

## **SACS Self Study Procedures**

Visitation formally applied for SACS-CASI accreditation in the summer of 2005. A letter of acceptance into the SACS-CASI accreditation program was received on August 12, 2005. Upon acceptance, Mrs. Diane Garbo, a Louisiana SACS-CASI spokesperson, toured our campus and spoke with the principal about the accreditation process and timeframe. A faculty member was named internal facilitator to assist the school through this study. A seven-member steering committee was formed to begin the self-study process.

To better understand the accreditation process, steering committee members attended either the SACS-CASI regional meeting in Houston, Texas or the Louisiana SACS-CASI meeting in Baton Rouge. Following these conferences, a meeting was held with the faculty to introduce the self-study process and start our accreditation discussion.

Progress on our self-study was halted for a seven month period due to Hurricane Katrina an event which had serious ramifications on our faculty, students and campus. We resumed in the spring of 2006 with a discussion, creation and editing of a new mission statement for Visitation of Our Lady. This updated mission and the new SACS-CASI standards and format were introduced during inservice for the 2006-2007 school year.

Committees and sub-committees were formed to compile data and gather information for each of the standards that SACS-CASI requires. In addition, subject area committees were created to identify and address curriculum issues by grade level.

In order to most accurately reflect the thoughts and opinions of our stakeholders, surveys were randomly distributed to faculty, staff, parents and students. Responses from these NSSE *Opinion Surveys* helped in determining areas of strength and weakness, and helped guide our self-study. Items specific to Visitation school were added to address particular school related issues and themes. Additionally, faculty members completed the NSSE *Survey of Goals for Student Learning* and the *Survey of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness*.

Action plans were created using information gathered from multiple sources. Survey results, the self-study process, and stakeholder discussions all were instrumental in our action plans.

## **Visitation of Our Lady Catholic School Mission Statement**

Inspiring Catholic Faith and Principles While Encouraging Academic Excellence

## **Visitation of Our Lady Catholic School Philosophy**

We, the faculty of Visitation of Our Lady School, as Catholic educators, in conjunction with the parents who are the primary educators of their child(ren), work together to integrate the teachings of Catholicism, Christian values and academic excellence within the school setting and aim for the total development of each unique child. Thus, the students are enabled to become fully integrated Christian persons who recognize Christ in others and themselves and contribute uniquely to their community. We believe that through our educational apostolate, our students are empowered to receive and understand the message of Christ, share it in service, in community, and celebrate its embodiment through worship.

We attempt to create an atmosphere of positive awareness in the areas of:

1. Spiritual Development - Emphasizing living in accord with the teachings of Christ and His Church.
2. Moral Development - Guiding the students in decision-making, through a deep understanding of right and wrong as taught in Holy Scripture and the tradition of the Catholic Church.
3. Emotional Development - Aiding the development of positive self-concept and acceptance of one another as individuals.
4. Intellectual development - Attempting to challenge each child to reach his/her academic potential - recognizing the unique abilities of each child.
5. Social Development - Encouraging positive interaction with one another in order to become a contributing member of society.
6. Physical Development - Encouraging respect for the human body.

In order to implement the philosophy of V.O.L. School we propose the following objectives:

1. Spiritual Development
  - a) Be examples of Christian living to one another
  - b) Begin and end each day with prayer
  - c) Provide instruction in religious truth and values

- d) Take part in meaningful liturgical celebrations
  - e) Encourage parents to attend student Masses and paraliturgical services
  - f) Organize activities for the student body which will help build a community of faith
2. Moral Development
- a) Give opportunities for decision making by presenting the alternatives, and stressing personal responsibility in deciding between right and wrong
  - b) Establish an atmosphere in the classroom for openness and trust
3. Emotional Development
- a) Be aware of the need for positive reinforcement in all relationships
  - b) Foster a level of awareness of the dignity of each person
4. Intellectual Development
- a) Provide varied learning experiences according to the needs of the individual child
  - b) Emphasize overall effort as well as academic achievement
5. Social Development
- a) Provide services for the immediate and larger community
  - b) Open doors to community involvement in our school
  - c) Encourage respect for the rights and property of others
  - d) Foster an appreciation of cultural diversity
6. Physical Development
- a) Emphasize personal hygiene and nutrition
  - b) Stress physical fitness
  - c) Foster chastity using guided Christian principles

## **School History**

Visitation of Our Lady School, in Marrero, Louisiana, a suburb of New Orleans, is a Catholic Parochial Elementary school and a member of the Archdiocese of New Orleans School System. Visitation is a Louisiana State approved school, and it is located at the corner of Ames and Baratavia Blvd.

The history of Visitation of Our Lady School begins with the establishment of Visitation of Our Lady Church Parish in 1963, and the appointment of Monsignor Paul J. Richard as our founding pastor. Msgr. Richard was instrumental in the initial growth and development of our parish and school. He was a man of the people who led by example and walked side by side with his parishioners. He was commonly known to all as "Padre." This easy going approach helped to foster the family oriented environment that still exists today at Visitation.

Once the church parish was established, the urgency for a Catholic school became paramount as the church parish and community grew in size. Financing through the Archdiocese was granted for a school facility, and construction of a two-story, twelve classroom building began on June 1, 1964. The school opened its doors in September of 1965 under the leadership and direction of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. The Sisters served the community well for many years, and the school remained under their leadership until May of 1986. The school has since had a lay administration and faculty.

When Visitation opened, grades Kindergarten through third were offered. Additional grade levels were added each year until the school was a K - eighth elementary facility. As grade levels were added and enrollment increased, portable classrooms were replaced in 1986 by a new ten classroom brick structure. The school has grown considerably since its inception and currently averages 730 students in Pre K-3 through eighth grade.

Visitation parish erected a new Church in 1988, which acted as a catalyst for school improvement and expansion. The de-commissioned Church was transformed into a large capacity cafeteria, and the former cafeteria was redesigned into a new library and religious education building. In keeping with our desire to serve both God and our community, we

identified a need for an early childhood program for three and four year old children. The Pre K-4 program began in 1988, and in 1992, a Pre K-3 program was opened. Both programs have flourished over the years and have served as a feeder program for the kindergarten classes. The early childhood programs are developmental and emphasize that childhood should be a journey not a race. A new Early Childhood Center is currently being constructed for the needs of our ever growing early childhood population.

Over the past 42 years, Visitation School has renovated and made many improvements to its physical plant. The addition of two computer labs, wiring of the campus for Internet, a reading and writing lab for students with special needs, and a science lab have helped to bring our curriculum into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A black wrought iron fence provides safety and security to our campus, and a landscaped prayer garden enhances the school's appearance in the community.

With an eye toward the future, a multi-purpose building is currently being constructed. The new facility will include a much needed gymnasium, auditorium, early childhood facility, additional classrooms and meeting rooms for the benefit of the school as well as the Visitation Church Parish. Completion of this facility is expected for the 2009 – 2010 school year.

Visitation prides itself on the reputation of preparing students spiritually, academically, and emotionally for success in future endeavors. As a Catholic elementary school, and in keeping with our school mission, *"Inspiring Catholic Faith and Principles While Encouraging Academic Excellence,"* Visitation integrates the teachings of the Catholic Church with academic principles in developing each unique child. Visitation provides a strong, basic curriculum along with spiritual and moral nurturing, which gives students the basis to go forth as faith-filled young adults, who are responsible and unique contributors in society. Students are challenged to develop a firm foundation in life skills that will last a lifetime.

Visitation is dedicated to teaching children with varied learning abilities and has been at the forefront in recognizing and accommodating children with different learning styles. The school's philosophy and mission emphasize meeting individual needs of students in an environment that stresses Christian values.

Our school philosophy centers on a family atmosphere and seeks to

encourage parents, teachers, and administrators and other specialists to work together as a team for the betterment of every child. A low student-teacher ratio and full time teacher's assistants in Pre K through first grades provide for an optimal learning environment.

To better service working families and single parents, we offer care from 7:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. daily, as well as, camp activities during the summer. We utilize the federal school lunch program for free and reduced breakfast/lunch and take part in the children's scholarship fund for needy families. Additionally, the school and church parish offer tuition assistance for qualifying families. Many parents are Visitation alumni, which demonstrate their confidence in the school by entrusting us with the education of their children. Furthermore, there are seven alumni on the faculty.

While the school primarily serves families of Visitation Parish, it also services other Catholic parishes and non-Catholics who wish their children to learn Catholic values and traditions. Families are predominantly middle class. The majority of our student body is rooted in our Louisiana heritage, which provides a strong connection between Visitation and the community-at-large. Approximately 15% of the school population is minority, with Asian-American, African-American, and Hispanics comprising the largest groups.

### **Catholic Identity**

The Catholic Identity of Visitation of Our Lady is apparent to all who visit our school. The school's Catholicity is reflected in our curriculum, activities and throughout our physical campus.

Visitation's Catholicity is displayed as one enters our school. In our main hallway are pictures of Church leaders, a statue of the Virgin Mother, various depictions of the rosary and a representation of the "Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth." The school prayer garden located in front of the cafeteria is a tranquil and open environment for all students, faculty, parents and parishioners to reflect, pray, or meditate. Each of Visitation's classrooms contains a prayer table, crucifix, *Bible*, and a copy of the Catechism to be used in lessons and discussions. Students actively participate in weekly liturgies; participate in daily prayer in a proven comprehensive religion program, all in a truly Catholic atmosphere. A

children's choir sings both at weekly school masses and at bi-monthly weekend children's masses. In addition, students participate as altar servers in parish and school masses. All religion teachers are either certified or working toward certification through the Archdiocese.

Visitation students are challenged to be good stewards of the community. Students and parents donate generously throughout the year to help the less fortunate in our parish and the surrounding community.

