



June 5th, 2020

Dear Friar Families,

What a year we have had! I cannot thank you enough for the patience, understanding, and teamwork you have shown during this difficult spring. It is with everyone's joint effort that our SVF students have continued to grow and flourish during this time away from the building.

As we have gone through this first year together, Father Tom, the teachers, and I have been assessing our current structures, curricular resources, policies, and procedures, and making plans for next year, and in some cases for the next few years. Some of our plans may be affected by the direction the Archdiocese and the state of Illinois plan to go with restrictions in the fall. However, the state of the school is strong with enrollment despite the current worldwide pandemic, and we are very excited to start sharing our vision for the growth and continued excellence of St. Vincent Ferrer School.

When looking to articulate policies we look at the four National Standards for Effective Catholic Elementary Schools as agreed upon by Catholic educators across the nation. The plans that we are discussing fit into this structure.

### Mission and Catholic Identity

Earlier this school year, the teachers and I began looking at our current St. Vincent Mission Statement. Over this summer, and during the beginning of next school year, we would like to adapt our mission and vision to align more closely with the Dominican Tenets of Community, Prayer, Study, and Service. We want to make our Mission Statement something that students can repeat daily, a pledge they take as a Friar at St. Vincent Ferrer School. We believe that this will increase the purpose behind it, as well as unite our students across grade levels.

Next school year we will be switching the mass that students attend to a special weekly morning mass. This school specific mass will allow us the ability to make mass more student friendly via music choices, to involve students in mass planning, including writing of the greeting and the petitions, alleviate the question of appropriate fasting time between lunch periods and the Eucharist, to provide increased security by being able to control who joins the students, to include the younger grade levels as mass would not be during nap time, and to increase school Catholic Identity by showing mass is meaningful and inclusive.



First through eighth grades would attend weekly. Kindergarten would attend the last week of the month until Christmas, and attend weekly post Christmas break. PreK3 and Junior Kindergarten would join us for the Liturgy of the Word in the last mass of the month, or Holy Days of Obligation. School mass would not be listed among the daily offerings in the bulletin or on the website, but parents or parishioners who wanted to attend would enter through the adoration chapel/Kyte Hall doors, show ID to our Administrative Assistant stationed there at a table, and sign in so we have a record of who is in the church during school mass.

### Academic Excellence

The most exciting change for next year comes with the addition of our new STEM lab. The old science room is the perfect place for this newest area of our campus. Thanks to the generous support of the Schauer Family in remembrance of their son, Charles (Chuck) Schauer '00, we are able to outfit our new STEM lab with the necessary materials. Every grade level at SVF will have a weekly or bi-monthly STEM lab as a part of their science instruction next year, depending on grade level. We will be integrating STEM into the current Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) that are being taught at each grade level, to ensure that it has context for the students. Mrs. Konrath, our new STEM teacher, is currently taking the steps necessary to become STEM certified. Over the summer Mrs. Konrath and I will continue discussions with other Catholic and non-Catholic elementary schools who are utilizing the STEM model, current science teachers with STEM credentials, and Loyola University to make sure that we are adopting this model with fidelity.

Through our iReady diagnostics this year, we have not only been able to monitor student achievement and growth, but to audit our curricular resources as well. We have learned a lot, especially as it relates to language arts, writing, and vocabulary, and in response to the changes needed we have formed a teacher curriculum committee for next year. Over the summer we will use the data gathered from iReady and formative and summative classroom assessments, and make decisions regarding upgrading or changing our textbooks and resources for the fall.

This year we piloted discipline plans across the grade levels in order to clarify expectations for students, teachers, and families. We have taken notes on these plans throughout the year, focused on what has worked, and what has not. Over the summer the teachers and I will be doing a comprehensive review of these plans to see where we can make improvements. Additionally, several of our teachers completed Responsive Classroom training this school year. We are looking to adopt a full Responsive Classroom model school-wide over the next two years. The principles of Responsive Classroom tell us that teaching social and emotional skills is as important as teaching academic content. We



have created a social emotional learning teacher committee for this next school year to guide us. We will also be welcoming Dr. Marcia McEvoy, an expert in mean behaviors, to campus in early September. Dr. McEvoy has developed a multi-step approach to student conflict by training teachers, students, and parents to identify and stop mean behaviors. I have worked with her previously, and we are extremely fortunate to be able to have her share her expertise.

Next year we will be renaming our “specials” classes “co-curricular classes”. We truly feel that Art, Music, Spanish, Physical Education, Finance, and Library play an essential role in the whole-child curriculum. While we are very proud of our students’ academic achievements in the core curricular areas, we believe that our students should be encouraged to express themselves in the fine arts as well.

