

“For the sake of one child, I would have founded the Society.”
(St. Madeleine Sophie Barat)

Time and again, these beautiful words are used in many contexts to describe the Society of the Sacred Heart’s educational mission. These words are joyfully lived and experienced at Sacred Heart Schools on Sheridan Road (the School). Indeed, one could almost become lost in the sea of happy faces that radiate the joy and well being of living as one with the Sacred Heart. At the School, nothing occurs without being prefaced by the thought that everything is done because of the students. By educating the heart and not just the mind, we understand that the Academy and Hardey Prep are genuinely educating the whole child. These Schools are who they say they are and, in so doing, live our faith, strengthen our faith, and teach children to emulate Christ through the *Goals and Criteria*.

These gifts of faith and authenticity encourage families to become friends. There is a real sense of community and community-building as everyone reaches out to others. Giving service and giving back become a part of children’s and families’ routines because they are thoughtfully developed as an awareness of people both within the school, as well as outreaching to peoples of the surrounding neighborhood, city, and world. The School is staffed with talented individuals who establish programs and guide others in a commitment to faith and to service.

The Visiting Committee experienced the warmth and friendliness of the Sheridan Road community as we celebrated a beautifully prepared liturgy upon arriving at the school on Sunday morning. Particularly worthy of mention was the choir comprised of students, parents, and staff. Representatives from every constituency shared this Mass, followed by a welcoming brunch. In this way, and with every possible anticipated need addressed, we were made welcome. All felt that we had indeed “come home” to this Sacred Heart campus. We commend the Steering Committee for its organization and dedication to designing a thoughtful Self-Study process and presentation document. Our continuing conversations with alumni, parents, trustees, faculty, staff, administration, and students allowed a deepening understanding of and admiration for the manner in which the *Goals and Criteria* are being lived and were brought to life for us far beyond printed pages.

The following Reflection is offered to you humbly and with the hope that you will continue to live the life of the Sacred Heart in all that you do. We honor your vibrant community, beautifully fostered by inspired servant-leadership. We celebrate your accomplishments. We confirm that Sacred Heart Schools on Sheridan Road is indeed living the *Goals and Criteria* every day, as presented in your Self-Study, and we reflect back on the many conversations that we have held in offering you our thoughts for developing an action plan that will carry you forward into the future.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The Visiting Committee met with the Board of Trustees to discuss the Board's commitment to the *Goals and Criteria* at the School. Specifically, the discussion centered around the Board's understanding of the Foundational Principles and how these principles should guide the Board's decision making in allocating resources and setting policies at the School to assure the vitality of the *Goals and Criteria*.

It was evident throughout our conversation with the Board that they are mindful of their responsibilities as Trustees. They have organized the appropriate committees and instituted effective policies to provide a solid structure for the School. In addition, the Board has a deep respect and admiration for the Director of Schools. Together, the Board and Director bring compassionate and effective leadership which permeates throughout the School.

The School has undergone tremendous growth during the past five years. Despite nearly doubling the size of the student body, the School continues to be fiscally sound and deeply committed to constant affirmation of the *Goals and Criteria*. The Visiting Committee was deeply impressed with the Board's ability to envision and manage this growth.

The Board is mindful that, for the near-term, its responsibilities lie in providing a platform for the School to absorb its recent growth and "go deeper" in order to continue to strengthen the life of the School and its commitment to the *Goals and Criteria*.

Goal I: Schools of the Sacred Heart commit themselves to educate to a personal and active faith in God.

"The minute that you walk into the door, you get the feeling that this is where I want my kids to be; this is where I want to be" (parent quote). To all who enter here, it is obvious that the School is committed to educating to a personal and active faith in God. From profoundly beautiful publications and Sheridan Road banners proclaiming the Sacred Heart presence in Chicago and through the rich dialogues with various constituencies, this Visiting Committee can truly affirm and celebrate that the Goals of all Sacred Heart schools are clearly and palpably cherished and lived. Goal I truly permeates the life of the School.

In our many encounters with constituents, we heard the gratitude and deep affection that people, whether trustees, faculty, staff, alumni, parents or students, do feel for the school. Various constituents mentioned that their faith grew stronger and that they experienced a true joy in life because this faith could "never ever be taken away" and that "the *Goals and Criteria* are articulations of what you believe in." One faculty member mentioned that there is always a striving to progress, to grow with the Goals constantly being referenced. Parents felt that they could see the ways in which their

children are being shaped because they are taught to reflect on the Goals. Alumni whose children are enrolled expressed that they wanted the connections with Sacred Heart to remain. They want for their own children what they had experienced as students themselves.