## **Parent and Community Support**

Visitation of Our Lady is fortunate to have very active community volunteers. They serve and assist Visitation school, faculty, and staff in a number of ways. Volunteers chaperone field trips, assist in the classroom, in the library, and assist at other school sponsored events and activities. Overall the parents and grandparents of Visitation students serve as invaluable support to our school, faculty, and staff. The following groups help to fulfill Visitation's mission and philosophy:

The parents' club at Visitation is known as the **Co-Op club**. It is a member of the Archdiocesan Council of Catholic School Co-Operative Clubs. The Co-Op club's board is comprised of eight parent representatives, our pastor, and our principal. Yearly, all parents are invited to join with the Co-Op board in fulfilling its goals. The goals of the club are to sponsor family oriented school activities and fundraising. Over the past several years the Co-Op has annually generated approximately \$20,000 for the school to use towards purchasing new technology and other improvements. Additionally, Co-Op organizes and funds a variety of social events for the school's faculty and staff.

Each year a large portion of the Co-Op clubs efforts is directed to our annual Cajun Festival. During the last weekend in April the Visitation community gathers together for a weekend of celebration. Music, fun, food and games are enjoyed by all. As a by-product of this community building activity, the Co-Op has been able to generously donate approximately \$125,000 to the school for our Multi-Purpose Building fund. Visitation of Our Lady School is very fortunate to have such an actively involved Co-Op club supporting our school.

The Visitation of Our Lady **School Board** was formed in 2005 as an

advisory council to the principal and pastor in the daily operations of the school. It provides direction and support for the purpose of successfully implementing the school's mission. Meetings are held monthly with time set aside for questions and input from parents. The School Board focuses their attentions on promoting the school, school improvement, and long range planning.

The **Men's Club** consists of fathers and grandfathers of Visitation students and church parishioners. Each year the Men's Club provides their time and effort to various maintenance projects on the Visitation campus. Their projects include providing fresh coats of paint to classrooms before the school year begins, building and fixing athletic equipment for student use, and any other projects in which their assistance is needed. The men approach each maintenance project with eagerness and the idea of improving the campus for the students and faculty alike. The Men's Club also sponsors the "Men's Club Award" which is presented to an eighth grade student at graduation.

### **The Visitation Graduate**

Graduates of Visitation of Our Lady School are well prepared to meet the challenges of life as a high school student and beyond. Visitation not only prepares all of its graduates in the areas of academics, but also most importantly provides guidance in Catholic morality and values. Visitation graduates can use these learned lessons as a guide through the academic, spiritual, and moral challenges they will face throughout their life. At the end of their eighth grade year, graduates are recognized for their spirituality, leadership, service, character, and academic achievement.

Many Visitation graduates, upon high school completion continue their studies and move onto successful professional careers. As a measure of our success, Visitation of Our Lady is proud of the large number of alumni who return to enroll their children at their alma mater.

### **School Organization**

Visitation of Our School has a lay principal, administrative team, and a faculty and staff who work together to implement and maintain the mission of Visitation of Our Lady School. The four member administrative team assists the principal in all aspects of the school's administration. The



administrative team meets each week to discuss organizational issues and to devise instructional strategies necessary for the long term success of our school.

### **School Finances**

The principal, pastor, and the Parish Finance Board manage the Visitation of Our Lady School budget. Based on the 2006 – 2007 school year the annual budget was \$2.7 million. Student tuition and fees accounted for \$2 million of the budget.

Visitation of Our Lady Church supplemented the school budget with \$197,400.00 for the 2006 – 2007 school year. Other financial support was obtained through the school's before-care and after-care programs, KidCam summer camp, parent club donations, required services, and community support programs such as Winn-Dixie Community Pals.

The Visitation Co-Op sponsors fundraisers throughout the school year that provides financial support directly to the school. Recent fundraisers have included the sale of candy, cookie dough, and gift items. Proceeds from the annual parish Cajun Festival and raffle are also added to the budget. During the 2007 – 2008 school year the Co-Op sponsored a \$10,000 raffle with the proceeds helping to subsidize teacher salaries.

### **Financial Assistance**

Approximately \$21,000 is set aside each school year for financial assistance. Families seeking financial help are required to complete an application for financial assistance. The completed application is submitted initially to the principal and is then forwarded to the Parish Finance Board for review. The principal acts as an advisor to the Finance Board in helping determine award amounts. This support has allowed lower income families to receive a Catholic education at a more affordable rate.

### **Admissions**

Visitation of Our Lady School admits students of any race, color, national, and ethnic origin to all of the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national, and ethnic origin

in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, and other school administered programs.

Students in our Pre-Kindergarten programs and Kindergarten must meet an age requirement for admission. All students must meet the necessary age stipulation before September 30<sup>th</sup>. The students are also screened for readiness.

All students entering Visitation of Our Lady School must provide the following documents:

Birth Certificate

Baptismal Certificate (if Catholic)

First Communion (if Catholic entering third grade or higher)

Immunization Certification of:

MMR vaccines – for Red and German measles

DTP/TD vaccines

Polio vaccine

HIB vaccine

HBV vaccine

Varicella (chicken pox) vaccine

Copy of Social Security Card

Completed Registration Form

If a student is transferring from another school, a parent and student interview with the principal is conducted and the following documents must also be provided:

Previous Standardized Test Scores

Previous Report Cards

Previous Behavior Records

Enrollment varies from year to year with the average class size being approximately 25 students. Students in each grade level are divided into three sections, except eighth grade which has two sections.

## **Professional and Spiritual Development of Teachers**

The faculty of Visitation of Our Lady School gathers each morning for prayer at 7:40 a.m. Spiritual enrichment of the staff is also developed through retreats and times of reflection throughout the school year. Teachers are encouraged to pursue religious certification through the Archdiocese of New Orleans as well as maintaining their certification. To aid the teachers in this endeavor, Visitation offers and pays for many of the courses. Presently, thirteen teachers have their religious certification.

Professional development is ongoing throughout the year. Faculty meetings are held at least once a month on Wednesdays from 2:00 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. Throughout the week, time is set aside for teachers to meet and collaborate by grade-level. Departmental meetings are held in conjunction with the monthly faculty meetings.

In-service days are scheduled prior to the beginning of the school year and throughout the school year. Occasionally, guest speakers conduct workshops on current best practices in education. Recent presentations have included: Mrs. Elizabeth Breaux speaking on the topic of Higher Order Thinking Skills and Classroom Management, Dr. Larry Koenig – Smart Discipline for the Classroom, and Mrs. Tammy Robichaux – Data Driven Curriculum.

Visitation of Our Lady's faculty is dedicated to being lifelong learners. By attending workshops and conferences the faculty is empowered to reach their highest potential which in turn improves students' learning. Workshops and conferences that have been attended by faculty members include, but are not limited to, the SACS CASI Annual Conference, Hoffinger Conference, Louisiana INTECH, National Catholic Educators Association Conference, National Middle School Conference, Nonpublic School Data Collection Workshop, Required Services Technology Workshop, American Library Association Conference, Audubon Institute Teacher Workshops, Archdiocese of New Orleans Standards Based Education Summer Workshops, Vernier Science Probe Workshops, National Association of Elementary Principals' Leadership Academy, Project Read Workshop, and Greater New Orleans Writing Workshop. Title II funds and portions of the school budget are used to pay for workshops and conferences. An additional professional development day is provided annually to all faculty members to encourage ongoing development.

Visitation of Our Lady School has membership in the following:

- Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
- Louisiana Library Association
- Louisiana Middle School Association
- Louisiana Association of Principals
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Catholic Educational Association
- National Middle School Association
- Louisiana Citizens for Education
- Louisiana Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

Many of the faculty members have individual memberships and/or involvement in the following:

- Lay Ministry
- Pastoral Council
- East-West Center
- Asia Pacific Educational Center
- American Library Association
- National Educators Association
- Kappa Delta Pi
- Louisiana Counseling Association
- Phi Kappa Delta
- C.A.R.E. – Counselors are Resources for Everyone
- Fleur-de-lis Project of New Orleans
- Golden Key National Honor Society
- Archdiocese Association of Early Childhood Educators
- Who's Who Among American Teachers
- LASERVIC – Louisiana Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling

## Faculty and Staff

The principal and a four member administrative team provide the leadership for Visitation of Our Lady School. The faculty consists of 35 full-time and 2 part-time teachers. The faculty includes 28 homeroom teachers, a full-time licensed and certified guidance counselor, and auxiliary teachers in the areas of music, computer, Spanish, physical education, art, resource, and library. The staff is comprised of 18 assistants, a technology director, a Director of Religious Education, an after school care director, two secretaries, a receptionist, and a full-time maintenance director.

The following table is a demographic profile of Visitation of Our Lady teachers and administrator by race and gender as well as educational background and years of teaching experience.

	2005 - 2006	2006 - 2007	2007 - 2008
<b>Racial Background</b>			
African-American	2	3	3
Asian	0	0	0
Caucasian	33	34	32
Hispanic	1	0	0
Other	0	0	0
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	34	35	33
Male	2	2	2
<b>Educational Background</b>			
Noncertified but Degreed	14	19	17
Certified	21	24	21
Masters Degree	3	4	4
Bachelors Degree	32	33	32
<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>			
0 - 5	13	14	12
6 - 15	12	10	11
16 - 25	7	7	8
26 +	4	6	5

## Student Profile

The following table details student attendance for the last three years.

	<b>2005 - 2006</b>	<b>2006 - 2007</b>	<b>2007 - 2008</b>
PreK-3 – 8 <sup>th</sup> Enrollment	747	731	738
Total School Days	*	177	177
Daily Attendance Avg.	96.2%	95.3%	N/A

\* Due to Hurricane Katrina school days were extended to make up lost instructional time.

The following table is a demographic profile of students at Visitation of Our Lady.

