

# Academic Excellence

## Number 2

### **How Do Our Graduates Perform?**

#### ***Information Gathered by SCCS Parent Volunteers***

Over the years at St. Croix Catholic, many of us have wondered how our children do once they leave our SCCS community and journey on to the next school system. There are always rumors that fill the streets and many assumptions are made without factual findings. We wanted to look into these statements being made and then truly try to find out where our SCCS education leads many students as they continue on.

Our first step was to start looking at where our SCCS graduates have placed on the honor rolls in the schools where they continued. This proved to be a challenge due to graduates going to many different schools in the area, and schools not saving this information once published. For this *first* report we took the two schools that had the highest number of SCCS graduates enroll, Stillwater Jr. High and Hill-Murray, along with honor roll reports that we found a complete list from both schools for this year. We had 38 St Croix Catholic Graduates in 2007, 23 went to Stillwater Jr. High, 11 went to Hill-Murray, 1 moved out of state, 1 to Mahtomedi and 2 went to Oakland. On the High Honors Honor Roll (GPA 3.5-4.0) at Stillwater Jr. High, there were 16 - SCCS graduates (9<sup>th</sup> graders) on this list and 2 on the Honors List (GPA 3.0-3.499). On the Hill-Murray "A" Honor Roll (GPA 3.5-4.0) there were 2 SCCS Graduates (9<sup>th</sup> graders) and 4 on the "B" Honor Roll (GPA 3.0-3.499). There are 410 - 9<sup>th</sup> grade students at Stillwater Jr. High with 168 of those students making the A Honor Roll (41%). There were 23 SCCS graduates at Stillwater Jr. High, 16 making the A Honor Roll (70%). Hill Murray has 220 - 9<sup>th</sup> graders with 51 making the A Honor Roll (23%). That puts SCCS at an 18% A Honor Roll status at Hill-Murray.

As we look at this information, it is very difficult to form a legitimate argument that our graduates do not succeed. We show 18 out of 23 on the A/B Honor Roll at one school and 6 out of 11 on the A/B Honor Roll at another. While there may always be room for improvement, and we should always strive to be better as a school, we seem to see many students leaving here and excelling in academics as well as having a well-rounded spiritual education that has taught them how to make decisions with a faithful conscience.

We would like to continue to track this information and we will be able to gather and save this on our own as a research project for our school in the future. We will also be looking at tracking more closely next year with Hill-Murray. Historically, just a handful of graduates transferred to Hill-Murray, and now about 50% are choosing Hill-Murray for high school. Responding to this change, SCCS will be looking at each subject area to ensure we align with 9<sup>th</sup> graders transitioning smoothly into this school.

We hope that this may answer some questions that parents have been wondering about and look forward to finding more ways to help all graduates from SCCS continue to attain their goals and become strong individuals in whatever they do.

### **Math Tracks**

Of the 23 SCCS graduates who transferred to Stillwater Junior High 9<sup>th</sup> grade, all stayed on their respective math tracks; all high-track students stayed on high track and all grade-level stayed on grade level. We have not been able to gather this information yet for Hill-Murray.

### **SCCS Graduates Stand Out Among Peers**

"At conferences at Stillwater Junior High, one of the teachers told me that overall, the students from SCCS were more prepared and 'got it' academically easier than other students. My children have sailed through 9th grade and gotten great grades. This teacher also noted that SCCS students were also more respectful of the teachers."

*Past and present SCCS parent*

"My children are average students and the academic transition to Stillwater Junior High was almost seamless! They had a wonderful 9th grade."

*Past SCCS parent*

### **NWEA - Measures of Academic Progress.**

We have completed our second year, and fourth round of NWEA testing. At this point, we can begin to see why the North West Evaluation Association prefers we call this dynamic computerized test "the MAP test," because we can begin to see the measures of academic progress our students and school have made as we build our historical database of RIT scores.

When we compare our Spring 2008 results with our Fall 2007 results (and reference to the national averages), we see our students are not only testing better than the national averages but also the growth the students experienced over the course of the school year far exceeds the average national growth for the same time period. (At this time, District 834 has not released its Spring 2008 results.) For an example of the growth SCCS has experienced: Second grade language scored a 199 class average in Spring 2008, this was a growth of 20 points when compared to the Fall 2007 test, and when looking at the national averages of 191.4 in Spring 2008 and 179.7 in Fall 2007, the growth of the national average was 11.7. We outgrew the national group by 8.3! Of the 21 areas to find growth, we outgrew the national average in 16 areas!

Additionally, as we look at individual children, 75.6% of our children met or exceeded their expected growth goal in reading; 73.7% of our children met or exceeded their expected growth goal in math; and 68.4% of our children met or exceeded their expected growth goal in language. According to the NWEA Web site ([www.nwea.org](http://www.nwea.org)) "classes in which 50% or more of students met their growth target show above average growth in relation to the norm group." And, "expecting every student to make average growth is setting an expectation that will be difficult, if not impossible to meet. In NWEA partner districts that perform well in term of growth, about 70% of students meet or exceed average growth."

Individual student results will be sent home with final report cards. If you would like to see more detailed reports, please feel free to stop in the office.

### **Focus on the Basics**

SCCS is committed to delivering solid basics in all subject areas. It's an approach we've taken for over 150 years, and has proven effective for five generations of SCCS graduates. Our graduates take the building blocks, which they have formed through nine years of consistent, quality instruction, and confidently apply them to higher level learning in high school and beyond.

