

Continuous Improvement Helps Us Soar

Summary of the work by Focus Groups after the “Setting Our Direction” dinners.

“It is impossible to maintain the status quo in retail business world, either you are improving or you are going backwards.” These words were spoken to me by my uncle more than forty years ago, as he shared the secret of his success as a business owner. For him, it was imperative to continually improve his store through service, integrity and hard work. His words touched me as I was beginning my career in education and still guide me as I enter my 43rd year of serving young people.

Continuous improvement is a must in the educational realm as well. Last fall, more than 250 individuals gathered in Reynolds Hall at the Early Childhood Center to share their ideas for needed improvements at Norwalk Catholic School. The feedback was incredible and hundreds of data points were established to be organized and discussed further. We shared those many ideas on the NCS website as we began setting our direction to move forward.

The many suggestions were ordered into strategic categories established by the Norwalk Catholic School Governing Board in an attempt to bridge the gap between suggestions to points of discussion and study. Nine (9) focus groups were established and headed up by governing board members. Each focus group met multiple times to further refine those ideas and to see how they can “fit” what needs to be done. These suggestions were aimed at all levels of education (Pre-kindergarten through Grade 12) and reflect a variety of ideas that go across the cost spectrum.

Literally hours and hours have been spent in discussion and study; in an attempt to identify ways to improve our educational programs. These next few pages offer a glimpse at what ideas have been identified to be put into actionable steps and be part of established goals to improve our school. It has been an honor to work with so many fine people in putting forward this challenging agenda.

Please take some time to read what great ideas our community has for our school. Be proud as we continue to stand on the shoulders of those who came before us and build for the future. Be assured that your voice has been heard in this process and be ready to answer the call as we move this agenda forward.

Dennis J. Doughty
President of Norwalk Catholic School
SPH Class of 1972

Catholic Identity and Parish Outreach led by Jen Naseman

Participants:

Msgr. Ken Morman

Jen Naseman

Fr. Gilbert Mascarenhas

Dennis Doughty

Our school is the largest ministry in terms of number of participants and dollars invested of our parishes. The mission of our school is to develop Disciples of Christ. Our school must work collaboratively with our parishes to fulfill our mission of creating disciples. Improving our communication between our parishes and our school is paramount to our success. We must continue to provide resources and experiences to help guide our student's discipleship journey. We are also committed to exploring new ways we can work with our parishes to better engage our school families in our parishes.

The school works closely with our parishes in an attempt to identify and avoid as many conflicts as possible. Included in this process are quarterly calendar discussions that have been implemented as a direct result of the focus groups and the "Setting Our Direction" dinners. The improved communication will enhance the parish outreach goals identified in the school's strategic plan and through the focus group process.

- Continue the progress of service learning in grades 1-12 with an emphasis on getting parents to be part of the program. As we know, if our parents share the experience with their sons and daughters, the family unit is enhanced and our faith is alive.
- Invite PSR (Public School Religion) student to the appropriate grade/sacramental retreats. Sharing the retreat experience will further relationships among our young people.
- To continue to work within the PSR providers offering assistance and support as necessary to support the religious education program.
- Continue to nurture the relationship of NCS and area parishes. Helping to coordinate fellowship, acolyte training, (sacramental training support), and support for additional parish/school ministries. The parishes that are part of our school should be notified of the training and the experiences of the young people within the school/parish. Early discussions show a desire for the pastors to work closely with the school in nurturing relationships among all students in the sacramental years including: St. Mary's, St. Anthony's and St. Paul PSR and Catholic school children.
- We received a proposal to reserve the 4th Wednesday of the month (evening) as the religious education/worship evening. That might mean scheduling practices on the 4th Wednesday to end by 6:30 p.m. This would allow the scheduling of the important preparation associated with the sacraments on one selected evening and on Sundays.

Our Culture: Communications, Expectations and Accountability led by Mark Coriell

Participants:

Mark Coriell
Corrine Ross
Nickie Schwan
Susie Pocos

Candy Skinn
Jason Schaffer
Dennis Doughty

Improving the frequency, consistency and manner of our communication with our stakeholders is a strategic focus for our institution. This is an area that requires continual review and improvement. The triangle of communication and accountability between home, school, and community is a point of emphasis as we enter into next school year. A better utilization of technology and digital media will help us reach our goal of providing parents additional platforms where they are more easily able to monitor their student's progress.