	2005 – 2006	2006 - 2007	2007 - 2008
<b>Racial Background (K – 8<sup>th</sup>)</b>			
African-American	10	10	14
Asian	51	55	56
Caucasian	566	541	538
Hispanic	10	10	9
Other	1	2	3
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	310	289	303
Male	328	329	317
<b>Religious Breakdown (PreK-3 – 8<sup>th</sup>)</b>			
Catholic	682	654	655
Non Catholic	65	77	83
<b>Other</b>			
Free and Reduced Lunch	136	124	112

## **Facilities and Services**

Visitation strives to fulfill its mission and philosophy by working together with its stakeholders. We integrate the teachings of the Catholic Church, Christian values, and academic excellence. Our aim is for the total development of each unique child.

With the help of state programs, federal programs, and the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Visitation of Our Lady School is able to offer its students many services. The cafeteria operates as part of the Archdiocesan School Food and Nutrition Program of New Orleans and provides nutritious, well-balanced meals daily. The school offers a breakfast and lunch program and participates in the federally funded free or reduced meals program for families who qualify for assistance.

Visitation of Our Lady participates in the Jefferson Parish Title I Program. This program is federally funded and is made available through the local educational agency. The Jefferson Parish Pupil Appraisal Team assists Visitation of Our Lady in addressing student needs. Visitation's Individual Needs Committee Coordinator acts as a liaison between the school and the team. Additional services include: Title II (Professional Development), Title IV (Safe and Drug Free Schools), Title V (Materials of Instruction), the D.A.R.E. Program, and the Required Services Program.

Bus transportation is provided for K-eighth grade students through the Jefferson Parish Public School System. Students who live in Visitation Parish boundaries and beyond one mile of the school are provided with transportation.

Visitation of Our Lady has a school Language Arts Lab that provides instruction and remediation for students who have special learning needs and/or learning differences in the areas of reading, English, spelling, and phonics. The children are screened for admittance into the program. The lab's small group setting helps to better accommodate the students' individual needs.

The Before and After School Care Programs are available to all students each morning from 7:00-7:30 a.m. and from 3:30-6:00 p.m. each afternoon. This program employs one director along with adequate full and part-time employees. A homework room is available to students each day

staffed by a full-time teacher.

School safety is a top priority. A crisis plan is in place should an emergency occur. Also, emergency exit routes are posted in all school facilities to assist in the evacuation process. Fire and health inspections are updated annually. In addition, a crisis communication system is in place between the office and the teachers. All visitors who enter the school are required to receive a visitor's pass in the main office. The administration and staff supervise students before school, at recess, during change of classes, and at dismissal. Additionally, our SchoolReach communications system provides timely information in the event of an emergency or crisis.

Visitation of Our Lady has a full time maintenance director and a contracted janitorial staff. The maintenance and janitorial staff are responsible for the upkeep of the facility. All classrooms and campus facilities are cleaned daily after school hours. The maintenance director provides for the day-to-day upkeep of the campus.

### **Guidance/Counseling Services**

Visitation of Our Lady has a full-time licensed guidance counselor who is available to children, parents, and faculty. Both school personnel and parents may refer students to the counselor. Visitation's counselor works with individual students, small special needs groups, and classroom guidance. The counselor offers individual sessions with parents and teachers. Additionally, the counselor consults with other outside professionals when necessary.

The school implements Child Protection Catechesis as mandated by the Archdiocese of New Orleans. The Director of Religious Education instructs students about child abuse in a manner they can developmentally comprehend. Students are taught to protect and respect themselves and others.

As an outside resource for children, Visitation of Our Lady is affiliated with Project Fleur-de-lis, a program that was formed after Hurricane Katrina. The project, which is funded through federal grants, assists the students and parents with individual academic assessments and/or emotional intervention through individual and family counseling.



According to the NSSE Opinion Surveys from Visitation's parents and students, these groups believe that bullying exists at our school. As a result of the survey, a program has been established to address these concerns. A Bullying Prevention Committee of students, parents, and teachers was formed to help all become more aware of bullying issues in schools. Through presentations, students have discussed how to handle conflict in non-aggressive ways rather than verbally abusive ways. The committee meets monthly to share ideas and suggestions to continually address the issue of bullying. The committee is looking to expand and include more members of the student body.

Parenting seminars are offered at Visitation of Our Lady. In conjunction with the newly formed bullying prevention committee, a recent seminar titled "When Anger Hurts" was presented to parents. Other seminars have included "Discipline With Dignity," "Homework Without Tears or Fears," "Effective and Loving Communication," and "Smart Discipline".

## **Discipline**

The Visitation of Our Lady School discipline plan is supportive of our school mission and philosophy that students are instructed in Christian principles and values. In the spring of 2006, a discipline committee was formed to develop a more consistent discipline plan to use throughout the school. Our school wide discipline plan promotes respect and cooperation that is conducive to meeting the academic needs of each student. Annually, the committee re-evaluates the success of the discipline program. Students are expected to be honest, polite, and respectful to everyone at all times. The discipline plan seeks to teach self-discipline, responsibility for one's own behavior, and the value of rewards and consequences. Qualities that foster growth in discipline are closely related to the interpersonal expression of basic gospel values. The discipline plan is designed to be proactive and progressive in nature and helps to provide for the welfare and safety of all students.

## **Discipline Policy**

### **A. Warning/Demerit**

Students who do not abide by the rules and regulations stated in the *Parent and Student Handbook* receive a demerit for their infraction. A

verbal warning is given to a student before a demerit is issued.

## B. Detention

After three demerits the student will receive an after school detention. Parents will receive written notification if their child earns a detention. A detention session is one hour. Once a student has three detentions, there will be a scheduled conference with the student's parents, teacher(s), and an administrator. Students begin each nine weeks with a cleared demerit record.

## C. Suspension

A suspension follows serious failure on the part of the student to comply with the rules and standards of behavior of our school. Suspensions are assigned in-school or out-of-school for one or more days. Suspension reasons are listed in the *Parent and Student Handbook*. Out-of-school suspensions are reserved for the most serious offenses. After the first in-school suspension, additional suspensions may be either served in or out of school at the principal's discretion. A conference with the principal will then be mandatory. A serious offense after the conference may result in expulsion.

## D. Expulsion

Expulsion takes place only in extreme cases at the discretion of the principal and with approval of the pastor. This takes place when a student consistently violates school rules and/or policies. If the behavior of a student is detrimental to himself, to another student, or to the school, immediate expulsion could take place. The good of the students and others is considered.

## **Academic Program of Studies**

Visitation of Our Lady School is a state-approved school which follows the non-public school standards established by the state of Louisiana and the policies of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

Visitation of Our Lady's mission statement - "*Inspiring Catholic Faith and Principles While Encouraging Academic Excellence*" - expresses the emphasis of our school: religious formation first and foremost and a concentration on academic excellence. Instructional goals focus on the development of the whole child including spiritual, moral, emotional, intellectual, social, and physical development. Visitation is committed to offering a well-rounded curriculum that addresses individual needs and learning styles in an environment that stresses Christian values. Students are challenged to develop a firm foundation in lifetime skills while striving for excellence in academics. The goals stated in Visitation's philosophy can be observed through "tried and true" teaching methods, individual student achievements and awards, high participation in extra-curricular and faith based activities, strong parental involvement and high attendance rate for students and faculty.

The curriculum is aligned with state standards and grade level expectations as established by the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Teachers also use the Compendium of Objectives for the Stanford 10 achievement test as guidelines in working toward smooth transitions between grade levels. Visitation students' performances in Total Reading and Total Math have been consistently above the national average. The school is currently developing a curriculum framework to establish additional requirements across grade levels to guide teachers in making instructional decisions. The entire faculty, grade level teams, and content area teams meet to evaluate and discuss appropriate strategies to enhance learning.

Visitation's curriculum includes classes in religion, mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts. Exploratory classes in Pre K-4 through fourth grades include library, physical education, computer, and music. A Spanish class was begun this year in first through fourth grades with the hopes of expanding to other grades in future years. Exploratory classes in fifth and sixth grades are study skills, art, library, and physical education. The exploratory classes in seventh and eighth grades are speech, computer, and physical education. A standardized test (SAT 10) preparation

class called “Scoring High” is taught in first through seventh grades weekly. Title One services are available to students in kindergarten through third grade who need further reinforcement in language arts. Participation in the Title I program is based on teacher recommendation, classroom observation, and test scores. Visitation also offers a Language Arts Lab for students with learning difficulties and special needs.

Visitation of Our Lady recognizes students who achieve success in academics, conduct and effort. Each quarter, students who qualify for the “A” and “B” honor roll are awarded ribbons of merit. The honor roll is posted in each classroom and submitted to the *Times Picayune* for publication. The Principal’s Award is presented to all students earning a straight “A” report card. Additionally, teachers award “Hero Bucks” for displaying Christian values, service, good judgment, and responsibility. The students are able to redeem their “Hero Bucks” for special prizes throughout the year.

### **Early Childhood (Pre K-3 and 4)**

Visitation is fortunate to have a highly regarded early childhood program. Pre K-3 has a Louisiana “Class A” license and Pre K-4 falls under the governance of the school and Archdiocese. Our enrollment has increased considerably over the past three years. We anxiously await our new early childhood facility to meet our stakeholders increasing demands.

Our early childhood programs utilize a hands-on/discovery approach to learning through the use of manipulatives. Students work within the Montessori philosophy of freedom of choice. The goals for students are concentration, coordination, independence, and order. These programs allow each child to independently progress through learning with their teachers as guides. The classroom materials are arranged by curriculum areas in skill sequence with each activity designed to advance the learner in their understanding of concepts presented. The teacher prepares the environment, guides the activity, functions as the leader, and offers the stimulus for learning, but it is the child who learns.