At the end of 2019 we announced the decision to increase the PreK3 and Junior Kindergarten half day programs by forty-five minutes. Teachers reported that they felt they needed more instructional time with students. We have also decided to add to the “co-curricular classes” in which these students participate in the afternoon. Next year our Junior Kindergarten and PreK3 classes will take PE, and our JK classes will also take Spanish.

We have also added time in the daily schedules next year for classroom teachers to meet together for collaboration and planning. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) will allow for more continued work on standards based teaching and learning, horizontal and vertical alignment of the academic and social emotional curricula, and analyzing student data.

Finally as a part of our extra-curricular offerings, we will also be looking to increase our after school club offerings. Some ideas that have been suggested are an Italian Club, a Theater Club, and an SVF News Station, in addition to our current athletics offerings, STEAM Scouts, Junior Friars, Art Club, and Children’s Choir. Final determination of the viability for these programs will depend on interest.

### Governance and Leadership

Father Tom and I, along with the Archdiocese, have been working on changing SVF’s current Board of Specified Jurisdiction structure to an Advisory Board structure for next school year. As defined by the Archdiocese, by its nature, the board is advisory and therefore commissioned to offer suggestions and advice regarding the vitality and continued success of St. Vincent Ferrer School. The advisory board will relate in a formal way, through a specified liaison, to the Parish Council. The board will work with the parish



Finance Council as directed by Archdiocesan policy and procedure. The board will develop a relationship with the Parents Club, the Athletic Board, and the school faculty and staff (through the principal) and develop partnerships with local businesses and not-for-profit organizations in the community. The board will represent all its constituents: parents, guardians, and parishioners. The advisory board members act as members of the board only at official board meetings or when otherwise directed.

We believe with this change we can increase communication and unity between the different governing bodies at St. Vincent Ferrer including, but limited to, the Parents Club, the Athletic Board, the Parish Council, the faculty and staff, and the Parish Finance Council. As such a designated member of each body will report to the Advisory Board. The new structure, guidelines, and policies and procedures will be included in next year's Parent-Student Handbook.

Over the summer teachers and I, along with Sue Ponzio-Pappas, a current BSJ member and former elementary school principal, will be reviewing our current Parent-Student Handbook and communication procedures. We want to ensure that the handbook is a comprehensive document that families can turn to with any questions they may have about student and family life at St. Vincent Ferrer School.

With regards to student leadership, moving forward we would like to utilize the eighth grade class as student and school ambassadors. We will start the school year with a leadership luncheon where we discuss how they can be models of St. Vincent Ferrer both in the building with the younger students, and in the community. We know that they will rise to the challenge!

### Operational Vitality

Next year we will be piloting a new 1:1 Chromebook initiative with our fourth grade students. Each fourth grade student will be supplied with a school owned Chromebook for use during the academic year. Students will be required to bring their device to class each day and will be allowed to take the device home with them to use for homework. Students will turn their device back into the school for maintenance over the summer, but will receive their same device for use when they move on to fifth grade.

We are excited about this program for several reasons. Studies have shown that Chromebooks are more durable and more cost effective for daily student use. Our teachers and tech team will also be able to monitor app usage during class time more effectively. We are also looking forward to our students having a keyboard on which to practice their typing skills. This will prepare them for the rigor of drafting longer papers



for middle school, high school, and beyond. We hope for the success of this program, so that we will be able to continue it in the future until our 1:1 program is utilizing Chromebooks from fourth through eighth grade.

This year we replaced four outdated SmartBoards with new touchscreen SmartBoard technology. The new technology has several upgrades including easier maintenance, ability to pair with student technology, and a mirroring to technology being used in the non-school world. We hope to continue to replace the other twelve boards over the next five years.

Also, over the next few years we will be adding to the security system in the school building. The fob system and cameras at our main entrances were added over the past two years, and while these are great additions to ensure the safety of our faculty, staff, and students, we would like to add additional cameras, and update the locks.

You may have noticed the new parking lot that was put in during the school closure. We are so excited for this smooth surface for our students to play during lunch and recess. It has necessitated the removal of the old Early Childhood playground equipment. After much discussion amongst the EC team, we have decided to not replace it at this time, but to invest in more moveable equipment for our youngest students suitable to their developmental needs.

Finally, our Development Director, Judy Bolton, has worked very hard this year to increase our Alumni database. With 2020 being the eightieth anniversary of St. Vincent Ferrer School, it is more important than ever that we reach out to former students, families, and teachers to honor the rich tradition of Friars that have come before. Next year Judy will continue to grow this database so that we can connect more closely with our community.

I am thrilled to see these projects through and feel very gratified to be working with a faculty and staff who are committed to growth, excellence, and providing our students with the best education possible in the Dominican tradition.

God Bless, and Go Friars,

Katie Cahill  
Principal