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HCA Design for Excellence Report

Spring 2016

Dear HCA families,

The time that the Visiting Team spent with us at HCA was truly a time of grace for us. We were very fortunate to have Dr. Norah Hooper, retired professor from UMW, as the head of our team. We know that her wisdom and experience will be an asset for us for years to come.

I want to thank all of you for your support during this past year as we took several extra half days to prepare our reports. It was a great deal of work but everyone did his/her part and we were able to hand our Reaccreditation Visiting Team an excellent product. We piloted a new reaccreditation process for the Diocese of Arlington. This added to our work but should prove valuable to all our schools in the future.

In addition to the regular narrative report which we have always done, we had to provide evidence of our adherence to 13 standards and 73 individual benchmarks which fall into four domains (Mission and Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality) as outlined in the **National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (2012)**. The standards describe policies, programs, structures, and processes that should be present in mission-driven, program effective, well-managed, and responsibly governed Catholic schools. The benchmarks provide observable, measurable descriptors for each standard. We also identified two curriculum areas – Science and Writing – which we asked the team to examine more closely and offer suggestions for improvement.

We met all standards and benchmarks with some notable areas where we surpassed the criteria for the benchmark. At the end of their visit, the team recommended us for full Reaccreditation.

The team's report went to the Virginia Catholic Education Association's Accreditation Board which renewed our reaccreditation May. I would like to share Dr. Hooper's summary comments with you:

"Holy Cross Academy is an outstanding Catholic school that offers its students a quality education grounded in faith. The members of the visiting team were impressed with the principal's strong leadership and the professionalism, competence and dedication of the teaching staff. They are energetic, focused on student achievement, and most happy to be a part of this close community. The students are respectful and clearly engaged in classroom activities. The support staff and parents demonstrate a commitment to the success of the school through their varied contributions."

Dr. Hooper mentioned that nearly every person interviewed listed **community as the greatest strength of the school**. I asked Dr. Hooper, in the meeting that Mrs. Molly Dalton, our chairperson, and I had with her at the end of the visit, if she had any general recommendations for us as a school or a faculty. She said that she did not. She stated that she had witnessed a lot of excellent teaching, remarkably so, and that the teachers were happy to do what they were doing and the students were happy as well. She noticed a lot of teachers reaching out to help individual students and remarked that the students were not at all afraid to ask questions in class. She was impressed by our focus on a quality final product and the standards we set for our students. These are all signs of an excellent school.

In the benchmarks report, the team can list opportunities for improvement or required actions. They did not list any required actions but gave 4 opportunities for improvement in the areas of reorganizing student records for students receiving resource help, providing information to prospective families in Spanish and other languages, working with curriculum-based assessments to differentiate learning and using data to set and monitor goals to improve student achievement. These last two will tie in nicely to the new testing that the diocese is implementing next year, which will be used in place of the Terra Novas.

The members of the Visiting Team told us how much they enjoyed their time in our school. They felt welcome and appreciated the little extra touches to make them feel at home.

I continue to be very proud of our school community and all that we are working together to accomplish. A visit like this is a wonderful opportunity to examine where we are and set goals moving forward. May we all continue to do God's work and to help each of his children to love and serve him.

Wishing you all God's blessings, Sr. Susan Louise