Visitation’s early childhood programs offer full or half day options that are developmentally appropriate. In keeping with our mission, we incorporate God’s message through the “*Christ Our Life*” religion series. Students are taught prayers, respect, and Christ-like behavior. Additionally,

a Montessori theme-based curriculum includes: math, sensorial, language, everyday living, science, geography, and social Studies. Weekly mass, computer, physical education, and library are offered to Pre K-4 students. In support of the curriculum, regular in-school field trips are planned for the student's enjoyment.

### **Middle School Curriculum (Grades 5 – 8)**

Visitation's Middle School Program served as a model middle school for the National Middle School Association Convention. The program addresses the needs of early adolescents. It includes exploratory courses, interdisciplinary teaming, honors classes, and extra curricular activities.

All students in middle school attend seven classes daily consisting of religion, literature, English, math, science, social studies, and one exploratory class (P.E., library, art, study skills, computer or speech). Special activities such as pep rallies, student/teacher volleyball games, Olympic days, and award ceremonies are planned throughout the year for middle school students. The fifth graders participate in the D.A.R.E. Program each year. Many clubs and organizations are available for students in the middle grades. Currently Visitation offers a middle school drama club, a math club, choir, student council, band, a library club, HALO club, cheerleading, and athletics.

### **Religion**

The religious education program recognizes that parents are the primary religious educators of their children. The school's faculty and administrators understand the importance of parents as religious role models for their children. With this in mind, parents are invited and encouraged to attend weekly school Masses with their children. In addition, grandparents are invited to monthly grade level Masses in their honor. A Sunday children's Mass is celebrated bi-monthly in the parish. A different homeroom is assigned to lead and participate in each children's Mass.

Each day begins and ends with school-wide prayer over the intercom. Other regular religious activities include participation in a weekly novena to Mary following Mass, monthly adoration in third – eighth grades, and Mass attendance on Holy Days of Obligation. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered frequently to students. Each October, the school sponsors a Living

Rosary which is well attended by the community. The entire school participates in Advent activities such as the Jesse Tree and each classroom displays an Advent wreath. Catholic Schools Week is celebrated each year during the third nine weeks. Special liturgies and activities are planned throughout this week. Older students are paired with younger students to participate in various activities. Students attend the Stations of the Cross weekly during the Lenten season. In May, students in kindergarten through eighth grade participate in the crowning of Mary in our prayer garden.

The Catholic Identity Standards form the basis of religious instruction at Visitation. Religion is taught not only during religion classes but across the curriculum and is manifested in all aspects of school life. The school uses the Faith and Life series by Ignatius Press to teach religion in kindergarten through eighth grades. A major part of the religion curriculum in the second grade is the preparation of students for the sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation.

In addition to their regular religion textbook work, students in middle school are required to complete several religion projects each school year, such as a Saints project and a Mary project. In fifth – eighth grades, writing assignments are a regular part of religion instruction. Students are also required to keep a prayer journal. Middle School students are actively involved in service projects, such as making Thanksgiving baskets and collecting toys at Christmas for the needy of the parish.

## **Language Arts**

Recognizing the fact that a love of reading and the written word can only be developed through a feeling of self-accomplishment, the school promotes a variety of programs which foster this feeling of accomplishment and ownership. The primary goal of the program is to develop students who not only master language arts skills but also develop a love of writing and literature that will remain with them throughout their lives.

In first grade, phonics is taught systematically following the order sounds presented in the Open Court Reading series. The Modern Curriculum Press Phonics workbooks, Levels A and B, are used in conjunction with the Open Court series to reinforce phonics skills. High frequency words are taught in class and reviewed nightly at home. In second grade, the Open Court phonics workbook is used regularly and

coordinated with the spelling list. Phonics development is continued in the third and fourth grades through the use of the McGraw-Hill hard back speller which presents lessons according to phonetic similarities.

In first grade, reading skills are taught using a combination of “Big Books,” decodable books, and hard back readers. First graders read approximately 30 – 35 decodable paper books before beginning their first hard back reader. “Big Books” are used in class to develop listening comprehension skills and vocabulary as well as phonetic skills. Through the various poems read in the Open Court Readers, the students are exposed to basic rhyming schemes and learn to recognize differences between stories and poems. Oral reading fluency is assessed as a group and individually.

In second through eighth grades, vocabulary is developed within the context of stories and through the use of The Wordly Wise series. In third through eighth grades, vocabulary is also developed in context through reading novels.

Comprehension skills are taught using the Open Court series in first through fifth grades. Independent and shared reading is used to practice vocabulary and comprehension skills in first through fifth grades. Cold readings are also incorporated into the curriculum in preparation for standardized testing and to build independent reading skills. Comprehension skills taught include: main idea, drawing conclusions, making predictions and inferences, summarizing, categorizing, comparing and contrasting, sequencing, cause and effect, critical and higher order thinking skills. Book reports are incorporated into the curriculum beginning in the second grade and continuing through the eighth grade. (The Title I program assists students in grades K – third that are lacking in reading skills.)

In fifth – seventh grades, Visitation offers both regular and honors classes in the area of language arts. Visitation's Middle School language arts program's main focus is to create accomplished readers and writers who can succeed in any chosen career. To meet this goal sustained silent reading (SSR) is incorporated into the curriculum daily. All students in fifth - eighth grades are encouraged to carry a book of their choice with them at all times to read when extra time is available. All teachers use the Daily Oral Language series in addition to the Loyola Press text and workbook to develop correct grammar usage and proofreading skills.

In sixth through eighth grades, the Prentice Hall Literature series is used as the main text for literature. Comprehension skills such as summarizing, comparing/contrasting, identifying main ideas, supporting details, and author's purpose are taught in the context of many different genres such as short stories, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, biographies, autobiographies, and tall tales. The story elements of plot, character, setting, and theme are taught and reviewed throughout the year.

At the fifth and sixth grade levels, one novel is read, discussed and assessed in class. Quizzes, vocabulary tests, and comprehension tests are given regularly on this novel. In addition, one SSR novel is required to be read independently during each semester. An assignment or project is given on each novel.

At the seventh and eighth grade levels, three novels per year are read, discussed, and assessed in class. One SSR novel is required to be read independently each nine weeks. Students are given options for projects based on each novel read. One Shakespearean play per year is taught and tested at the seventh and eighth grade levels. A poetry unit is taught in the seventh and eighth grade requiring students to analyze several poems using the TIPCAST method. Analysis is done in small groups and projects are completed and presented to the class.

The English program at all levels teaches the conventions of the English language as well as writing skills. Students learn about the parts of speech beginning in first grade with nouns and adjectives. Contractions, compound words, capitalization, and punctuation are also taught beginning in first grade and continuing through eighth grade. Second through eighth grades use the Voyages in English series by Loyola Press to present and practice skills.

In fifth through seventh grades, all parts of speech are covered thoroughly with an emphasis on grammar, usage, and mechanics. At the eighth grade level, the parts of speech are reviewed with additional time spent on developing writing skills. At the fifth and sixth grade levels, writing skills are developed through multi-paragraph compositions in different styles such as narrative, descriptive, and persuasive. Social and business letter writing is also taught. One writing assignment is graded each nine weeks. Daily Oral Language exercises are incorporated each day, and proofreading skills are tested regularly at all grade levels. At the seventh



and eighth grade levels, additional emphasis is placed on writing skills. Written assignments with writing prompts are given each week. Five assignments are graded each marking period and counted as one test grade. Several English papers using different types of writing are required throughout the year. At the eighth grade level a research paper is required with a bibliography and source documentation.

Spelling is formally taught in first through eighth grades. In first grade, spelling words are correlated with the dictation words assigned from the stories read in class. The McGraw-Hill hard back speller is used in second through fourth grades. Students in first through fourth grades are also given dictation sentences on their weekly spelling tests. In middle school, the Wordly Wise series is also used as a spelling text.

## **Math**

In the primary grades, students are introduced to basic math concepts through the use of manipulatives. At the kindergarten level, a hands-on discovery approach is used with manipulatives. The “Touch Math” method is also used in kindergarten and first grade to teach basic addition and subtraction facts. In first grade during the second half of the school year, memorization of the math facts is stressed and students are discouraged from relying on the “Touch Math” method to solve basic addition and subtraction facts.

Flashcards are used to drill math facts in all primary grades. The Problem of the Day transparencies are used in all primary grades to enhance problem solving skills. The Math Minutes series is used at all grades levels to review previously learned skills and to prepare students for standardized testing. Beginning in third grade, timed math quizzes are given on addition, subtraction, and multiplication facts. These quizzes are continued through the sixth grade.

The Middle School math curriculum focuses on problem solving skills, concept development, and computation skills in both regular and honors classes. Teachers strive to give students a deeper understanding of how mathematical concepts work. Manipulatives are readily available to enhance conceptual understanding. Calculator skills are incorporated in certain areas of study. Emphasis is placed on memorization of basic multiplication and division facts.

At the fifth and sixth grade levels, timed math facts quizzes are used during the first half of the school year to ensure memorization of multiplication and division facts. Problem solving skills are taught at least three times a week through use of the Problem of the Day transparencies, the Guided Problem Solving Workbook, or challenging word problems included in lessons of each chapter. At least two alternative math assessments are given during the school year to further develop higher order thinking skills. Partner work or small group work is incorporated regularly to allow students to learn from each other and to encourage discussions of different methods to solve word problems. Regular review of previously learned skills is incorporated into the weekly schedule through use of review worksheets, the “Check Skills” section included with each lesson, the “Mixed Review” sections following each lesson or Math Minutes worksheets which target a wide variety of skills and concepts. Review problems are also included on most tests beginning in the second nine weeks.

