



Embracing Curious Minds.  
Nurturing Compassionate Hearts.  
*Now and for the Future.*





## Table of Contents

|                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Letter from the Committee .....       | 3  |
| SJF History & Background .....        | 5  |
| St. John Fisher Today .....           | 7  |
| Strategic Plan Executive Summary..... | 8  |
| Our Shared Strategic Objectives ..... | 9  |
| Safe Welcoming Environment .....      | 10 |
| Academic Excellence .....             | 12 |
| Faith in Action .....                 | 14 |
| Foundational Investment .....         | 16 |
| Responsible Stewardship .....         | 18 |
| Tangible Legacy .....                 | 20 |
| Announcements .....                   | 22 |
| Acknowledgements .....                | 23 |

Embracing Curious Minds. Nurturing Compassionate Hearts. *Now and for the Future.*

May 1, 2020

Dear St. John Fisher families, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends,

Last January, the School Advisory Board formed a strategic planning committee to assist the school and parish leadership teams in formalizing our longer-term vision for SJF. Specifically, we set five goals for our work:

- engage the community and identify a base “starting point,” near-term needs, and longer-term areas of growth important to the continued vitality of our school;
- prioritize key areas of focus and differentiation as strategic objectives for the next 3-5 years;
- create specific action plans to measure success in achieving each of our objectives;
- communicate those plans to the school and parish communities; and
- organize marketing and fundraising initiatives around those plans.

We thought the time was right to capitalize on the energy and enthusiasm amongst the community for our new school leadership team, and we thought this process itself would allow leadership to accelerate its ability to make a long-lasting impact on our community. We also recognized that the education landscape both nationally and in our community is rapidly changing, and we wanted to make sure the many advantages we have long enjoyed at SJF – notably our **strong academics, strong community spirit, and strong enrollment** – don’t get diminished over time for lack of attention on not just maintaining the status quo but constantly searching for ways to improve it.

A little over twelve months later and having had the privileged opportunity to directly hear from over 200 individuals involved in the life of our parish and school through a variety of both open and targeted discussions and interviews plus review the written responses to the 5Essentials Survey completed by our parents, students, and teachers last spring, we’re very excited to publish this strategic plan. It hopefully delivers to the entire community a common set of goals and priorities we can all buy into as it should reflect the goals and priorities we’ve **ALL** jointly identified. It truly has been a collective effort that we could not have completed without the community’s support. For that, we are extremely grateful. It made the compilation of this plan much easier than any small group of us could have done on our own, and, believe it or not, it made the process a lot of fun.

The more important work awaits, however, as we move from the information gathering, idea prioritizing, and writing phases of this process to actually acting upon the objectives summarized in the pages that follow. Maybe now as evident as ever, it is key that we all embrace that work. When we started this process, we never could have imagined the situation we find ourselves in today dealing with government-issued social distancing orders, juggling the difficulties of working and schooling from home, and constantly worrying about our personal health, safety and well-being as the world figures out how to confront a global pandemic in modern times. On the one hand, it creates a daunting backdrop on which to present and promote this plan as it will likely accelerate the evolution of what it means to educate our children and permanently change our approach to and understanding of “school,” “work,” “travel,” etc., undoubtedly forcing us to be flexible in our application and execution of it. On the other, it sharpens our belief in the need for a clear strategic plan we can get behind as a community and strengthens our resolve to set goals and priorities for our shared future, so that we can continue the strong positive momentum already in motion at SJF and hit the ground running when we can all hopefully get back together again in person as a school and parish community this fall.

Having reflected on the many suggestions and critiques offered, data crunched, discussions had, and time volunteered, we are confident in our collective ability to do this and to achieve our goals. Our recent experience of pulling together as teachers, students, families, priests, volunteers in support of each other and all the essential workers in our community only underscores this confidence. We are clearly a community of interested, invested stakeholders, and if we partner with and support our leadership, those advantages noted above should and will outlast any of our individual efforts to ensure St. John Fisher School and Parish are thriving destinations of faith and learning, of family and friendship, and of hope and happiness for many years to come.