You will find continuity in the message and need for better communication with our parents in almost every strategic focus report. Inherent in this focus group was the need for the various groups to be accountable to each other. You will already note a heightened focus on the use of Facebook, Constant Contact, email and other platforms available to the school to improve that communication process. The processes identified and the required improvements will be readily identified as more implementation takes place. The other communication piece where a difference should be seen in the upcoming school year will be the utilization of the features established in Power School. It is our goal to provide parents with additional platforms where they are more easily able to monitor their student's progress in the formal identified ways.

- Continued development and refinement of a communications plan with parents. (Google calendar, adaptation of tools associated with power school, updating websites on a regular basis, use of email and texting to parents. Focus on using multiple platforms to reach all parents. The parents on the committee asked that the school communicate in at least three different formats making sure all families can be reached.
- NCS should call for accountability and high expectations in utilizing Diocesan guidelines, employee handbook and evaluation procedures.
- Clearly define expectations for students, parents and staff while paying particular attention to the various transitions that take place through our system. Examples of these transitions include: Kindergarten to first grade, third grade to fourth, sixth grade to seventh. Likewise, there is a need to invite parents and the community to participate in the many activities that are available.
- Continue the survey process, making sure that follow-up does take place going forward. This can be a source of very positive information.
- Establish a focus group process a few times a year, utilizing a quality facilitator to help students, parents and teachers to understand the obstacles that are faced by all groups.
- Much discussion about parish/school relationships were discussed and desire to remove the barriers real or perceived between parish staff, school and parents.
- Develop a place for students to go after school while waiting for an athletic practice. Currently the parents are often saddled with picking up students multiple times which is very difficult for parents who are out of town.
- It is suggested that school can more fully engage students by utilizing formative assessment, by identifying specific learning targets and using the tests as form of evaluative feedback along with monitoring learning growth. The feedback utilized will allow for stronger academic growth.
- It has been recommended that positive feedback be provided parents and the community on a more frequent basis in the way of photos, positive notes and other supportive materials.

Curriculum led by Heather Belden

Participants:

Heather Belden	Libby French	Abby Asher
Jim Tokarsky	Brooke Meyer	Dennis Doughty
Angie Smith	Betsy Pertner	Laura Dowdell
Dawn Smith	Mary Ann Kaple	
Melissa Englert	Jackie Houck	

Providing state-of-the-art STEM resources in addition to a challenging and balanced curriculum is a cornerstone of our strategic vision. Additionally, further developing life-skills programming and student experiences with our many community partners in business and industry will further enhance our curriculum and prepare our student's for their life's journey.

This focus group divided the curriculum areas into three specific groups including: academic improvement, prioritized skill development, additional coursework and areas to keep strong. Significant to this focus group was the need to integrate technology and its use across the curriculum. NCS has made this a point of emphasis over the last few years in adding Chromebooks, replacing staff computers, increasing bandwidth and providing additional professional development for staff. It should be noted that the VEX Robotic program has been added to go along with the Lego Robotics initiated three years ago. NCS is looking to enhance the curriculum and support areas that are already strong. Simply stated, this improvement and assessment is ongoing and must remain so if our schools are to remain excellent.

- Investigation, establishing and implementing STEM goals for NCS (Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics).
- Expansion of college curriculum in the school, emphasizing College Credit Plus and Dual Credit by encouraging staff to be high qualified in their particular content areas.
- Establish an honors or advanced theology class for the Junior/Senior year for those students who would like to study their religion in depth.
- Integrate the Catholic Identity standards throughout the curriculum.
- Utilize assessments to identify strengths and gaps in the curriculum (MAP).
- The Curriculum Focus Group identified four key areas to work on, including: Skill Development, Additional Coursework, things to maintain and areas where academic and/or curricular improvement was required.
- Update textbooks and other resources is considered a priority item by both the strategic plan and by the related focus groups.
- Look for ways to enhance the elementary curriculum, making sure students with higher level needs are met.
- Several cost items were identified in this process, including: adding a curriculum/technology integrationist, providing a budget for teacher resources in supporting new textbook adoptions, and the establishment of a "Makers Space" to allow students to problem solve and have hands on projects across the grade levels.

Faculty and Staff (Development and Retention) led by Julie Roberts

Participants:

Julie Roberts	Emily Riley	Mike Powers
Kristina Polachek	Rebecca Fair	Chris Ceccoli
Dennis Doughty	Monica Powers	

The recruitment and retention of quality, mission-driven faculty and staff is a key strategic initiative which will require substantial investment and resources. We are committed to providing our faculty and staff abundant professional development opportunities to further their professional and personal growth.