Sixth grade girls met with us at their advisory time to explain that “we connect with people in a different way.” They felt that there is always someone to show them how to be really good inside. For them, it meant building themselves from the inside out in order to be happy. From many different groups of students, we heard about building circles of friendship where no one is bossy or bullying. Specifically mentioned multiple times was the importance of making good choices. Through a great deal of individualized attention, the faculty models the *Goals and Criteria* to the students because they believe in them. The children notice that the adults are nice to each other and courteous. Everything is done with the well being of the students in mind.

A personal and active faith in God in terms of teaching the entire community to be respectful, compassionate and generous is exemplified in several praiseworthy programs and initiatives such as the Child Study Group that takes a personal interest in helping students succeed and the Children of the Heart Program that assists families of the surrounding neighborhood. Among many other outreach initiatives, these are noteworthy.

The School provides its students with a vigorous prayer life through devotions, chapels, liturgies and daily prayers. Religion teachers expressed great enthusiasm for the instructional programs and materials available to them. All students participate in sacramental preparations. One Middle School student who described himself as “non-denominational” even likes the reconciliation process “where one can just talk things out.” There are many opportunities for parents to share in the faith experiences of the School and deepen their own faith life.

The Visiting Committee confirms as a strength the words contained in the Self-Study and finds ample evidence that there is a respect for and an acknowledgement of the diverse faith traditions present at Sheridan Road. Respect for diversity in the many faiths represented among the student body and in the 37 countries representing family origins provides many opportunities for student connectivity and an appreciation of a global society.

Based on conversations with the faculty, the Visiting Committee encourages the School to incorporate quiet times in their program so that adults and students may have opportunities for personal and communal prayer and reflection.

To all who are familiar with Sacred Heart schools as well as all who experience Sheridan Road for the first time, there is a sense of coming home. As one faculty member expressed it, “...there’s a feeling...it took me a while to figure it out...it’s the Goals, ...it’s the Goals, ...it’s the Goals!”

GOAL II: Schools of the Sacred Heart commit themselves to educate to a deep respect for intellectual values.

“Sacred Heart Schools on Sheridan Road demonstrates its commitment to Goal Two in many aspects of both daily life, in and out of the classroom, as well as in strategic planning.” (Self-Study document, Goal Two) The Visiting Committee experienced the truth of this statement throughout our conversations with all constituencies during our visit.

All constituents spoke to ways that “the school provides rigorous education that incorporates all forms of critical thinking and inspires a life-long love of learning.” (Goal II, Criterion 2) Students appreciate their teachers’ ability to make their learning fun, interesting, and challenging. They feel safe to take risks and know that their teachers will find ways to help them understand any difficult material they encounter. Parents appreciate the balance provided between being a school that nurtures and also challenges students to grow academically and personally.

The Board of Trustees and school administration have taken great care to provide the funds necessary to support teachers with opportunities for professional development and the funds for the creation of structures and personnel to meet the needs of educating a diversity of learners. Teachers spoke of recognizing they are given many opportunities for professional development, including attendance at Network-sponsored events. The Child Study Team, which is comprised of the three heads of school, principal, two learning assistance teachers, two student counselors, one school nurse, one reading specialist and an enrichment coordinator, works with teachers and parents to meet the individual needs of students with learning and emotional issues.

Students are provided a variety of learning experiences in and out of the classroom. The School has worked hard to strengthen the after-school athletics department along with a variety of after school classes. Compelling student artwork fills the halls of the school.

One area of concern mentioned by several parents of Middle School students is the use of their child’s advisor for parent-teacher conferences. The parents believe in the Middle School advisory program and understand the role of the advisor in their child’s day-to-day school experience. However, they feel that conferencing with only their child’s advisor has not given them the opportunity to know their child’s teachers as well as they would like, and hinders direct communication.

The Visiting Committee believes that you know well the challenges you face in living out Goal II as articulated in the Self-Study document and encourages you to find ways to continue the dialogue about how best to serve the needs of the children you teach. We believe this will be critical as the number of children in the Middle School grows over the next few years.

GOAL III: Schools of the Sacred Heart commit themselves to educate to a social awareness which impels to action.

The School clearly has a deep appreciation for and understanding of the inherent significance and long-term implications of Goal III within its community. The School is embedded in a diverse, urban Chicago neighborhood. This “juicy” environment both beckons and inspires all members of the school community to daily consider the importance of educating to a social awareness which impels to action. However, at the School, action is virtually the end product of a thoughtful, deliberately planned program which has tangible and measurable results for both the students and those they serve.

In 2007, the School appointed a full-time Outreach/Diversity Coordinator to formalize and enrich the School’s ongoing community action programs. Consequently, enhanced opportunities for awareness, education and compassion have been embraced to supplement this aspect of the School’s curriculum. In addition, in answer to the School’s strategic goal of increasing diversity, the Outreach/Diversity Coordinator, working with a Diversity Committee, also is charged with developing programs to specifically progress this objective. Coupled with allocation of financial aid to students of diverse backgrounds, the School has significant resolve to further its diversity goals. There also is a conscious effort to educate the students about international and multi-cultural issues through such events as Justice Day and International Night. Aspiring to be a good neighbor, the School has increased interaction with Loyola University, as well as other neighborhood citizens.