At the seventh and eighth grade levels, students are expected to have instant recall of basic multiplication and division facts. Seventh and eighth graders are also required to complete at least two alternative assessments per school year. Also, partner work and small group work is incorporated on a regular basis at these grade levels. Regular review of previously learned skills is incorporated in the same manner as mentioned above for the fifth and sixth graders. With money from the school budget and Louisiana Textbook Adoption funds, new math texts were purchased in 2005 for grades kindergarten - eight to better sequence concepts and skills.

## **Science**

The science curriculum at Visitation encourages students to think, explore, and work independently and collaboratively through use of our state of the art science lab. The science lab is fully equipped with 10 computers, science kits, microscopes, and supplies for experiments. The ability to collect, display, print, graph, and analyze data using Vernier and Logger Pro 3 software was made possible through an 8(g) grant. To further assist teachers and students in studying about weather conditions and concepts, a WeatherBug weather station has been installed in conjunction with WWL-TV.

In kindergarten through second grade, science is taught through

thematic units addressing topics such as weather, plants, and animals. Science is not graded at these levels.

Beginning in third grade, science is formally taught for two nine week periods and is graded. The textbook and the consumable workbook are used. Third graders are required to complete two reports, one on animals and the other on planets. Third graders visit the science lab to perform simple experiments at least once each nine weeks.

In fourth grade, science is taught for the entire school year. The fourth grade curriculum includes integrated science with special emphasis on life and physical science. Fourth graders also visit the science lab at least once each nine weeks to perform experiments.

The fifth grade science curriculum encompasses the basics of earth, life, and physical science. Sixth (earth science), seventh (life science), and eighth graders (physical science) engage in a more in depth study of these topics. Environmental science is integrated at all grade levels.

## **Social Studies**

The goal of Visitation's social studies curriculum is to nurture responsible citizens with a broad knowledge of the history of our state, country, and the world. Our aim is to develop in our students an understanding of the relationship of the past to the present.

In kindergarten through second grade, social studies is taught through thematic units addressing topics such as community helpers, Indians and Pilgrims, countries around the world, and government. Social studies is not graded at these levels. The Daily Geography Program is incorporated beginning in the second grade. This program increases students' knowledge and understanding of the physical and political features of the world. It encourages students to use maps, globes, atlases, and charts.

Beginning in third grade, social studies is formally taught for two nine week periods and is graded. Units taught in third grade social studies include: Communities, Louisiana, and Washington D.C. In fourth grade, social studies is taught for the entire school year. The fourth grade program focuses on regions of the United States.

The Middle School social studies curriculum encompasses Louisiana History, United States History/Cultures, and World History. All grade levels utilize the Daily Geography Program, and each student is required to have an atlas in class every day. All students are required to complete a minimum of one social studies project per year. The curriculum is enhanced with field trips to historic local sites which have included: World War II Museum, French Quarter, State Capital, etc.

### **Exploratory Classes**

Visitation offers a wide variety of exploratory classes to students in PreK-4 through eighth grade. Students attend weekly classes in music, library, computer, physical education, and Spanish (first – fourth grades). In addition to the above, middle school students are offered study skills, art, and speech depending upon the grade level.

### **Art**

In PreK-3 through third grade, the homeroom teachers teach art at least once a week to their individual classes. All fourth graders and some fifth graders participate in art classes specializing in perceptual skills. These classes are taught by a professional artist who uses the “Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain” teaching method. The sixth graders are offered art instruction as one of their exploratory classes. Students in first – sixth grades are also given the opportunity to receive additional formal instruction in art through an After School Enrichment Program. This program is provided by an outside source and is offered each school year for a nominal fee. The topics studied include the basic elements of color, painting with acrylics, watercolors, pastels, and working with graphite.

### **Music**

The goal of the music education program at Visitation is to develop an appreciation of music by exposing students to a variety of music and teaching them the rudiments of reading music. Students in PreK-4 through fourth grade attend weekly music classes taught by a professional musician and certified music educator.

At the kindergarten level, students learn the importance of music in their everyday lives. They also learn to sing to various styles of music, and

to identify and pantomime the playing of many musical instruments. In first grade, students learn to sing and act out many children's songs. They are introduced to a variety of rhythmic percussion instruments and use these to keep a steady beat to music. At the second grade level, students learn about the music of our American culture and other countries using the book, *Making Music Our Own*. In third grade, students learn to play the recorder. They learn the fundamentals of music-reading and performing in preparation for possible enrollment in beginner band in fourth grade. In fourth grade, students begin studying instruments of the orchestra. They also study the basic elements of tempo, dynamics, and pitch.

Although there are no formal music classes in the middle school, fifth - eighth graders have the opportunity to join the Archdiocesan Band Program. This program is divided into three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Students may join band in the fourth grade and continue through eighth grade. Classes meet once a week for sectional rehearsals and once a week for full band rehearsals. All students perform in an end of year concert and in other events and performances throughout the year.

## **Spanish**

Currently Spanish classes are provided weekly for half of the school year in first through fourth grades. Classes are taught by a part-time Spanish teacher. The FLEX (Foreign Language Experience Program) program is used to expose students not only to the Spanish language but also to Spanish culture. The lower elementary program is a four year conversational thematic program with sequential and spiral learning. It expands each year on previous work as well as introduces additional themes. The students learn necessary vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and parts of speech to build dialogues, stories, questions, and answers.

## **Speech**

Students in seventh and eighth grade study the principles of creating and delivering speeches as one of their exploratory classes. During their speech experience, students have the opportunity to present individually as well as in a group. Students learn about the different types of oral presentations, from biographical speeches to dramatic readings. They are exposed to techniques that reduce anxiety and strategies to enhance presentation. The goal of the class is to promote self-confidence and

demonstrate to students that public speaking is a challenge to be conquered, not an insurmountable barrier. The grades received in this class become part of their language arts (English) grade.

## **Health and Physical Education**

Visitation's physical education program stresses skill development, fitness, social interaction skills, responsible behavior, personal hygiene, and nutrition. Two full-time physical education teachers teach students in PreK-4 through eighth grades. Students in PreK-4 through fourth grades attend weekly P.E. classes. Students in fifth through eighth grades attend two P.E. classes weekly. All fifth grade students participate in a drug and alcohol prevention program called D. A. R. E. sponsored by the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Department. A graduation ceremony from this program is held in May. Health topics are integrated into the physical education curriculum throughout the year.

Visitation of Our Lady School offers a variety of sports for Middle School student athletes to showcase their abilities. The school belongs to the West Bank Catholic Athletic League. Our nickname is the Volunteers and our mascot is Hero, a Dalmatian firefighter. Boys and girls in fifth - eighth grades are allowed to try out for either junior or senior teams in the following sports: girls volleyball, boys flag football, boys and girls basketball and indoor ball.

## **Standardized Test Preparation**

Scoring High is the name of our standardized test prep program used in first through seventh grades. In first – fourth grades, the homeroom teachers are responsible for implementing the program. In fifth through seventh grades, Scoring High is taught as one of the exploratory classes. Students receive weekly instruction in standardized test preparation as well as study tips.

## **Computer**

Students in PreK-4 through fourth grades attend weekly computer classes designed to enhance and reinforce skills taught in major subject areas appropriate to each grade level. In fourth – eighth grades, the focus is on learning how to use the computer to conduct research. Two computer labs

are available for students at Visitation. One lab is primarily used by students in fourth - eighth grades for research, projects, and exploratory classes. The second lab is used by lower elementary students in skills development (typing, math, language arts, etc.). Students in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade computer exploratory classes learn proper techniques for conducting Internet-based research using a variety of tools such as online encyclopedias, search engines (Google), periodical databases (EBSCO), and selected web sites. Students learn to select the correct tool for the type of research needed and to be critical in evaluating the quality of items returned by these research tools. To put these skills to use, students are given a variety of research projects.

### **Library Skills**

All students visit the library regularly and receive grade level appropriate instruction. PreK-4 and kindergarten students visit the library weekly and listen to stories that foster a love of books and reading. Students in first through fourth grades visit the library weekly to learn about the organization of the library, library skills, research skills, and to check out books.

### **Language Arts Lab**

Visitation is the only Catholic school on the West Bank that offers a Language Arts Lab for students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, language processing problems, and attention deficit disorder. The Language Arts Lab consists of language arts classes for qualifying students whose reading, grammar, writing, spelling, and comprehension of language are significantly below expected growth.

It is the mission of the Language Arts Lab to call on ourselves, in Christ's message of love, to honor and value students with varying learning styles. The program provides an avenue which enables students to grow to higher standards spiritually, morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially. In the Language Arts Lab, we have an opportunity to further individualize the tenets of the Visitation of Our Lady Catholic School mission statement, philosophy, and objectives, particularly those regarding the whole child and the differing developmental or learning needs of children.

The program components include:

- Small class size
- Workstations with specialized software and Internet capabilities
- Multi-sensory learning activities
- Supportive academic structure with a low-stress environment for optimal learning gains
- Curriculum and methods chosen to enhance a wide variety of learning styles
- Parents, teachers, administrators, and other specialists work together as a team for the betterment of the child

### **Student Programs, Clubs, and Extra-Curricular Activities**

In an effort to fulfill our mission, Visitation offers numerous opportunities to explore and develop their personal talents and academics abilities beyond the boundaries of the structured classroom environment.

Visitation takes part in the following student programs:

- The Louisiana 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student of the Year program.
- In 2006-2007, seventy 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were recognized by Louisiana's Pat Taylor's Kids' program for maintaining a 2.50 GPA or higher.
- Each year many Visitation students participate in the academic fair at Academy of Our Lady. In the year 2006-2007, thirteen VOL students placed at this academic fair.
- In 2006-2007, eighteen 7<sup>th</sup> graders were invited to participate in the Duke University Talent Search program. For the past three years, two students have earned state recognition.

Visitation students are also presented with the opportunity to participate in the following extra curricular clubs and organizations.

