Executive Summary

Saint Thomas Aquinas High School

Archdiocese of Miami

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Introduction

Every school has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school, and the kinds of programs and services that a school implements to support student learning.

The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the school community will have a more complete picture of how the school perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.
Description of the School

Describe the school's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school serves?

As St. Thomas Aquinas High School turns 80, the school community harkens back to 1936 when St. Anthony School enrolled 12 high school students to initiate Catholic secondary education in Broward County. Under the aegis of the Dominican Sisters from Adrian, Michigan, and motivated by the motto, “Not for school but for life we learn,” the school grew to a student body of 42 in four years, boasting of nine graduates who comprised the Class of 1940. St. Anthony High School earned its initial affiliation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 1941.

While the curriculum and enrollment expanded, extracurricular offerings did the same. Realizing the need for a more extensive campus and seeking to afford the school its own identity, Archbishop Joseph P. Hurley purchased 20 acres “way out west,” at 2801 SW 12th Street, in 1948. Named Central Catholic High, the school moved to its present location in 1952, enrolling 218 students.

The original Central Catholic campus consisted of the main office wing, library, 15 classrooms, patio, cafeteria, kitchen, coaches' office, and locker room facilities. Annexing a track, baseball and softball fields, field house, and tennis courts in the ensuing years, the school also erected a statue of Mary in 1957, the same statue that graces the campus today. During the decade of the 60s, Aquinas added 12 classrooms, built the gymnasium, and constructed new tennis courts. From 1970 to 1974, the school upgraded the baseball and softball fields, fenced in the entire campus, remodeled the cafeteria, partitioned off an art lab, enlarged locker rooms and the field house, and added coaches' offices. On September 19, 1975, Brian Piccolo Memorial Stadium welcomed fans to its inaugural football game.

To accommodate such a large enrollment during the remainder of the 70s, the campus expanded east with additional science labs; west with a larger library, conference room, offices, and seven classrooms; and north with more parking areas and the Ralph R. Bailey Building, adding 15 classrooms. While growing in size, the school also recognized its first National Merit Scholars, with ten finalists qualifying between 1976 and 1980.

During the following 20 years, growth, expansion, and enhancement served as watchwords for the school. Advanced Placement classes, together with preparation courses and curricular components addressing PSAT, ACT and SAT skills and strategies, boosted students' test scores and increased the number of Advanced Placement and National Merit Scholars. Advancements in science and technology prompted the construction of the John A. Kelly Building along with the establishment of computer labs and a school-wide computer network. Guidance offices, classrooms, and parking lots continued to multiply; and the Enzweiler Family Room (now the Failte Room) provided a center for the increasing number of parents engaged in assisting the staff. An imposing tower and porte cochere enhanced the main entrance while additional offices, a small conference room, and the Dominican Chapel with beautiful stained glass windows completed the main office wing renovation. Providing a band/music room and devoting more space to teaching various media in the art curriculum strengthened the fine arts program. Installation of new lighting throughout the campus, air conditioning in the gymnatorium, hurricane-proof windows in many areas of the campus, and a perimeter wall and gates around the entire campus fulfilled some of the practical updates needed for security and comfort.

In the first decade of the new millennium, Aquinas unveiled a new library media-center with a television studio, additional classrooms, a tri-level parking garage, and the Strand Building. State-of-the-art athletic facilities included the Smith Center with classrooms, conference room, executive summary, saint thomas aquinas high school
fitness center, offices, and locker rooms, as well as Brian Piccolo Stadium's new field-turf, re-surfaced rubberized track, concession stands, restrooms, and grass practice field. Teachers and students helped to beautify the campus environment with trees, plants, and flowers. The completion of the Bienes Center for the Performing Arts offered a state-of-the-art venue for showcasing school as well as community performances in drama, dance, and music.

The next five years saw technology evolving rapidly through an innovative initiative using broadband communication capabilities. As the first steps in this evolution, STA chose Blackboard as the learning management system for teachers, parents, and students; adopted the Google Chromebook for all students; established a state-of-the-art Innovation Center; and relocated the Library/Media Center to a more centralized and dynamic information hub called the STAR Lab.

A newly constructed practice gymnasium provided additional space for indoor teams with full-sized basketball and volleyball courts. In addition to the expansion and maintenance of parking areas and new landscaping around the campus, ongoing renovations to the physical plant included improvements to offices, classrooms, and restrooms: painting, lighting, ceilings, roofing, flooring, air conditioning, and furniture. Areas in the Bienes Center, Litzinger Athletic Center and Gymnasium received facility and equipment updates as well. In the summer of 2015, a renovation of several science labs, a new robotics lab with a 3-D printer, and a makeover of the Cafeteria, including new impact windows, a ceiling wave, and new refrigeration equipment took place. Clear Touch panels were installed in all classrooms.