### **Example of Building Solid Basics –Grammar, Spelling, Writing, Oral Presentation**

From the first days in Kindergarten, SCCS students are learning consonant and vowel sounds, and blending these sounds into words. Students recognize and write the entire alphabet; and draw and write with inventive spelling at their own level in year-long journals. By the end of Kindergarten, it is our goal that all SCCS students are able to read a list of 24 sight words, and read and write simple sentences.

We recognize the importance of continuing this focus on the basics in grades 1-5. In Grammar and Writing, we begin with the goal of recognizing and understanding a basic sentence structure. As students progress, they are encouraged to continue to build more complex and interesting sentences. Weekly spelling tests incorporate words from various subject areas, and "challenge lists" are offered to advanced students. In 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, cursive writing is introduced, and correct, neat handwriting is expected throughout all grade levels.

As students progress, our program strives to help the student learn the entire writing process of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Expectations increase from simple and complex sentences to paragraphs, and eventually to essays and reports. Our middle school English and Communications courses are structured to apply the skills learned in K-5, with advanced literature, challenging writing assignments, and oral presentations.

### **Differentiated Learning**

While SCCS focuses on the basics, we recognize that not all children learn in the same manner or at the same pace. At the foundation of our school's mission is the belief that each and every child is a unique creation, an image of God, and deserves respect as such. A new Kindergarten mother recently shared, "It's very apparent that the school works hard to meet the needs of all students." Much of our staff development centers around this philosophy, and teachers frequently exchange instructional ideas. As an example, some children may need more hands-on learning to grasp mathematical concepts. Some may need small group reading opportunities. Some children need more one-on-one help to attain grade-level expectations. On the other hand, some students are well beyond the grade level and need extra challenges to continue learning. SCCS is committed to meeting the needs of all its students.

### **Faith on the Field**

Is our faith-based school "just religion class?" Is it "just Mass on Wednesdays?" It's much more, and is evident in every classroom – including the sports fields. Any casual observer of the recent Middle School Field Day would have noticed there was something very special happening at Lily Lake that day. The entire day revolved around teamwork, and respect for self, others, the environment, and Our Creator.

The following is the Opening Prayer, led by Mr. Slaikeu, Middle School Physical Education and Health instructor.

*God, let me play well but fairly.*

*Help me to learn something that matters once the game is over.*

*Let competition make me strong but never hostile.*

*Always let me help my opponent up.*

*Never catch me rejoicing in the adversity of others.*

*If I know victory, allow me to be happy; if I am denied, keep me from envy.*

*Remind me that sports are just games.*

*If through athletics I set an example, let it be a good one.*

Our faith-based K-5 and 6-8 Physical Education programs create an environment where students can be successful and earn self-esteem through fair play, high expectations, and consistent discipline with positive reinforcement. We provide a variety of experiences that develop independent and group skills. Students gain confidence, assertiveness, self-control, and the ability to accept their own and others' strengths and weaknesses. The Middle School program includes a comprehensive Health course including: nutrition and wellness, body systems, diseases, growth and development, physical fitness and conditioning, addictions, stress and conflict management, first aid and emergencies, and overall health and safety.

## **A Part of Them for Life**

"I love SCCS. I know that my children are being nurtured in a Catholic loving way every day that they spend here. They get to live their Catholic faith every day so that it becomes a real part of them, and can't be separated from them; it's so much more than a weekend ritual. The staff and teachers are bright, loving and supportive, and have high expectations. The students frequently see and interact with our priests and sisters, who have so selflessly given their lives to God, and are such great role models. I know that the friendships that my children make will be strong healthy ones that will hopefully last into their adulthood. I also get the support of good families in raising my children, families with materialistic limits and totally pro-life. It isn't an easy task for anyone in today's culture. In addition, I know that they are getting a fantastic education, because I have a daughter who is graduating from SAHS this year and did very well academically. I feel that she is ready emotionally and academically to go on to college. (Even if I'm not ready!)"

*Deb Fedor, past and present SCCS parent.*

*Deb and Vince Fedor's daughter, Alyssa, is the 2008 winner of Stillwater High School's prestigious Athena Award, which is given to an outstanding female senior athlete based on excellence in individual sports or team sports. Alyssa has been a member of the Swimming/Diving Team and Gymnastics Team for the past four years.*

## **Comprehensive Three-Year History Program**

Research completed by volunteer parents shows that our Middle School History curriculum is a direct match with Hill-Murray and is more comprehensive than Stillwater Junior High's History program. More importantly, the SCCS History program is guided by the principle that Jesus Christ is the source and summit of all human history. Our program encourages critical thinking, separating facts from theories, and admitting what we do not know. Our program aims to help young people build a moral and mature perspective of human history.

The three-year program starts out with a fascinating tour of 11 Ancient Civilizations and moves into Medieval Europe and the Renaissance. These long-ago cultures come alive for the students through presentations, role-playing activities, and unique projects, such as building realistic models of castles and cathedrals. In 7th grade, students begin American History, starting with the first inhabitants of the Americas. Students explore the first 13 colonies, study the American Revolution and the Constitution, discuss changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, and explore with pioneers during the westward expansion and the California Missions. In 8th grade, the course picks up where students left off in 7th grade by studying the cultures and industry of the North and the South around 1850. Students move through the Civil War, the two World Wars, the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement and many events in between, ending with present day issues.

In addition to this comprehensive historical timeline, SCCS History students learn time-management skills as they plan and construct the corresponding projects alongside their textbook learning. SCCS students are well-prepared as they enter high school. The Social Studies program, K-5, provides solid building blocks for this challenging three-year Middle School History program.

**May God refresh our minds, bodies, and spirits with a relaxing and safe Summer.  
See you next Fall!**