Some key focus areas include improved compensation and affordable professional development be made available to staff to encourage individual professional growth. This is already being implemented through several educational organizations. It is the goal of NCS to have all staff actively participating in new professional development on an annual basis to further their educational opportunities and individual growth.

- The highest priority of the focus group is to establish a salary schedule for stabilization and fairer compensation.
- Review, develop and implement ways to increase staff members' compensation. This is made doubly hard because of the need to establish a continuous flow of funds (tuition or endowment) and not just one-time funding. This is made even more difficult with the implementation of the pension rescue established by Bishop Thomas that will deplete employees funding by 3% over the next three years while costing NCS an additional 2.5% over those same three years. This negatively impacts funding plans currently being discussed by the finance committee.
- Focused and updated professional development utilizing the individual professional development plans of staff members to establish the design and scope of the programming.
- Look at different ways to enhance and support teachers through, professional development, college credit opportunities and other programs to support them professionally.
- Help teachers advance in their content area (Masters Level) so they might be able to teach college level course while enhancing their place on the salary schedule.
- This group discussed adding an integrationist/curriculum person to support the teaching staff in implementing technology into the curriculum.

Retention of Families and Students led by Denise Stine

Participants:

Cassandra Shella	Denise Stine	Mike Roth
Melissa Beal	Stacy Stoll	Laura Dowdell
Vanessa Cook	Lori Matlack	Dennis Doughty
Jenny Ridge	Nickie Schwan	Mike Juby
Sue Lesch	Andrea Hayes	

This focus group meets on a monthly basis to discuss issues and find answers to respond to the needs of our community. Many initiatives have happened over the past few years under the guidance of this group. Additionally, the "Setting Our Direction" dinners provided an emphasis on inviting new families while making sure the needs of our current families are being met. This team that focuses on enrollment and initiated the school-wide communication plan after hearing from our parents in the annual survey.

- Develop key questions for families that have left NCS to determine if there are inconsistencies or identified concerns that must be addressed. Both exit strategies and surveys are to be completed to make this determination. Included in this concept is the establishment and utilization of a retention form.
- Testing, data and interventions will be put into place to help all students with identified and particular curricular needs.
- An incredible amount of work has been done by this group which meets monthly to discuss enrollment and retention issues.

All are Welcome (Building capacity to serve all students) led by Andrew Shella

Participants:

Andrew Shella	Jen Collins	Julie Cloud
Dennis Doughty	Monica Powers	
Darlene Walker	Cheryl Gfell	

We are committed to exceeding the expectations of all families seeking an outstanding educational and faith formation experience. We are working diligently and deliberately to explore initiatives that ensure every family that desires an excellent Catholic education is served compassionately and provided with equal opportunities for their child(ren) to be successful in our school.

This area of strategic focus identified by the governing board was emphasized in the “Setting Our Direction” dinners and focus groups. Students with special needs require additional support interventions that are not always in the scope of the regular classroom teachers. Finally, additional staff will be hired to fulfill the needs identified in our student population.

- Help with the establishment of “Response to Intervention” initiatives throughout NCS to make sure teachers have the capacity to identify particular needs along with successfully identifying particular interventions for those identified students. Additionally, the district (NCS) will work to bring additional supports for our students with needs.
- Classroom instruction will be designed to support and engage student with particular learning needs.
- Need to add ½ time inclusion teacher to elementary to serve students.
- Wrap around or inclusionary plans developed for students in need, making necessary accommodations when needed.

Finance led by Andrew Welfle

Participants:

Andrew Welfle	Ken Fries	Chris Stang
Denny Camp	Msgr. Ken Morman	Sue Lesch
Mike McLaughlin	Fr. Gilbert Mascarenhas	Dennis Doughty
Rita Thayer	Sharon Harwood	

We must have both the courage to dream and the sacrificial investment to sustain our proud legacy and continue to instill our Catholic faith for generations to come. Our success requires thorough financial planning and a great deal of faith.

In order to keep the educational programs affordable, the financial committee (meets monthly) using the three-legged stool as a model of how funding takes place. Norwalk Catholic School has been able to keep tuition affordable because of generous and supportive parishes who contribute a third of the cost of providing a Catholic education; another third is provided through generous donors (annual Friends for the Future Campaign) and a rather robust endowment fund; finally tuition collection covers the additional cost of educating a student. The stability and affordability of our educational process is dependent on a steady stream of income coming from each resource.

