



Green Bay Area Catholic Education (GRACE) 2018-2021 Strategic Visioning Plan

JUNE 2018

WHO WE ARE

GRACE is a faith-based school system with a focus on individualized learning within nine Green Bay Catholic schools.

GRACE was formed in 2008 as the collaborative bond between these schools and 23 sponsoring parishes. Today, GRACE is one of the largest Catholic education systems in Wisconsin and our mission is to build a successful future for Catholic education for generations to come.

GREEN BAY AREA CATHOLIC EDUCATION MISSION

Building academic excellence and life skills while growing in our Catholic faith.

STRATEGIC PLANNING TEAM

A broad, cross-functional team was assembled to create the three-year strategic vision. The group consisted of:

Sue AmtmannBoard
Todd BlahnikDiocese of Green Bay
Mary BurichBoard
Kim DesotellPresident - GRACE
Gerard FallerDirector of Strategic Operations and Finance - GRACE
Sharon GastPrincipal
Bill Micksch.....Board
John PetersonBoard
Marv WallBoard
Father Andrew Cribben, O.Praem.....St. Willebrord Parish - Consultant

The process was facilitated by Dean Stewart, Ed.D., Executive Director of the Center for Exceptional Leadership at St. Norbert College and Corporate Trainer for Northeast Wisconsin Technical College.

STRATEGIC VISIONING PROCESS

The strategic visioning process consisted of multiple events beginning in February 2018. These steps included:

- Initial visioning session with the strategic planning team – February 21, 2018 at Schreiber Foods in Green Bay.
 - A review of the perceived current state of the organization
 - A discussion of the desired future state
 - The creation of survey questions to be used in gathering feedback from key stakeholders
- “Voice of the Customer” online survey process focused on gathering feedback from parents and members of the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors – April 2018.
- Strategic Planning sessions – May 3 and 9, 2018 at Schreiber Foods in Green Bay.
 - Review of “Voice of the Customer” key stakeholder feedback, a 2017 “Pulse” survey of GRACE faculty and staff in addition to key recommendations on school and parish

- planning from the Diocese of Green Bay (*Disciples on the Way—Strategic and Mission Plan for Catholic Schools*)
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis
 - Development of Key Focus Areas and Action Plans
 - Identification of “90-day” priorities, owners and timelines
 - Development of Cascading Messages

CURRENT STATE

During the initial visioning session in February 2018, the strategic planning team identified a number of key themes that defined the current state of the organization. These were:

- The system has a very mixed relationship with the parishes that support it. The status of the relationship is often defined by the presence of a school at the site, and the support of the priest at the location.
- Leadership within GRACE is strong, with a solid principal core and a committed Board of Trustees.
- The academic excellence of the students is supported and evident.
- Best practice sharing is encouraged between all school sites, their leadership and teachers.
- The system is currently stable and healthy, with solid financials and enrollments, but several factors should be addressed to support and sustain this viability.
- In relation to other Catholic school systems in the state and region, the cost of attending a GRACE school is below national comparisons and affordable for most families.
- The parish subsidy model that is currently in place needs to be reviewed and enhanced.
- The condition of the facilities is mixed, and should be updated to support modern technology and teaching methods. GRACE has unique dynamic regarding facilities as the buildings are owned by the parishes, not the system. This creates significant challenges as the question of accountability for financial improvements needs to be addressed.
- Even after nine years as a system, GRACE still has a major identity crisis. There is considerable confusion in the community as to the value that the system provides the individual schools. Communication with parents, parishes and the community at large needs to be strengthened.
- School CHOICE has created both opportunities and challenges within the system.
- There needs to be a stronger relationship built with Notre Dame Academy.
- There are multiple mission statements driving the work of the system. In addition to GRACE, each school, parish, Diocese of Green Bay and CatholicLink all have mission statements; and while similar in tone and spirit, create conflicting priorities.