The entire school community enthusiastically participates in a broad selection of social service programs. Clearly, these programs benefit the recipients, and more importantly, provide a thoughtful foundation for the students to progressively learn about and understand social justice issues and the ensuing reasons for compassionate action.

For example, the Primary School students make sandwiches to feed the poor. Lower and Middle School students enhance their insight about social inequities through more in-depth interaction and hands-on programs shared with parents and faculty. The programs that were cited most frequently to the Visiting Committee were Children of the Heart, Share Your Soles, Inspiration Café, Centro Romero Youth Program and Howard Area and Uptown Head Start. Additionally, the Summer Program deliberately integrate community children, bringing significant depth and authenticity to Goal III as it is lived at the School.

The School’s program to employ residents of Misericordia helps the students to learn to accept and interact with people with disabilities and physical and mental limitations. The respect and affection shown by the students towards these employees was nothing less than heartwarming.

All of these initiatives related to Goal III and its Criteria have resulted in students who are unusually mindful of social justice issues and can articulate their concern for others less fortunate, others who are physically or mentally challenged, others who have

different nationalities or cultures. Most impressively, the students with whom we spoke all expressed a resolve to continue to help others when they leave the School. In fact, the alumni with whom we met cited Goal III as an ongoing component of their lives.

As a Criterion of Goal III, the School understands the importance of providing reasonable and comparable salaries for faculty, administration and maintenance staff. The Board of Trustees is mindful of its responsibility to ensure equitable and appropriate compensation throughout the school (including professional development and classroom resources) in order to attract and retain educators and employees of the highest caliber. This will help to sustain the spirit of excellence which pervades the School and its physical plant today and in the years to come.

In light of the solid approach the School has taken to implement Goal III, the Visiting Committee recommends that the School community be mindful of the requisite criteria relative to sustaining this Goal, particularly Criteria 3 and 4, as they relate to stewardship of environmental resources.

Goal IV

Schools of the Sacred Heart commit themselves to educate to the building of community as a Christian value.

From the moment the Visiting Committee arrived, we were impressed and moved by the warm, genuine welcome extended to us by all constituencies, especially the boys and girls, who conveyed respect and friendliness in their words, smiles and waves. When asked to describe what they loved most about the School, the overwhelming response from the various constituency groups with whom we spoke with was “community” and the different facets of what it means to be a family. A sense of gratefulness for being a part of this community was echoed by many. A banner lettered with the slogan, “Coming to a Sacred Heart school, you have entered into a family and come to a home,” was prominently displayed in a hallway, but more importantly, this feeling was manifested throughout our visit.

While the Self-Study acknowledges the challenges associated with the School’s unprecedented growth, we commend the School for striving to maintain a vital sense of community between and across constituency groups. It is evident that there are countless opportunities for all constituencies to connect and support the School’s mission. Faculty and staff have opportunities to interact with each other in a variety of meaningful ways, including prayer services, retreats, weekly meetings and on and off campus events sponsored by the Social Committee. Nonetheless, getting to know each other across divisions and throughout the School is more challenging as the School has grown, and continuing attention is needed to ensure that communication and interaction remains positive and beneficial in building community.

It was evident from our conversations with constituency groups that great pride is taken in the history, traditions and identities of The Academy for Girls and Hardey Prep for Boys. Some voiced concern that the identity of Hardey Prep is being lost, although it is

noted that the School has made a recent effort to recapture this identity. We encourage the School to continue to develop a greater understanding of and appreciation for the history and identity of each school.

The Visiting Committee witnessed an exceptionally caring community in which courtesy and deep respect for others seem to be embedded in the fabric of daily life at the School. Many stated that they learned about the *Goals and Criteria* from the community. One sees it in how faculty, staff and students treat each other. The faculty and staff lead by example, and the students were quick to attribute to their teachers many of the traits that they value most in a Sacred Heart education. Additionally, the faculty and staff teach and model empathy and compassion by creating a safe learning environment where students are encouraged to take risks.

Parents have many opportunities to connect and meet each other, and special attention is given to welcome and support new families. Students have many opportunities to experience community on a day-to-day basis, including buddy programs that pair students across divisions. Athletic and after-school programs have expanded significantly, offering additional opportunities for students to interact across grade levels and divisions.

It is evident that the building of community carries on beyond life at the School. Social outreach programs have enabled students to become more involved in the neighborhood community, resulting in the building of true, meaningful and reciprocal relationships. These richer experiences have helped the students better understand the people being served and have reinforced an awareness of being part of a greater community.

