

St. Augustine of Canterbury School – Executive Summary

Cognia Re-Accreditation Document

October 22, 2020

Dear Families and Friends,

Following this introduction is our Executive Summary, which is a critical component of the AdvancED (Cognia) Accreditation Process. Parents, faculty, staff, and students were asked to complete surveys provided through Cognia, which is the organization that evaluates schools as a system every five years.

The self-evaluation for the past year and a half served as a valuable tool to assist St. Augustine of Canterbury School to reflect on its effectiveness as well as to prepare for the re-accreditation visit, which is taking place the week of October 26. The faculty met in committees twice a month to determine the strengths and areas in need of improvement: Catholicity, Operational Vitality, Governance, and Academic Excellence. The outcome and evidence were entered and shared in a common Cognia Portal.

Our school community will participate in specific zoom sessions during the week. Five different schools were selected for this cycle of visits from Cognia. Previously, St. Augustine of Canterbury School was visited. The commendations were a catalyst for our school to earn a Blue Ribbon in 2016.

Proudly, we present our Executive Summary to the constituents of St. Augustine of Canterbury School. The notable achievements are not limited to what is included in the Executive Summary. The information highlights and gives a glimpse of the remarkable school we have been and continue to be.

Thank you to our Pastor, Reverend Canon Robert G. Lynam, KHS; Sister Mary Louise Shulas, MPF, LHS, Principal; Edward Modzelewski, Vice-Principal; Chairperson: Karen Wagner; Co-Chair: Amy O'Donnell; and the committee leaders: Patricia Pucci, Jane Straughn, and Erin Falk; faculty and staff, School Advisory Council, parents, students, and parishioners. *There is no place like St. A's.*

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Description of the School

Saint Augustine of Canterbury School is a Pre-K - 8 Roman Catholic parochial school located in Kendall Park, New Jersey. The school is under the stewardship and leadership of the Diocese of Metuchen and accredited by AdvancED/North Central Association. Having recently celebrated the 55th anniversary of its founding, Saint Augustine School has a successful history of over five decades that continues to fulfill its mission to foster in its students a love and respect for the values found in Catholicism while providing an academic program based on excellence and full development of the unique talents and abilities of the students. The school's goal is to encourage its students to be living models of its mission at school, at home, and in the community.

The majority of students enrolled at Saint Augustine School are from the school's home parish. Saint Augustine School welcomes students from South Brunswick and surrounding townships, including Franklin, North Brunswick, Princeton, and Hillsborough. The demographic nature of the student body mirrors that of the parish and surrounding area with a diverse mix of races, ethnicities, and economic strata. While Saint Augustine School is a Catholic school and serves a predominantly Catholic school community, students of all faiths are accepted and welcomed with open arms into the school family.

Saint Augustine School continues to be a leading school within the Diocese of Metuchen. The school has been chosen by the Diocese to pilot significant initiatives, such as MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) computer-adaptive assessment tests. The Principal currently co-leads the regional principals and is an active member of the Principals' Advisory Council.

Purpose

Saint Augustine School strives to provide a learning environment that educates the whole child, placing emphasis not only on academic success but also on faith development and service to the community. With the full support of the Pastor and parish community, the school embraces a 21st Century approach to teaching and learning. Through the seamless integration of technology into the curriculum and modern classroom best practices, teachers are able to provide a true differentiated learning experience that provides extra help to students that may be struggling while not holding back those seeking additional challenges. This philosophy extends to the after-school hours as well: teachers in all subject areas regularly volunteer their time to hold extra-help sessions for their students, while extracurricular activities covering a wide range of topics provide an outlet for students to express their creativity and build their leadership qualities and self-esteem.

Religion is an integral part of the curriculum at all grade levels. The school day begins and ends with prayer, and the Pastor schedules regular school Masses on key days of the liturgical year which are attended by the entire student body as well as faculty and staff. From our youngest learners in Pre-K to our graduating 8th graders, all students are given the opportunity throughout the year to participate in service projects benefiting the local community and

communities across the US and around the world. Through these service projects, students learn to become responsible citizens and give witness to their Catholic faith.

Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

St. Augustine School was honored as being recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School in 2016. In 2019 the Middle School Planning Service Project was chosen as a finalist of the Innovations in Catholic Education Award presented by *Today's Catholic Teacher* in the category of Total Community Involvement and again this year for Technology Integration.

A unique feature of Saint Augustine School is the award-winning student-led TV station, the Knights Television Network (KTN). Begun in 2004, KTN broadcasts morning prayers and announcements, school news, and special events to all classrooms and common areas in the school building via a closed-circuit TV system. In recent years the station has been upgraded to include: high resolution camera, teleprompter, video-mixer, and green screen effects which the students use to increase the production of the daily broadcast.

Traditional and 21st Century tools such as iPads, 1:1 Chromebooks in grades 3-8, Google Apps for Education, and Google Classroom are blended seamlessly into a standards-based curriculum focused on critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and enriched with STEM/STREAM activities. Additional Chromebooks acquired with state and federal grant funding will expand the 1:1 deployment of technology all the way down to Kindergarten. Our new fully equipped Maker Space Rooms (Pre-K, Grs.K-1; Grs.2-8) educate students to become innovators, where they use hands-on projects to solve real world problems. One of the Maker Space Rooms has 3D-printers, laser cutter, and various construction materials for executing Project-based projects. We were selected to represent the Diocese of Metuchen at the State House in Trenton for the New Jersey Network Project of Families in Catholic Education. The students are working on a Hydroponic Project which uses recycled materials to help the community. The Rube Goldberg Team placed first in the 2017 National Competition and second in 2018 and 2019. The Odyssey of the Mind Team achieved a school record sixth place finish at the 2019 World Finals. Music students from Saint Augustine were represented in the winning Competition for Catholic Bands in Philadelphia, PA and were named 2018 Middle School National Champions.

Some areas of improvement include: the accomplishment of the goals set forth in the Improvement Plan in the previous accreditation cycle; the Early Childhood Wing was recently renovated and now features a life-size Little Knights Community Center and indoor playground; the integration of project-based learning into our curriculum; the strengthening of basic computation skills in each grade level; and measurable growth in the area of Reading with focus on comprehension. The school's physical plant was further improved with energy-efficient LED lighting in the parking lots, speed bumps and bollards in front of the main entrance, and upgraded fire doors throughout the school building.

In March 2020, St. Augustine School transitioned to a remote learning model in response to a mandatory school closure instituted by the Governor of New Jersey due to the public health emergency caused by the SARS-CoV-2 / COVID-19 pandemic. During the transition phase, surveys were conducted to assess the capabilities and needs of school families with the goal of creating a Remote Learning Plan that optimized at-home learning time, ensured continuity of education, and addressed any technology challenges experienced by teachers, students, and

parents. At the same time, teachers were provided with the training necessary to move as seamlessly as possible from in-class instruction to remote instruction using tools such as Google Classroom, ClassDojo, and Zoom. Once the transition phase was completed, remote learning began for all students from Pre-K to Grade 8 and continued until the close of the school year in June 2020. Throughout the transition phase and for the duration of the remote learning phase, the school administration maintained an open line of communication with all stakeholders, utilizing all available channels (website, social media, Constant Contact e-mails, Honeywell instant alerts) to provide updates and gather feedback in order to adapt the remote learning environment to unforeseen challenges.

Saint Augustine School's heritage is shaped by the dedication and caring of the administration, faculty, and staff who endeavor to maintain a supportive and safe atmosphere in which self-esteem can be nurtured and learning can take place. Our mission goes beyond what we say and what we do. It is who we are.



“The Future Begins Today”

St. John Paul II

“Well Done, St A! This new model of hybrid education, with both in-class and remote students simultaneously learning, is new for everyone (educators/students/parents) and our family has been so impressed by your Admin and the staff/faculty efforts. By working together, we will succeed! Thank you for asking us to send feedback and questions after just the first week. We definitely support and appreciate our teachers who were willing to come back into the classrooms during the pandemic and live-stream their classes to remote students.

~September 21, 2020