then teachers in turn sign a form that they have received and read the list. The arrival and dismissal procedures provide for the safety of the all the students. With regards to safety, the self-study addressed two areas of concern. The first was lighting in the upper parking lot, and the second was building security after school hours.

Finances

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends the pastors for their commitment and dedication to Catholic education and their continued financial support of Holy Guardian Angels Regional School.
2. The visiting team commends the faculty for identifying the need for improved marketing strategies.
3. The visiting team commends the administration for identifying qualified persons to be members of a marketing committee.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends that the administration continues to closely monitor the budget.
2. The visiting team recommends that the Home and School Association continues their yearly contribution to the school budget.
3. The visiting team recommends that the marketing committee investigates the possibility of establishing closer ties with the alumni of Holy Guardian Angels and the former St. Joseph School.

Comments:

When meeting with the Advisory Board, there was discussion of the various state grants that the school could receive. The principal and bookkeeper prepare the budget. The largest part of the budget is instructional salaries which are established by the Diocese after negotiations with the Diocesan Teacher Association. The Advisory Board approves tuition and the budget. The strategic plan includes a marketing goal. It is the vision of Holy Guardian Angels Regional School that this will result in increased enrollment and higher retention.

School Improvement Planning

Commendations:

1. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for providing continuity in writing instruction and increasing the use of writing across the curriculum.
2. The visiting team commends Mrs. Wallin and Mrs. Reber for their commitment in promoting the school and assigning marketing responsibilities to various members on the committee.
3. The visiting team commends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School for their efforts to increase global awareness, appreciate diversity, and promote good citizenship across the curriculum.

4. The visiting team commends the faculty and their families for their presence at school events especially those sponsored after the school day.

Recommendations:

1. The visiting team recommends the faculty utilize student writing rubrics as a way to examine student progress with writing from year to year.
2. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School investigate and secure funding from community and private donors.
3. The visiting team recommends Holy Guardian Angels Regional School strive to integrate geography skills across the curriculum.

Comments:

Due to a lack of consistency in terminology and format in writing, a guideline was provided as an addendum demonstrating the Six Traits of Writing model that will be used to guide instruction for the writing goal. In-services will be provided to train the teachers in this model.

A marketing committee has been established to assist the principal and her assistant with promoting the school, expanding communication through the school website and the media, and raising funds for the school. Committee members have been assigned specific marketing tasks to achieve, and then they will report back to the principal and/or her assistant. Maps have been purchased for classrooms in conjunction with global awareness for the Social Studies goal. Discussion of current events and participation in service projects are also provided to help build a sense of community and diversity.

Summary and Closure

After having read the self-study report developed by Holy Guardian Angels Regional School, observing in classrooms, and interviewing all stakeholders in the school, the visiting team has concluded that the school has begun to implement their strategic plan and that all standards set forth by the Middle States Commission have been met. A Catholic Christian atmosphere permeates the school and provides an environment in which students, faculty, staff, administration, and parents can thrive. There are strong lines of communication among groups. The home and school share a vision for the future of the school and work in partnership with each other. The two parishes that financially support the school work cooperatively with the principal to provide spiritual direction and financial stability. Rev. Msgr. Dennis T. Hartgen and Rev. Luis A. Bonilla Margarito are openly enthusiastic and involved in the school.

The visiting team was impressed with the strong organizational and leadership skills of the principal, Mrs. Wallin. She has a very strong commitment to the school, the faculty, and the community. She is open to the ideas and suggestions from the faculty that will enhance the curriculum of the school. Faculty members are given leadership opportunities within the school and are encouraged to grow and learn professionally.

The parents of Holy Guardian Angels Regional School are active and supportive members of the school community. They volunteer during and after school hours to help with the many extra activities sponsored by the school. Many parents expressed an appreciation for the leadership of Mrs. Wallin and all that she does for the school.

The students at Holy Guardian Angels Regional School demonstrate the mission of the school as they develop academically and spiritually. They are respectful of one another and of their teachers. Their enthusiasm and love of school is obvious.

In conclusion, the visiting team would like to recommend that Holy Guardian Angels Regional School continue to pursue the three areas identified in the strategic plan and to follow the timelines developed. The team recommends that the administration and faculty evaluate the progress of the strategic plan annually.

Secondly, the visiting team recommends that all members of the Holy Guardian Angels Regional School community continues to build on the solid foundation, both spiritual and academic, which is their greatest strength.

The visiting team believes that Holy Guardian Angels Regional School is well on its way to achieving the goals identified in the self-study and strategic plan.