FUTURE STATE

Ultimately, the team would like to build an organization that:

- First and foremost, lives our Catholic faith through its teaching, service and actions;
- Generates meaningful, collaborative relationships with the parish communities it serves, as well as the other school partners in the CatholicLink system; and
- Maintains a high level of academic excellence where students are supported and prepared for the next phases of their lives;

- Creates more opportunities to build well-rounded students through additional extra-curricular activities such as music, the arts, athletics and world languages;
- Provides opportunity for ALL families who wish to attend a Catholic school to be able to do so;
- Allows for enrollment increases and maintains high retention of students and families;
- Supports safe environments in well-maintained, up-to-date facilities conducive to 21st century learning;
- Uses data for enhanced decision making;
- Enjoys financial stability built around a sustainable funding model supported by a strong endowment;
- Supports competitive wages and benefits for faculty and staff; and
- Develops a positive brand reputation as an organization that provides real value.

VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER – KEY STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

In April 2018, a request to participate in a survey was sent to key stakeholders consisting of parents, the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors. A survey translated to Spanish was provided to families that required it. The survey consisted of both multiple-choice queries and open-ended comment questions designed to gain insight on several critical topics to inform the strategic planning process.

A full version of each survey and the respondent feedback was reviewed by the strategic planning team.

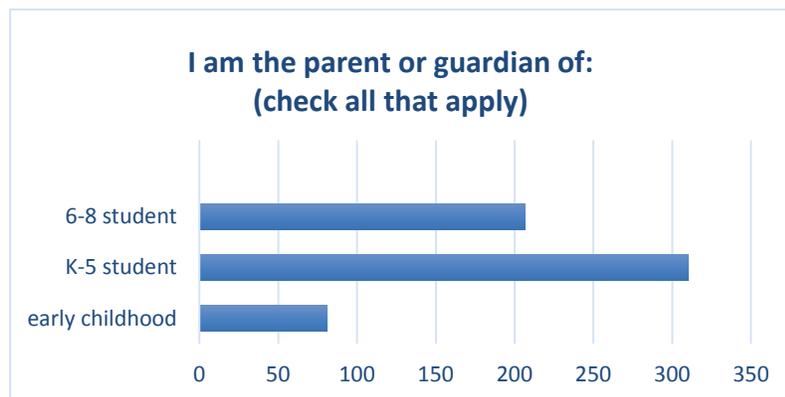
SUMMARY

Parent Survey (English) and Parent Survey (Spanish)

1,462 families were invited to respond to the online survey through the GRACE schools e-mail contact list. A total of 441 respondents completed the survey for a response rate of 30.16%. This exceeded the targeted response rate of 25%.

Demographics

The participants were asked to identify the grade level of their student(s). The responses reflected a good mix of K-5, 6-8 and early childhood participation, as the 441 respondents account for 598 students in the system. Those results are listed below:



Questions

Question 2 asked the respondents to rate their satisfaction with the value of the educational experience provided by GRACE. The scale ranged from extremely satisfied to not at all satisfied.

88.66% of the respondents were satisfied/very satisfied/extremely satisfied with the value of the educational experience with 57.14% ranking their experience very or extremely satisfied. Respondents were also asked to provide feedback for their rating. Several emergent themes developed from the answers that were provided:

- Faith was mentioned repeatedly in the comments, with a fairly even split between those believing that it was adequately supported with those who feel that it is not evident enough.
- The quality of the education that the students receive was emphasized, and the teachers in general were viewed in a positive light.
- There is a preference for smaller class sizes, and a growing concern that some sites have classes that are too large.
- There is a question about certain aspects of curriculum, with a major misconception about the use of common core standards, and general unhappiness among respondents to how math is being delivered.
- The affordability of Catholic education is a primary concern for families.
- The need for enhanced communication between the system, schools and families was emphasized.
- The desire for more extra-curricular activities was noted, with music opportunities being listed over 30 times.

Question 3 asked respondents to select the top 5 reasons that they send their child(ren) to a GRACE school. The respondents were offered 15 choices from which to select their answers. The top 5 responses in rank order were:

1. Catholic education – faith based358 responses
2. Quality of education.....263 responses
3. Class and school size256 responses
4. Sense of community.....247 responses
5. Safe structured environment154 responses

Question 4 asked parents whether they intended to send their child(ren) to a GRACE school through eighth grade. 79.77% of respondents indicated that they desire to send their children to a GRACE school for the duration. 16.59% responded that they were unsure at this time.