Today, the STA campus spreads over 25 acres in urban Fort Lauderdale where 2118 students study 200 different courses, including 31 AP classes, in 97 classrooms and laboratories. Aquinas draws from 105 feeder schools, 46 Catholic parishes, and three counties. The Archdiocese of Miami operates the school, accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (AdvancED). Aquinas maintains membership in the National Catholic Educational Association, Southern Association of Independent Schools, Florida Association of Academic Non-Public Schools, Florida Catholic Conference, Broward County Non-Public School Association, and The College Board. The United States Department of Education has twice named STA a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, in 1985 and 1996; STA ranks among the top 50 Catholic high schools in the country.

The professional staff, averaging 19 years of teaching experience and 12 years of STA teaching experience, numbers 123 full-time members and consists of a diocesan priest and 122 lay persons; 68 teachers hold advanced degrees. Thirty-seven students from the Class of 2016 have earned commendations from the National Merit Scholarship Program, and the Advanced Placement Program identified 247 students as AP Scholars in August 2015. Additionally, 33 students from the Class of 2017 earned commendations from the National Merit Scholarship Program, and the Advanced Placement program identified 305 AP Scholars in August 2016. Over 99% of the most recent graduating class matriculated to college directly from STA, with 97% attending four-year colleges and 2% attending two-year colleges. By June 1, 2016, the Class of 2016 had received academic, athletic, military, and special talent scholarships totaling approximately $57.8 million.

Students have the opportunity to participate in approximately 40 activities and clubs, many earning local, state, and national recognition, as well as on over 40 athletic teams that have won 12 national and 103 state championships.
School's Purpose

Provide the school's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.

We believe that it is very important to the vitality of any school to have a real, living Mission Statement. Every year in May, we send out our Mission Statement to all of our stakeholders. We review the suggestions, comments, and concerns that we receive. The Principal's Advisory Council then decides on any adaptations for the upcoming school year.

The dissemination of our Mission Statement to all of our stakeholders is also a necessary component to any successful school. We publish our Mission Statement in all of our publications; i.e., our website, Course Description Booklet, Faculty/Staff Manual, our Curriculum Guide, etc. We post our Mission Statement in every classroom and every meeting room on our campus. It is the guiding force in which we operate.

2016-2017

Mission
Respectful of each person's self-worth, St. Thomas Aquinas High School, seeks to develop each student's God-given talents in a safe and caring atmosphere of sharing and challenge.

School Motto
Honor the past, embrace the present, envision the future.

School Logo
Vita, Deo, Veritas
Life, God, Truth

Vision Statement
St. Thomas Aquinas High School is a four-year, college preparatory school, which educates young men and women according to the traditions of the Catholic faith. The school seeks to develop each student's God-given talents in a safe and caring atmosphere of sharing and challenge. Through a comprehensive program of Catholic teachings, quality education and personal development, St. Thomas offers to its students religious experiences, academic challenges, innovative approaches, athletic programs, social and cultural opportunities, and service to others.

The entire program focuses on the individual student, made in the image and likeness of God, who receives attention, affirmation, and challenge.

Statement of Beliefs
We believe that each person in our school community, having been created in the image and likeness of God, has dignity and importance.
We believe that the entire school community shares in the responsibility to help all students develop their God-given talents to the best of their ability.
We believe that the entire school community shares the responsibility of creating a safe atmosphere of caring, sharing, and challenge.
We believe that students learn most effectively through diversified programs of educational opportunities, religious experiences, athletic programs, social and cultural opportunities, and service.
We believe that all individuals in our school community deserve personal attention and recognition.

Goals
Among its goals, St. Thomas Aquinas High School, in an atmosphere of discipline and order, strives
to model for our students the daily practice of Christian living;
to invite our students to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ;
to provide a program that serves the spiritual, cultural, physical, and academic needs of a diverse student population;
to challenge our students to achieve academic success and excellence;
to instill a sense of STA Raider pride and tradition in our school and community;
to instill in our students a hunger to learn so that learning becomes a life-long commitment;
to help identify and develop student leaders through academic and extra-curricular programs;
to create a dynamic school atmosphere, fostered by an environment of mutual respect and personal attention;
to develop in our students a social conscience and a commitment to community service;
to provide opportunities to develop responsibility and self-confidence in our young people and to promote critical thinking; and
to broaden our program through the STA Innovation Initiative and use of technology.

Our sincere purpose is to serve to the best of our ability the entire student body and families of St. Thomas Aquinas High School. We use our Mission Statement as our school's purpose in which to function.
Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

Describe the school's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school is striving to achieve in the next three years.

