



11 May 2018

Dear School Community,

We would like to provide an update and overview of the direction of our school. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic School has been a great school with excellent teachers and a wonderful history and we will continue that tradition by remaining Christ-centered and faithfully Catholic.

As a Catholic school in our diocese, we are called to educate and form students so that they “are able to recognize and cherish the eternal and transcendental goods of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness.” We are also called to focus on the whole child—on educating the student spiritually, intellectually, morally, and physically—and doing so in a Christ-centered environment.

Our school has been a place rich in a Catholic vision that understands the development of the child, the importance of academics and the fine arts, provides children with hands-on learning and outdoor activities, and holds that instructional methods should be suited to the way children best learn at their respective ages. We will continue this tradition of Catholic education and deepen the students’ experience of this where we can.

In order to continue in this direction and become even more a place where students encounter, are nourished on, and grow in Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in a way that is aligned with how children best learn, our school will become a **Classical Catholic School** next year.

In many areas, there will not be changes as we are already teaching in this manner. In other areas, there will be development or changes to what and how we teach so that our students experience a more integrated curriculum (teaching across the curriculum, cross-curricular studies) as they go, for example, from history and literature to religion, science, math, art, and music. We will align the content in these subject areas so that what a student is learning in history will then be experienced through that time period or culture’s expression in literature, poetry, art, music, religion, or advances in scientific and mathematical thinking. A greater understanding of history will be cultivated in religion, too, as students from more grade levels learn about the timeline of not only the history of the world but salvation history as well.

Through this, students will gain a deeper grasp of concepts and events throughout history as they see and realize there is a story to the world, a series of connections through cause and effect, and one that suggests or provokes us into thinking that there might be something or *Someone* who is

beyond this world but somehow also within it and with us. This approach to education strongly disposes one to see the reasonableness of God, the attraction of the Christian story, and see how Christ is the ultimate answer to our questions and desires for life. It is both intellectually challenging and spiritually fulfilling.

To help us achieve this, we will review our overall methods of instruction and student learning expectations so that they are organized along the following pattern:

- Students will be encouraged to wonder and be curious about the world. Our teachers already provide this, and we will increase ways we do this. Students will learn how to engage the world and attain new knowledge through developing attention skills, through listening, learning, remembering, and then practicing and repeating the content that has been learned; this is the foundation and building block of learning (often called the Grammar stage of learning);
- Students will think critically by analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing prior knowledge with new discoveries, finding connections, more deeply asking about the why of things, seeing cause and effect, problem solving, learning dialectical argument, and making sound judgments (often called the Logic or Dialectic stage of learning); and
- Students will develop the art of communication by reflecting upon what has been learned and analyzed and then taking this deeper understanding and communicating it in a persuasive and beautiful manner, whether that be in written or oral form (often called the Rhetoric stage of learning).

As a result, students will not only cover material but more importantly will *discover* new knowledge and develop deeper understandings so that they move towards conceptual mastery of the curriculum's content and skills. Students will develop the foundations for lifelong learning and future success by being knowers of things that are True, thinkers who can identify and judge what is Good, and communicators who can express thoughts persuasively and eloquently because they have been nourished on and formed by Beauty.

“Wonder is the beginning of wisdom.” --Socrates

These are key features of a **Classical Catholic Education**. In many ways, Catholic schools traditionally have done much of this. Ours included. We will just organize the curriculum content so that the integration of subjects is more intentional and aligned from subject to subject and from one grade level to the next. At the same time, we will continue to provide our teachers with professional development so that they have the resources and support needed to give your child an education that not only prepares students for success in high school and even college but one that prepares students for true success in life: the formation of faith, virtue, and wisdom so that one follows Christ and is prepared to respond to God's call.

For more on classical education, please see our [Resource Library page](#).

Specials

In order to help us achieve these goals of a classical Catholic education, we will re-structure some of our Specials classes. We will plan for the content taught in art and music to be aligned more often with the other subject areas. When a student is learning about a particular time period in history, we will include lessons in that student's art and music classes on major figures or movements from that time period in addition to the regular skills and elements students have been learning in our art and music classes. As we work with the schedule, we plan to make art and music a required class for all grades within the next two years. If we can arrange that in the schedule for next year, then we will.

Drama and Band will remain as elective choices.

We hope to increase the amount of days 7th – 8th graders have foreign language. Our goal is 4 days a week and that the curriculum for 7th and 8th grade match the high school curriculum for first year foreign language courses. For example, 7th grade would be the first semester of high school Spanish I and 8th grade would be the second semester of Spanish I. This will help prepare our students for greater success in high school and hopefully provide them with the knowledge and skills to place into second-year foreign language as a 9th grader (if the high school allows that). As of now, we will offer a choice of Latin or Spanish to 6th – 8th grades. Latin will remain the foundational course in the lower grades. If you would like to read more about the importance of Latin as the foundation and its benefits to further learning, please see the articles at the bottom of our [Resource Library page](#).

French. While French is a beautiful language and one we would like to keep offering, it is becoming more difficult. With decreasing interest in French, we are not able to continue offering it to incoming middle school students. For those students who have already started French, we are looking into options for them to continue with French if we have enough numbers (students enrolled in a class) to have a teacher and can find one willing to teach part-time for those few classes a week.

Technology is an instrument or tool that can be used to achieve certain objectives. With the amount of research showing that students learn better and retain information longer when writing with pen or pencil (instead of a device), that students should master writing by hand before spending significant time with keyboards, that students' ability to focus, pay attention, and sustain strong reading habits is jeopardized with increased screen time, we are going to use the time students have been going to Computer class and spread it out amongst the core classes and/or other Specials classes. Therefore, we will not have Computer class next year for 4th – 8th grades but will keep the lab open for teachers to take students there to complete assignments/projects or teach a lesson where the lab's computers are needed. As a result of the problems we have had with students able to access inappropriate content on the Internet even though our safety filter is working properly, student Internet access will remain limited. For more on technology and education, we encourage you to see our [Resource Library page](#).

STEM

For those who have interests in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), we encourage you to read this article and find out more about how classical education can prepare a student for STEM: "[Classical Education: The Best Preparation for STEM.](#)"

School Leadership

As we continue the principal search and interview process, we are looking for an experienced educator who will lead the school in this direction. We will notify you once we have a new principal in place.

In closing, we recall that St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic School is a great school with excellent teachers who have given us a wonderful history and, while changes will happen in becoming classical, we will continue our tradition of remaining Christ-centered and faithfully Catholic as we provide challenging academics and hands-on learning through a classical Catholic education. We look forward to seeing you next year.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Gary Picou
Pastor

William Perales
Principal