- Library Club
- Children's Choir
- Mass Readers
- Altar Servers
- The Visitation HALO Club (Heavenly Angels Loving Others)
- Archdiocesan Band Program



- Archdiocesan Athletic Program
  - Girls volleyball
  - Boys flag football
  - Boys and Girls basketball
  - Boys and Girls indoor ball
- A Cheerleading Team
- The Visitation Math Club
- The Visitation Student Council
- An elementary and a middle school Drama Club

## **Technology**

Visitation of Our Lady has an extensive networked computer system called VOLnet. The physical network spans eight buildings (school and church offices) using a combination of copper and fiber optic network cables. The backbone is 100Mb and 1000Mb (gigabit) switched Ethernet.

VOLnet is connected to the Internet through a service provided by the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Internet access is filtered for content by the Archdiocese and internally at Visitation. Students and teachers at Visitation have access to a variety of school information over the school intranet.

### **Technology Highlights**

- Full-time technology director
- Extensive campus computer network
- Faculty web pages and homework web pages
- Every classroom has at least one workstation
- Two computer labs
- Computer exploratory classes
- Telephone voicemail system with a daily homework access line
- Parents receive school announcements via email and a phone messaging system

## **General Library Information**

The Visitation of Our Lady School Library is home to over 10,000 reference, non-fiction, and fiction books. Our library provides 18 magazine titles for student and faculty use. The Media Center houses over 300 videos

and DVDs which enhance the curriculum at Visitation. The library's card catalog is stored electronically on the VOL network and is available from any workstation using a web browser. In addition, the library contains five computers connected to the VOL network and the Internet. The library is fully automated and managed through Follett software and is networked throughout the school giving both the students and teachers access to the library from their classroom. The library suffered heavy damage during Hurricane Katrina and was completely remodeled in 2006.

The Media Center is open each day from 7:50 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. Students may use the library during these times to check out and return books, to conduct research or complete homework assignments. A printer is available for computer work.

The school employs a full-time certified librarian who moderates an active Library Club.

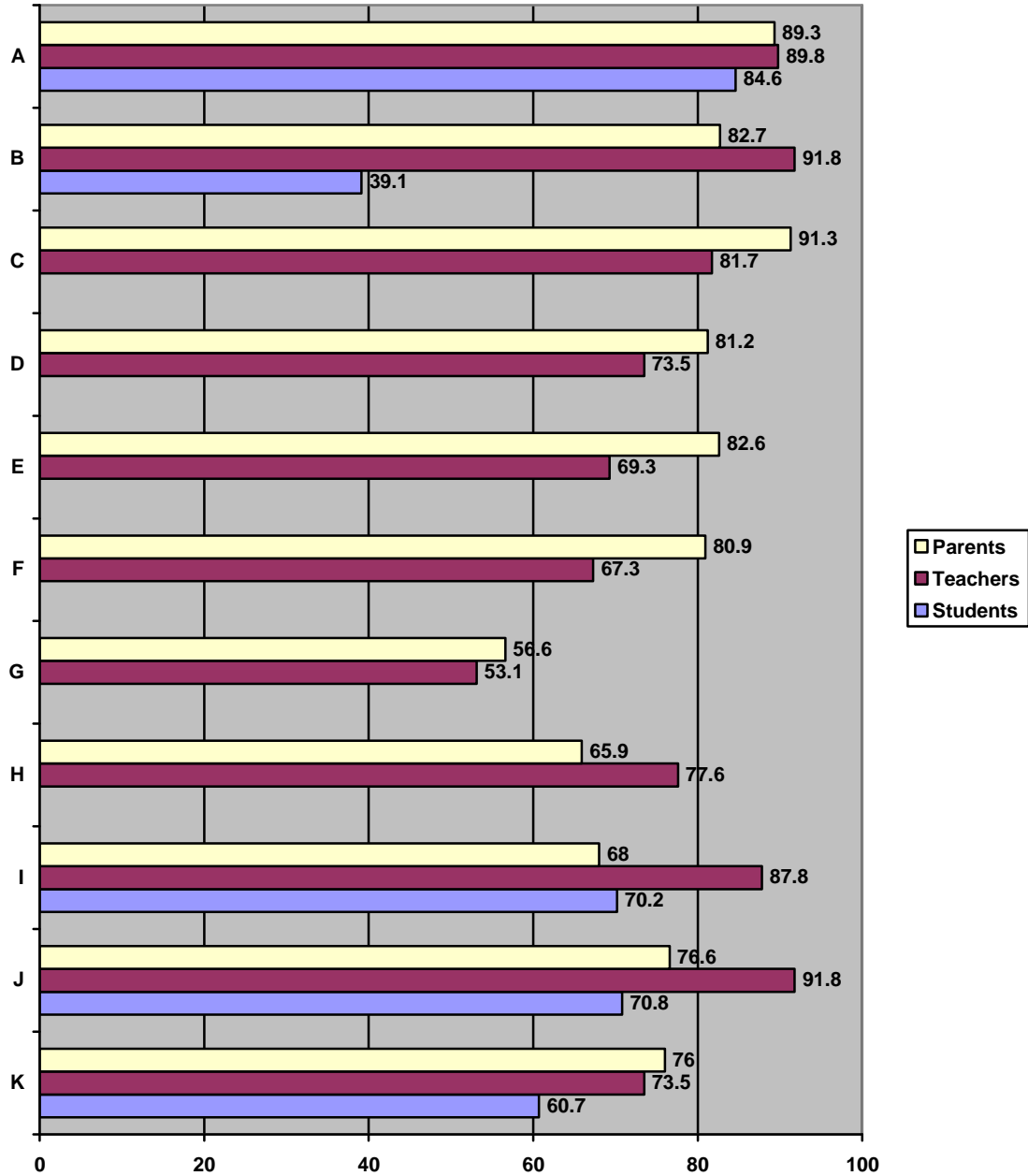
### **Stanford Achievement Test 10**

The Stanford Achievement Test 10 is the standardized test used by the Archdiocese of New Orleans. The SAT 10 is given to students at Visitation from first through seventh grades each spring. Prior to 2004-2005 school year, the SAT 9 was administered. Visitation's test results are consistently above the national average in Total Reading and Total Math. For the past two years students in the first through seventh grades participate in a SAT 10 prep course called "Scoring High." The goal of this class is to familiarize students with the testing format and environment.

### **NSSE Surveys**

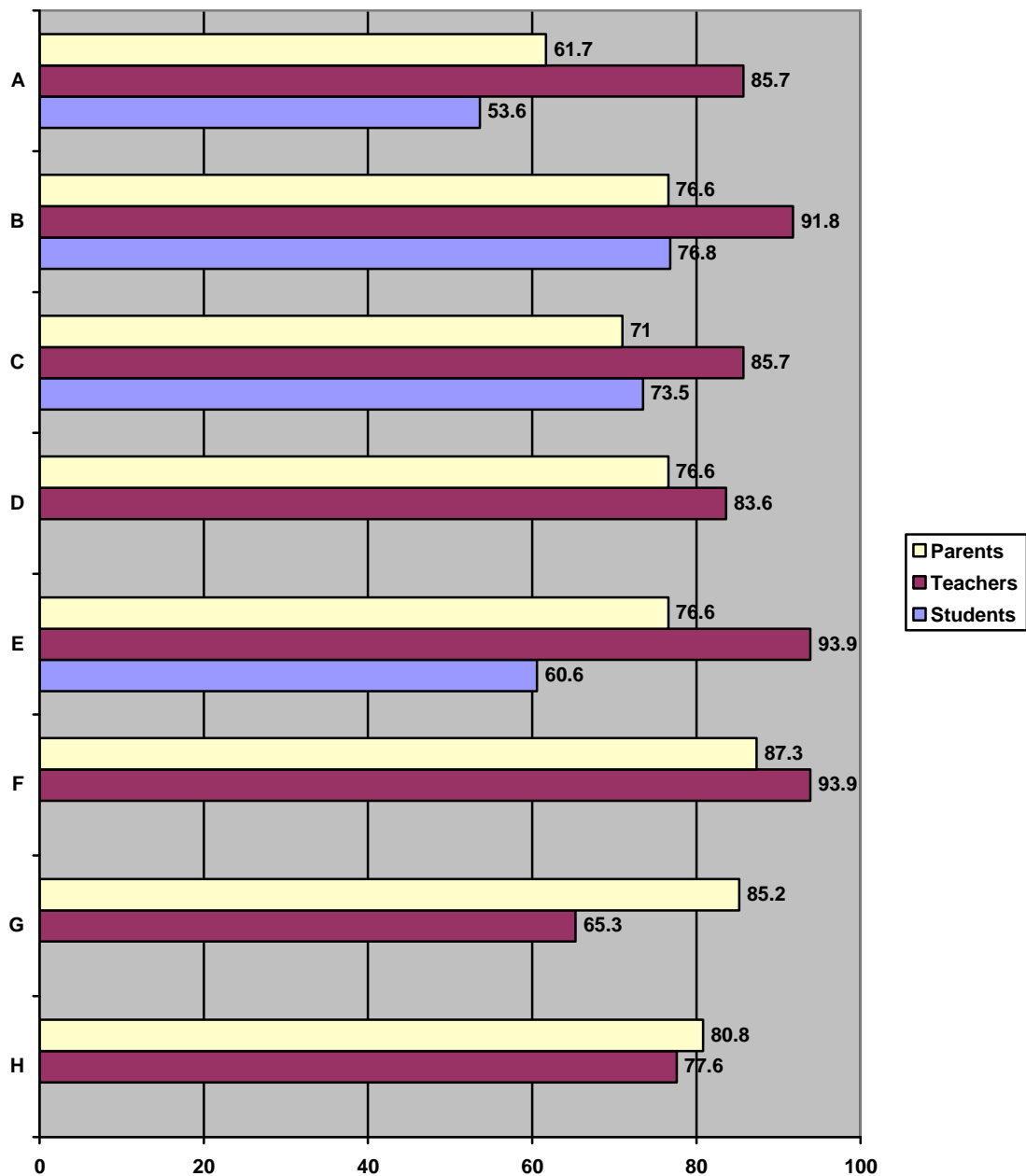
The NSSE *Opinion Surveys* were distributed to compile the opinions of students, teachers and parents about Visitation's quality of education. All faculty and staff, 132 students, and 47 parents responded to our survey. On the following pages are samples of common items asked and survey results. Survey results show that most are satisfied with our school.