The School is commended for teaching and promoting the principles of nonviolence, conflict resolution and peacemaking. A revitalized “no bullying” program is aimed at preventing bullying, teasing and harassment. Students are empowered to resolve conflicts on their own whenever possible.

Truly a community that embraces inclusiveness and celebrates diversity, the School continues to take steps to recruit students and employ faculty and staff who reflect the rich tapestry of cultures represented in the Greater Chicago area. We applaud the Board of Trustee’s inclusion of diversity initiatives in its Strategic Plan and for elevating to full-time status the Outreach/Diversity position. In addition, the Board generously funds a financial aid program that aims to ensure socioeconomic diversity in the School’s student body, and as set down in the Strategic Plan, recognizes the need to increase tuition assistance to an even greater degree in order to meet this Goal.

Faculty and administrators are given opportunities to participate in Network activities and professional development. While students are aware of and value the larger Network of Sacred Heart Schools, some expressed a desire for more regular contact with other Network schools at the student level. We encourage the School to explore ways to strengthen interaction with other Sacred Heart schools and extend the feeling of community beyond the local area.

GOAL V: Schools of the Sacred Heart commit themselves to educate to personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom.

At Sacred Heart Schools on Sheridan Road, the atmosphere of respect, acceptance and concern for one another other is truly palpable, especially as demonstrated through the poise, friendliness, and courtesy of the students as they pass in the hallways and interact with each other and adults. Adults in all parts of the community echoed over and over their positive relationships with both peers and children, their partnership and teamwork with colleagues, their love of the children, and their trust in the administration. Likewise, the children remarked on the fairness of their teachers, and their sense of being treated as unique individuals inside and outside the classroom. Parents believe that their children emerge from the School “well-balanced leaders” who can walk any path of life.

“Wise choices” was a phrase we heard from many constituencies during the Visiting Committee’s visit. The recent introduction of the Marcia McEvoy violence prevention rubric has deepened awareness in all members of the community of the importance of self-discipline and accountability. In the words of one eighth grade student, the program is a good “precaution” in helping to identify and deal with possible adverse situations. The significance of the “same message from everybody” was a common theme from all adults in the School, whether the concept of a right decision is applied to behavior or academics. As one teacher expressed it, “wrong choices can be forgiven,” and can often lead to deeper understanding of the value of Goal V for life in and beyond school.

The art and music programs give the students the opportunity to develop and express their aesthetic knowledge and skills in the security of the single-sex classroom. Specialists and core teachers work together to integrate and deepen curriculum “for the good of the children.” Students and parents expressed enthusiasm about the expanding extra-curricular program, which gives opportunities all year long to pursue athletics, and explore drama and clubs for special interests like art and science. After school faculty and the Athletic Director work together to ensure that the children can have the maximum experience in their extra-curricular lives.

Whether sharing in front of the class in first grade, reciting a prayer at a Lower School Chapel or guiding an admissions tour as an eighth grader, there are a variety of leadership opportunities for students at Sacred Heart Schools. Seventh grade buddies learn to act as role models for kindergartners, and student council officers and representatives listen to and speak for their classmates and also for Lower School students. Middle School students mentioned more than once that the annual Goal Awards are of great importance, as they each get the chance to nominate classmates and explain in their own words why a classmate exemplifies a particular Goal. Participation in community service enables students to meet, get to know and respect people different from themselves in the greater Chicago community.

The addition of two counselors was applauded by the faculty for helping to meet needs of those children who require additional services outside the classroom. The Child Study Team meets weekly to track the progress of students referred by teachers and to develop individualized plans for academic and behavioral remediation, and its members articulated how the Team acts for “the whole child.” At the same time, some faculty in the older grades expressed concern about their ability to care for each child as larger class sections move into the Middle School.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The Director of Schools for her exemplary leadership during this time of change and growth.
- The Board of Trustees for their understanding and commitment to the Foundational Principles and *Goals and Criteria* as the lens through which decisions are made for the good of the school and, ultimately, for the good of the children in the school.
- The adult community for modeling the living out of the *Goals and Criteria*.
- The entire Sacred Heart Schools community for the atmosphere that exists in the School: a welcoming, loving, safe, respectful, and beautifully maintained environment.
- The School’s work on developing in the students of all grades a sense of the true meaning of the *Goals and Criteria*.

The Visiting Committee recommends:

- The School continues the work begun through the Self-Study process of delving more deeply into the *Criteria* as a means of living more deeply the *Goals* of Sacred Heart education.
- The School implements an ongoing plan for educating both adults and students in the heritage and mission of Sacred Heart education. (Goal IV, Criterion 1)

Thank you for opening your hearts and your home (the School) to us. We leave strengthened by your example of what it means to live by the *Goals and Criteria*. We leave renewed in our own commitment to Sacred Heart education and living our lives “for the sake of one child.”