- Emphasis on the three forms of support to provide for a Catholic education in our schools: tuition, parish support and development.
- Create a sustainable fiscal model for funding of the educational process now and into the future. This includes salaries, benefits, professional development and other necessary costs.
- Staff compensation that is fair, affordable and sustainable.
- Find ways to keep tuition affordable for our parents. Additionally this group identified additional ways for parent to be supported including: SHOP, parish subsidy, tuition assistance, scholarships and other supports.
- This group meets monthly. They will be reviewing the proposals and helping to prioritize the various protocols, processes and procedures.

Facilities and Plant Maintenance led by Patrick Schwan

Participants:

Pat Schwan	Marvin Ott	Dale Harbert
Mike McLaughlin	Brad Riley	Scott Lee
Dennis Doughty	Andy Skinn	Jim Wasiniak
John Riley	Pam Kocher	

Taking care of what we have, is a legacy of our school and consistent with our philosophy and teaching of Catholic Stewardship. We must maintain our physical plant and keeping it as modern, accessible, and welcoming as possible.

The Facilities and Plant Maintenance Focus group is very pro-active when it comes to getting the job done. When they reviewed the many projects suggested in the “Setting Our Direction” dinners, they determined how and when the various projects could be done. As with everything, a priority list with how and when projects could be done is being established. As you tour the physical plant, please notice the many upgrades that have taken place already as both in-kind and outright donations are taking place. It is the vision of the Governing Board that the various identified projects be “adopted” and completed by our very talented community.

- Establish a master plan that will identify the “end of life” usefulness of facilities, equipment and vehicles. This plan should be part of a five to ten year planning process.
- Continue to identify and add safety upgrades to our facilities.
- Develop strategies to address short-term and mid-term projects facing NCS.
- Develop a budget to address upcoming and anticipated upgrades for facility and equipment.
- Prepare a list of campus projects that might be adopted by various volunteer groups.
- Continue to identify various grants and individuals who might be considered for facility upgrades.

- Additionally looking at specialized upgrades that can be done around the facility.
- Discussed and reviewed eleven specific projects which included some rather detailed action planning and even quotes. Additionally, the complete list established at the “Setting Our Direction Dinners” was reviewed. The eleven projects (not prioritized) included: Annex Roof, Tar and Chip Social Hall Parking Lot, Tuck Pointing and lintel replacement of west door at ECC, Recoat Maintenance Building Roof, Check for leakage of Convocation Center Roof (fasteners), Kitchen Upgrade (Cafeteria), Replace windows at ECC (Insulated panels), Seal coat of brick buildings, A-C for cafeteria, replace hardware in older rest rooms across campus, add security camera in cafeteria, annex, elementary and parking lots (exterior).

Technology led by Frank VanDresser Jr.

Participants:

Frank VanDresser	Elaine Colvin	Jim Tokarsky
Ron Forrest	Julee Fries	Jaime Fries
Dennis Doughty	Emily Smith	Rob Bleile
Dave Hedrick,	Hannah Wilde	Will Crosby
Brad Davis	Angie Smith	
Zach Bleile	Melissa Englert	

Our strategic focus is on integrating technology effectively and efficiently in our classrooms. We are committed to providing our students exposure to the most innovative applications and advancements in technology to best prepare them for the industries of today and tomorrow.

The commitment to technology upgrades has been a consistent focus at NCS. An example of the upgrades include the increase in bandwidth to 200MB which doubled what supported our school a year ago. The school has added 171 Chromebook devices to our inventory since August because of the generosity of donors in supporting our classroom needs. (The generosity included parents, alumni, PTO, Trek for Tec, and Giving Tuesday dollars.) It is our goal to have 50% (1:2; meaning 2 students share 1 Chromebook) of our students with access to the Chromebook on a daily basis. We have also established a replacement program for our computer hardware, making sure we are able to take care of the identified future needs of our students.

- Continue to develop a five year plan for technology, connectivity and hardware purchases for the school (NCS).
- Establish a timely replacement process and procedure for outdated technology.
- Annually develop a projected technology budget and convene the technology committee for recommendations on how best to appropriate funds for the technology budget.
- Secure a funding source to support the increasing cost of technology in our schools.
- Plan in place (5 year) to upgrade and replace equipment and hardware and the projected costs with that.
- Divided the suggestions into three categories: communications, resources and training. Each category received strong attention. Example: suggestion that teachers be trained to utilize, “remind” as an effective way to communicate with parents.