## Quality of Instructional Program



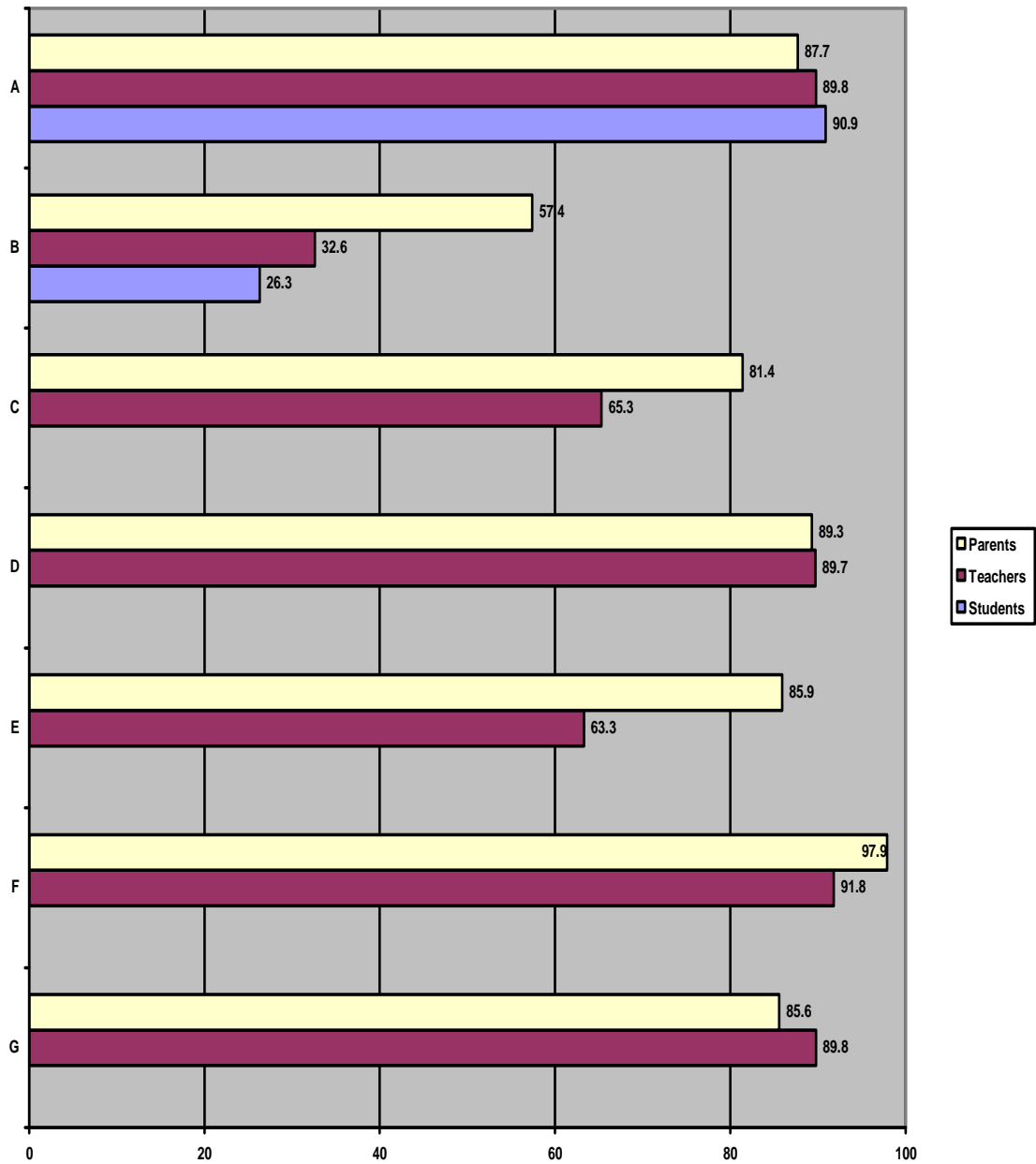
- A. The education offered to students at our school is of high quality
- B. Teachers provide a reasonable and appropriate amount of homework to help students succeed in their studies.
- C. Our school is doing a good job in teaching Language Arts.
- D. Our school is doing a good job in teaching Mathematics.
- E. Our school is doing a good job in teaching Science.
- F. Our school is doing a good job in teaching Social Studies
- G. Our school is doing a good job in teaching Fine Arts.
- H. Our school is doing a good job in teaching Physical Education.
- I. Teachers use a variety of strategies and learning activities to help students learn.
- J. Teachers hold high expectations for student learning.
- K. Students are motivated to do their best work.

## Support for Student Learning



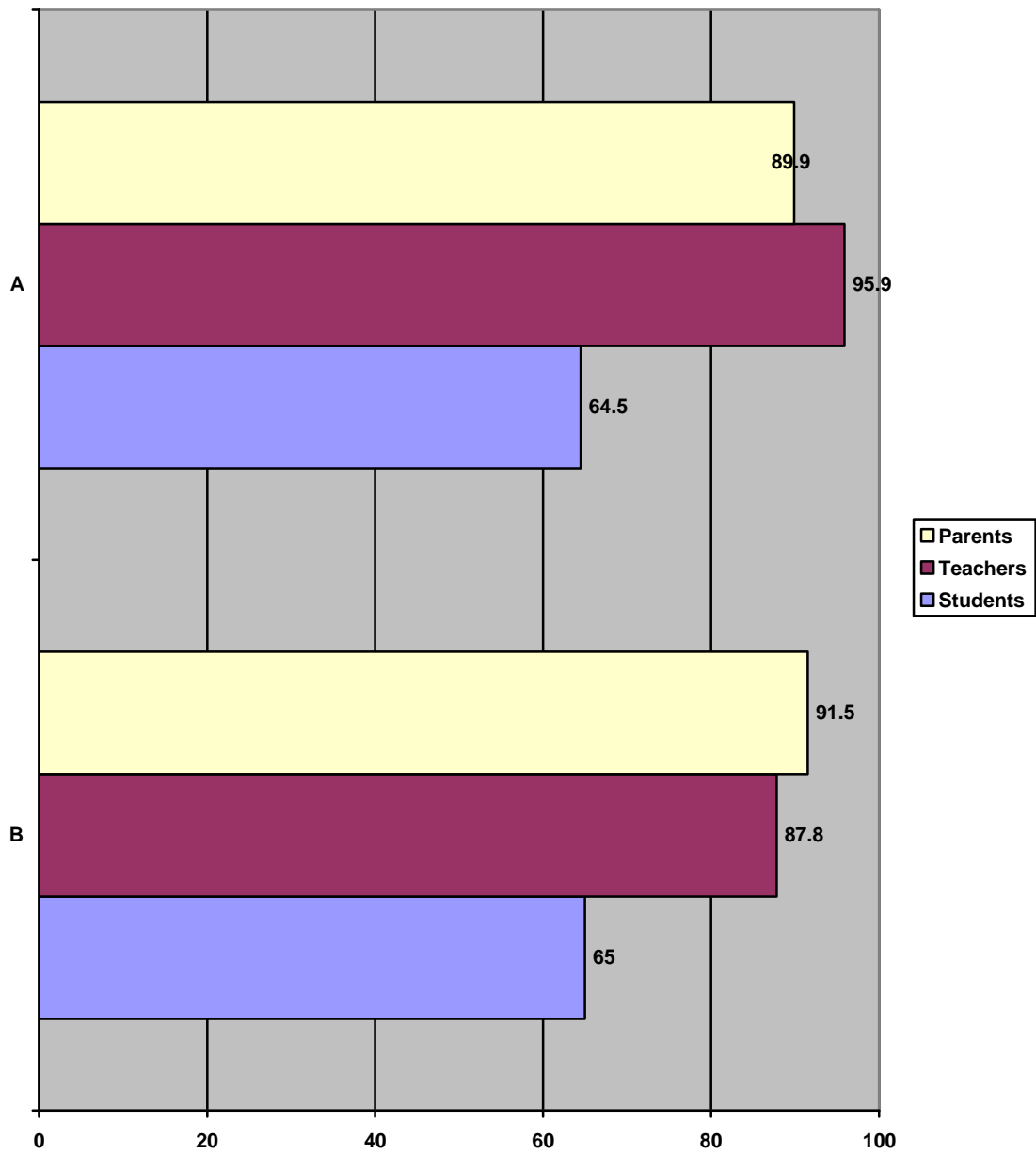
- A. Teachers are willing to give students individual help outside of class time.
- B. In our school, students have access to a variety of resources to help them succeed in their learning, such as technology, media centers, and libraries.
- C. Up-to-date computers and other technologies are used in our school to help students learn.
- D. Our school offers learning opportunities that support the full range of student abilities.
- E. Our school recognizes the achievements of students for all types of accomplishments.
- F. Effective procedures are in place to support communication between parents and teachers.
- G. Our school provides teaching materials and supplies that are current and in good condition.
- H. Our school's facilities are adequate to support students' learning needs.

## School Climate/Environment of Learning



- A. Cheating is strongly discouraged at our school.
- B. There are no problems with bullies at our school.
- C. Class sizes at our school are appropriate for effective learning.
- D. All students and staff at our school are treated with respect, regardless of race, religion, or gender.
- E. School rules apply equally to all students.
- F. Our school provides a safe and orderly environment for learning.
- G. Substance abuse (e.g. drug/alcohol) is not a problem at our school.