Question 5 was an open-ended query asking respondents to articulate what the GRACE system does really well. Several emergent themes developed from the feedback provided:

- A sense of community is fostered throughout the system and the individual schools.
- Faith is viewed as being put first in priorities.
- Respondents appear to more strongly identify with the strengths of their individual school, rather than the GRACE system, which supports the need for building better brand awareness of the value the system provides.

Question 6 asked respondents where GRACE could improve as a system. Feedback provided indicated that:

- There is frustration around fundraising, and many feel that they are being “nickel and dimed” to death. The desire for a more comprehensive plan with a distributive model for the entire system was supported.
- There is confusion over who owns marketing; the system, the school or a combination. The disconnect has hindered brand equity, which has led to perception issues with both current and potential school families.
- Food service quality is viewed as inconsistent between sites and in need of improvement.
- Enhanced school safety at all sites was viewed as a priority.

Question 7 asked respondents to identify any things the system could start doing that they currently aren't. Many similar themes emerged from the responses:

- System-wide fundraising was again consistently noted.
- Safety and security was emphasized with a stated desire for ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate) training to be provided.
- The creation of GRACE-wide events for all ages, and families is viewed as important to building system unity.
- A technology plan is desired to maintain a high functioning classroom experience.
- The ability to provide more specialty services including tutoring, counselling, and school site health care was noted.

Question 8 simply asked if there was any other feedback that the respondent would like to share. Two themes emerged from the responses:

- Parents would like more explanation behind the creation of the school calendar. With students potentially at multiple schools and systems, what consistency is there between area districts and GRACE?
- There was gratitude for the survey being sent and the opportunity to provide insight to the strategic planning process. There was a stated desire to conduct a survey on a more regular basis to provide more timely, consistent feedback.

Board of Trustees – Board of Directors Survey

38 individuals were asked to participate in a study focusing on the opinions of the Board of Trustees and Board of Directors. In total, there were 16 respondents; for a response rate of 42.10%. Further breaking that total down, 9 respondents (of 18 targets) were trustees for a response rate of 50%, and 7 (of 20 targets) were directors for a segregated response rate of 35%.

Questions

Question 2 asked respondents to rate their perceived value of the educational experience provided by GRACE. 93.75% respondents rated their perception as satisfied/very satisfied/extremely satisfied, with 75% answering very/extremely satisfied. Comments provided supported those ratings and noted the focus on faith, academic excellence and quality of staff and leadership as key drivers.

Question 3 was an open-ended query asking respondents to comment on what GRACE does well. Themes that developed from those responses included:

- A perception of good collaboration between parishes, schools, St. Norbert College and Notre Dame Academy.
- A feeling that administrative tasks are handled well.
- There is strong evidence that a Catholic, faith-based education is being supported.

Question 4 asked for insight on improvements that could be addressed. Feedback from this question indicated:

- There is growing concern about school family participation in the parish. Factors include:
 - Families not going to mass on Sundays
 - We oftentimes are not the “neighborhood” school – loss of sense of community
 - Lack of defined expectations for families
- There is also a concern over the cost of education, including the challenge of facility ownership and accountability for enhancements.
 - There is a strong desire to create a long-term facility plan

Question 5 asked respondents to identify those things that the system should start doing. Ideas that were shared included. There was a significant amount of responses that supported the notion of developing extra-curricular activities including athletics, music and the arts. There was also discussion regarding “niche” offerings not found in the public schools that could support enrollment.

Question 6 asked the respondents to offer their opinion on what the top priorities should be for the system over the next 3 to 5 years. Suggestions included:

- A focus on increasing enrollment.
- Addressing financial concerns including tuition costs and teacher compensation.
- The development and inclusion of extra-curricular activities.
- Developing a refined model of parish and diocesan support.
- How do the schools impact lifelong faith formation and discipleship?