Over the past eighty years, St. Thomas Aquinas High School has truly been blessed. We have been able to maintain our enrollment between 2,100 to 2,200 students for the past three years. Many of our current students are not only the siblings and children of our alumni, but also the grandchildren of alumni. They keep the tradition alive. We continue to attract the most talented and well-prepared teachers in our area and beyond. We advertise nationally to ensure that we can employ the best teacher available for our STA community. We brag of the fact that for the past three years between 20 and 25% our faculty are STA alumni.

At St. Thomas Aquinas, we are constantly upgrading our curriculum. We currently have over 200 courses, which includes 31 Advanced Placement courses. We are pleased to offer our classes, not only during our six-period day, but also during the mornings before school and after school. We pride ourselves on the fact that we firmly believe that our curriculum should be fluid. Our curriculum should meet the needs of the students. We have recently added a Robotics program, a music theory program, a Science Independent Research program and many more.

St. Thomas Aquinas High School has a long-standing tradition in athletics. We currently have over 45 different sports being offered on the varsity, junior varsity, and freshman levels. We have received the Broward County All-Sports Trophy for 35 consecutive years, the Florida Athletic Coaches All-Sports Trophy for 28 years, and the Florida High School Activities Association All-Sports Trophy for 21 consecutive years. We have also received National Championships trophies in Football (twice), Boys' Soccer (twice), Girls' Soccer (7 times), and Boys' Track (once).

In addition to our varied sports program, we have an extensive array of clubs in which our students participate. Currently, we have over 40 different extra-curricular clubs for our students. Also, we have memberships in 16 national honor societies.

Our Fine Arts program affords our students an outlet for their creative expression. We have programs and performance opportunities in drama, forensics, dance, studio art, cinematography, photography, digital art, band, jazz, guitar and music theory. We are blessed to have the Bienes Center for the Arts Theater and the Bienes Dance Studio.

Our theology and Campus Ministry program is campus wide. Students must serve 25 volunteer hours per year while at St. Thomas. Additionally, we have classes in Liturgical music, ministry and dual enrollment. We have a retreat program that focuses on all grades.

In addition to our voluntary after-school Test Prep Program, a number of school leaders and teachers devised what is now known as the STA Prime Time program. The STA Primetime program is presented to our students during the homeroom period (Tuesday through Thursday). These 15-minute programs are composed of mini-lessons on PSAT/SAT/ACT test-taking strategies in the areas of English, Reading, and Mathematics. Additionally, students are tested once per quarter in their subject-specific classes to ensure that the respective skills have been achieved.

The safety and security of our STA community has always been a concern. Recently, we have increased the number of cameras around campus. We have installed on all Administrators’ computers a program which allows easy access to all cameras. The cameras also have a recording feature. We have increased the lighting in our parking garage. We have a protocol in place for visitors to our campus. They must
present identification which is run through a database. We have contracted with the Fort Lauderdale Police Department to have an officer on premises every school day. The officer's duties include, but are not limited to, assisting in the registration process for visitors, monitoring the perimeter of the school, and assisting our resident security personnel.
Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.

In September of 2012, St. Thomas Aquinas High School introduced the Blackboard Learning Management System. Blackboard Learn is the leading educational technology platform available today that is being used by over 9,000 educational institutions worldwide, including many of the top universities in the United States.

The Blackboard Learning Management System gives St. Thomas the ability to offer online education material integrated directly into our existing curriculum. We use Blackboard Learn to provide new and exciting ways for our teachers to engage students. The traditional teacher-student interaction that is our strength continues but has been enhanced by adding the capabilities that Blackboard provides. Parents can follow along with their students’ school assignments and grades by using their own personal Blackboard accounts. Teachers post a description of their grading system in the “Class Information” section of their Blackboard class.

During the 2013-2014 school year, after a one-semester dry run, St. Thomas Aquinas High School decided to utilize the Chromebook for all of its students. With 2,200 Chromebooks deployed and over 120 different titles from 17 different publishers over multiple delivery platforms, the Chrome OS has worked well for our students from the beginning. Each student has his/her individual schedule and books placed on Blackboard for easy access.

Over the past three years, we have undertaken major renovations to our classrooms and our school, including, but not limited to the following. We:
Remodeled of our cafeteria, entrance way, all student bathrooms and faculty bathrooms
Landscape throughout the campus
Remodeled all classrooms
Remodeled the Institutional Advancement Office
Remodeled the Parent Volunteer Room (now the Failte Room)
Installed four hallway television monitors and one cafeteria television monitor
Re-engineered the Science labs
Remodeled both teacher lounges/workrooms
Remodeled the Deans’ Office
Remodeled the Student Activities Office
Purchased two new buses
Purchased school robot, “Tommy”
Purchased touchscreen televisions on rolling carts
Installed a new stadium press box and sound system
Installed new stairways in the football stadium
Remodeled the softball dugout and team area
Replaced the football stadium turf
Upgraded the football stadium lighting
Increased campus cameras
Increased garage lighting