## Parent/School Relationships



- A. Our students' family members feel welcome in our school.  
B. For the most part, I am satisfied with our school.

**NSSE Survey of Goals for Students Learning Performance Indicators**  
**Grouped by Goal Level of Achievement**

	4	3	2	1	0
<b>LEARNING TO LEARN SKILLS</b>					
Makes a commitment to creating quality work and striving for excellence	4.3%	30.4%	65.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Uses a variety of learning strategies, personal skills, and time management skills to enhance learning	10.6%	34.0%	55.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Reflects on and evaluates their learning for the purpose of improvement	2.2%	26.7%	57.8%	13.3%	0.0%
<b>EXPANDING AND INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE</b>					
Connects knowledge and experiences from different subject areas	4.4%	46.7%	42.2%	6.7%	0.0%
Uses what they already know to acquire new knowledge, develop new skills and expand understanding	6.5%	41.3%	50.0%	2.2%	0.0%
Demonstrates integrated knowledge and skills in applying multi-disciplinary approaches to solving problems or completing tasks	2.2%	22.2%	62.2%	13.3%	0.0%
<b>COMMUNICATION SKILLS</b>					
Communicates with clarity, purpose and understanding of audience	0.0%	22.7%	61.4%	16.0%	0.0%
Integrates the use of a variety of communication forms and uses a wide range of communication skills	0.0%	36.4%	45.5%	18.2%	0.0%
Recognizes, analyzes and evaluates various forms of communication	2.3%	18.6%	62.8%	14.0%	2.3%
<b>THINKING AND REASONING SKILLS</b>					
Gathers and uses information effectively to gain new information and knowledge, classify and organize information, support inferences and justify conclusions appropriate to the context and audience	2.3%	11.4%	79.5%	6.8%	0.0%
Utilizes, evaluates and refines the use of multiple strategies to solve a variety of types of problems	2.2%	20.0%	53.3%	24.4%	0.0%
Generates new and creative ideas by taking considered risks in a variety of contexts	0.0%	32.6%	58.1%	9.3%	0.0%
<b>INTERPERSONAL SKILLS</b>					
Works with others in a variety of situations to set and achieve goals	4.7%	55.8%	37.2%	2.3%	0.0%
Manages and evaluates behavior as group members	7.1%	46.7%	44.4%	4.4%	2.2%
Deals with disagreement and conflict caused by a diversity of opinions and beliefs	0.0%	26.7%	55.6%	15.6%	2.2%
<b>PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY</b>					
Takes responsibility for personal actions and acts ethically (e.g., demonstrate honesty, fairness, integrity)	0.0%	37.0%	45.7%	15.2%	2.2%
Respects themselves and others, and understands and appreciates the diversity and interdependence of all people	0.0%	31.1%	53.3%	13.3%	2.2%
Demonstrates an understanding of and responsibility for global and environmental issues	0.0%	21.7%	54.3%	26.1%	2.2%
Acts as responsible citizens in the community, state and nation	0.0%	31.1%	53.3%	11.1%	4.4%

Legend: 4 – Exemplary level of achievement  
3 – Fully competent level of achievement  
2 – Evidence of progress, but not fully competent level of achievement  
1 – Low level of achievement  
0 – No evidence of achievement

**NSSE Survey of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness**  
**Grouped by Goal Level of Achievement**

	4	3	2	1	0
<b>CURRICULUM</b>					
Develops a Quality Curriculum	11.1%	66.7%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Ensures Effective Implementation and Articulation of the Curriculum	11.1%	59.3%	29.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Evaluates and Renews Curriculum	11.1%	66.7%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN</b>					
Aligns Instruction with the Goals and Expectations for Student Learning	7.4%	85.2%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Employs Data-Driven Instructional Decision Making	14.8%	70.4%	14.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Actively Engages Students in their Learning	25.9%	59.3%	14.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Expands Instructional Support for Student Learning	29.6%	59.3%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>ASSESSMENT</b>					
Clearly Defines the Expectations for Student Learning to be Assessed	11.1%	77.8%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Establishes the Purpose of the Assessment	7.4%	74.1%	18.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Selects the Appropriate Method of Assessment	11.1%	77.8%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Collects a Comprehensive and Representative Sample of Student Achievement	11.1%	81.5%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Develops Fair Assessments and Avoids Bias and Distortion	18.5%	66.7%	14.8%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>EDUCATIONAL AGENDA</b>					
Facilitates a Collaborative Process	37.0%	55.6%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Shared Vision, Beliefs and Mission	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Measurable Goals	18.5%	66.7%	14.8%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>LEADERSHIP FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT</b>					
Promotes Quality Instruction	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Develops Schoolwide Plans for Improvement	18.5%	59.3%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Employs Effective Decision Making	11.1%	77.8%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Monitors Progress	7.4%	74.1%	18.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Provides Skillful Stewardship	22.2%	63.0%	14.8%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>COMMUNITY BUILDING</b>					
Fosters Community-building	25.9%	63.0%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Extends the School Community	22.2%	51.9%	25.9%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND LEARNING</b>					
Commitment to Professional Development	29.6%	63.0%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Supports Productive Change and Improvement	44.4%	51.9%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%

Legend: 4 – Exemplary level of achievement  
3 – Fully competent level of achievement  
2 – Evidence of progress, but not fully competent level of achievement  
1 – Low level of achievement  
0 – No evidence of achievement



## School Improvement Action Plan 1 – Thinking and Reasoning Skills

**Improvement Goal:** To increase the ability of students to think critically

**Targeted Participants:** Pre K through eighth grade students

**Timeframe for Implementation:** 1 – 4 years

Action	Timeline	Responsibility	Resources
Teachers will participate in professional development workshops, which focus on students' effective use of critical thinking and higher order thinking skills.	Fall 2008 - ongoing	Content Area Teachers	Operating funds to both in-house speakers and conferences, professional development day
A committee will be charged to identify where critical thinking skills are currently taught in the curriculum and illustrate how these skills relate to real life experiences.	Fall 2008 - ongoing	Critical Skills Committee	Textbooks, GLE's, publisher's scope and sequence guides
Faculty teams will share information at grade level meetings on instructional strategies designed to enhance problem solving and critical thinking skills.	Spring 2009 - ongoing	Content Area Teachers	Textbooks, professional journals, internet, workshops, presentations
Implement Bloom's Taxonomy in teaching and testing while developing a common test construction format to incorporate Blooms.	Spring 2009 - ongoing	Administration and Faculty	Textbooks, GLE's, SAT 10 Compendium, Bloom's
Teachers will help to make parents aware of ways to improve critical thinking	Spring 2009 - ongoing	Administration, Classroom Teachers, and Parents	Newsletters, Parent Teacher Conferences, Teacher websites
Organize a "Critical Thinking" Night for both parents and students	Fall 2009 - ongoing	Critical Skills Committee, Administration, Classroom Teachers	Stakeholder volunteers, Community sponsorship

**School Improvement Action Plan 2 – Learning to Learn Skills**

**Improvement Goal:** To better prepare students in the area of technology

**Targeted Participants:** Pre K through eighth grade students

**Timeframe for Implementation:** 1 – 4 years

<b>Action</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Resources</b>
Continue to acquire up-to-date technology for all classrooms and labs.	Spring 2008 - ongoing	Administration, Technology Director	Operating budget, E-rate funding
Hire a full-time computer teacher to instruct students in the use of computers.	Fall 2008 - ongoing	Principal, Pastor, Computer Teacher	Operating budget. Computer lab and equipment
Technology committee will investigate a sequenced technology curriculum that will best serve our students.	Fall 2009 - ongoing	Technology Committee and Administration	Workshops, internet, State Technology standards, school visits
Teachers will participate in professional development workshops, which focus on teachers and students use of technology in the classroom.	Fall 2009 - ongoing	Administration, Technology Director, Computer Teacher, Classroom Teachers	Workshops, Conferences, journals, internet, professional development day
Teachers will implement/model the use of technology in the classroom on a regular basis.	Spring 2009 - ongoing	Administration, Technology Director, Computer Teacher, Classroom Teachers	Computers, LCD projectors, Technology Curriculum, Computer Teacher
Students will become proficient in the use of curriculum based computer applications.	Fall 2010 - ongoing	Students, Administration, Technology Director, Computer Teacher, Classroom Teachers	Computers, LCD projectors, Technology Curriculum, Computer Teacher, Classroom Teachers

## **Results**

This is Visitation's initial self-study, at this time there are no results to report. Our means to evaluate the effectiveness of our action plans is described in the following section.

## **Implementation of School Improvement Plan**

With the input of the school community, the faculty and staff of Visitation of Our Lady School formulated action plans that will produce the desired results in student learning. Visitation of Our Lady will put forth every effort to set into practice the action plans described in this self-study report.

Our action plans will be revisited annually by the faculty, staff, school board, and by a newly formed School Improvement Team (SIT). These groups will work collaboratively to assess the successful implementation of the action plans. This SIT will supervise and evaluate these plans and address any issues concerning school improvement goals. They will also produce an annual action plan progress report. These assessments will reflect faculty evaluations on each actions success. Revisions and/or modifications of the action plans will be made upon thorough analysis of these evaluations.

The School Improvement Plan goals for Visitation are summarized as the following:

1. Students are able to think, act, and interpret ideas critically.
2. The school demonstrates a commitment to infuse technology into all aspects of the curriculum.

The faculty will participate in workshops and inservices to implement the strategies needed to reach these goals. Workshops, faculty discussions, and improved teaching methods will assist in the development of critical thinking and higher order thinking skills. A technology plan will be introduced to better integrate skills into all grade levels to produce a more technologically savvy student.