STRENGTHS WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Based on the initial visioning session, the voice of the customer surveys, individual feedback and other data, the team analyzed and identified the principal organizational strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The top answers to these areas are listed below:

Strengths

- Sense of community – great families and students
- Emphasis on Catholic faith
- 9 schools but 1 unified system
- Academic excellence built around strong teachers, staff and leaders
- CatholicLink

Weaknesses

- The perceived value of GRACE by all stakeholders
- Dated facilities
- Status of system-wide extra-curricular activities and athletics
- Overall teacher compensation
- Consistent shared curriculum

Opportunities

- Need for Catholic child care
- Accessing our deep and growing alumni network
- Use data more effectively in decision making
- Reaching out to Catholic families in our public schools
- Developing untapped opportunities in CatholicLink

Threats

- Demographic changes – less practicing Catholics
- Financial model – how do we keep high quality education affordable?
- Strong public schools in our suburban communities
- Brand value of GRACE is misunderstood
- Reliant on the health of our parishes – shared ownership of system

KEY FOCUS AREAS AND THREE-YEAR ACTION PLANS

Key Focus Areas

Four key focus areas for GRACE developed out of the evaluation of the data and commentary, review of critical challenges and opportunities, and the subsequent team discussion.

- **FAITH:** a focus on keeping our Catholic faith at the core of our mission and incorporating it into all that we do.
- **ACADEMICS:** a focus on developing and maintaining academic excellence throughout our programming as evidenced by our outcomes.
- **VITALITY:** a focus on strengthening and sustaining our system for the future by focusing on enhancing our financial model, updating our facilities, developing our people, and growing enrollment.
- **EXPERIENCE:** a focus on creating the optimal experience for our students and their families.

Action Plans

With the establishment of the key focus areas, the broad strategic planning team broke into sub-groups and developed action plans within each segment.

Key Focus Area: FAITH

Build schools of discipleship:

1. Create and execute a program for family faith formation in collaboration with the parishes.
2. Develop a plan to understand how to use Assessment of Catechesis Religious Education (ACRE) scores more effectively and execute that plan.

3. Create and execute a strategy to help students and staff grow in their Catholic faith and develop life-long commitment.
4. Create a strategy to develop more consistent religious instruction at all campuses.
5. Develop a strategy for GRACE schools to collaborate with partner parishes for regular community service and social awareness endeavors.
6. Build on CatholicLink initiatives to create a Catholic youth movement to support evangelization.

Key Focus Area: ACADEMICS

Utilize the Diocesan standards and benchmarks to:

1. Develop a consistent curriculum model across the system in math, language arts and science.
2. Strengthen and further develop programs for students with a range of learning abilities.
3. Create and implement a strategy for academic best practice sharing and collaboration among teachers and staff across the system.
4. Explore opportunities for school specialization, i.e. language, STREAM Project (Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, Art and Math).
5. Create a system-wide strategy on how to better utilize technology in the classroom.
6. Infuse faith into other subject areas throughout the day.
7. Explore how to better use academic assessment to improve instruction.

Key Focus Area: VITALITY

1. Create and expand endowment for facilities, teacher compensation and tuition assistance.
2. Create a facilities task force to develop a strategy to update facilities to support 21st century learning.
3. Create a system-wide marketing strategy to support enrollment growth.
4. Define the brand value of GRACE – who are we? Create a unified message incorporating the uniqueness of our individual schools.
5. Review and focus on the diversification and expansion of our revenue sources to guarantee operational sustainability.
6. Develop and execute a strategy to recruit and retain top-level teachers.
7. Develop and execute a strategy to recruit and retain families and students.
8. Evaluate tuition and funding framework for enhancements and modifications.
9. Explore ways to tap into our growing alumni network.
10. Review and redefine the Board of Trustees' structure.
11. Establish dashboard including Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) and three-year goals.
12. Explore ways to create greater connectivity with non-school parishes.

Key Focus Area: EXPERIENCE

1. Explore and develop ways to enhance the sense of community at the individual sites.
2. Research the need for Catholic-based child care.
3. Develop a continual “voice of the customer” process for feedback on critical issues including the community, neighborhood and mission field.
4. Understand the social support needs of our families especially related to issues of diversity of our stakeholders – how can we respond?
5. Explore the opportunity to create a system-wide athletics network/conference.
6. Explore the opportunity to establish system-wide music, theatre, robotics and other types of clubs and activities.