Interestingly, we learned in our research that St. John Fisher School will be celebrating its 75th anniversary during the 2024-25 academic year and the parish the year before that. It's a bit fortuitous, maybe, to have stumbled upon this fact, but we thought it only reinforced the appropriateness of taking on this endeavor at this point in our history. "Banner" anniversary years naturally bring a sense of excitement and a spirit of celebration to institutions. We hope the objectives laid out in this plan serve as further inspiration for us to look back upon the many successes and traditions we've enjoyed as a community since our initial founding and to keep reinforcing the strength of our foundation for future generations of Falcons. It's why we've titled the plan as we did:

## SJF's Drive to 75

*Embracing Curious Minds. Nurturing Compassionate Hearts. Now and for the Future.*

We invite you to now join us in this "drive to 75," and we welcome you to continually influence it going forward. Our strategic plan, by definition, should be a living document, updated over time to reflect a regular re-evaluation of our collective priorities and capabilities. It should also be a document we can all digest and against which we can benchmark ourselves. As you'll hopefully read in the pages that follow, the details underpinning that benchmark are many, but they all revolve around four big picture goals we hold dear and believe simply sum up the many perspectives, opinions, and ideas we've heard from all of you:

- To create a school day, curriculum, and environment centered around our students' development
- To provide our fantastic faculty with the resources, respect, and compensation they deserve
- To keep Catholic education accessible, affordable, and attractive to all families
- To strengthen the sense of community and mission shared between our parish and school

Finally, we would also invite you to reach out with any questions, comments, additional considerations, or recommendations you have. As an initial point of contact, we can be e-mailed at [sjfspc@gmail.com](mailto:sjfspc@gmail.com). While we had hoped to unveil this in a more personal, community setting, that obviously cannot happen for the foreseeable future. As such, we will do our best to make ourselves available to individually discuss the plan's details at your convenience, and we will also be working to find ways to creatively bring the plan to life through regular digital updates and to seek additional volunteers to put it in action over the coming months and years.

On behalf of the St. John Fisher School Advisory Board, our strategic planning committee, the school and parish leadership teams, and all who actively contributed to this plan, we thank you for your time and attention, your input, and your continued support.

Joan Rogers and Joe Goldrick, Strategic Planning Committee Co-chairpersons  
Maura Nash, Principal  
Rev. Ken Budzikowski, Pastor  
Gene White, Parish Council Chairperson

## St. John Fisher, **the Person**

John Fisher was an English Catholic theologian who came to prominence in the early 16th century. Fisher was born in the town of Beverley, Yorkshire. He was a lifelong academic who served as tutor to members of the English royal family and Chancellor of the University of Cambridge as well as a bishop and cardinal of the Church.

Fisher's stature in the Church grew out of his defense of marriage and of supreme papal authority over the Church and king. When King Henry VIII, whom Fisher had supposedly tutored as a prince, broke the Church of England away from the Roman Catholic Church, Fisher refused to take the oath of succession and actively preached and campaigned against the king's acts. He was ultimately imprisoned for treason and beheaded. He is honored as a martyr and saint by the Church and has June 22nd as his feast day.

Erasmus, one of the great scholars of the Renaissance whom Fisher brought to Cambridge as a Professor of Divinity and Greek, said of John Fisher: "He is the one man at this time who is incomparable for uprightness of life, for learning and for greatness of soul."



*Source: Catholic Online (www.catholic.org)*



## St. John Fisher Parish & School

Whether it was his ties as a native son of a far away and differently-spelled Beverley, his defense of the Catholic Church against English royalty that may have excited the Irish blood prevalent in our neighborhood, the personal characteristics described by Erasmus as noble pillars on which to erect the foundation of a fledgling parish, or something else altogether that had our founders dedicate a parish in John Fisher's name, we were not able to find out, but reflecting on his life, writings, and legacy, we certainly can all proudly look at the example of John Fisher as one to live by and be associated with.

Similarly, since our parish founding in 1948 and school opening in 1950, the growth and success of our community is also one we should proudly look to carry on. After taking parts of Sts. Barnabas, Cajetan, and Christina to establish boundaries all our own and celebrating our first mass in the basement of the Heddleston family home at 10324 S. Talman Ave., we quickly grew from 371 initial families with no school or church to nearly 600 families with temporary worship space and 300 students enrolled in a 12-classroom school directed by the Sisters of St. Joseph from La Grange only two years later. School enrollment reached its maximum of 1,565 students in 1962 right around the time Fr. Kane began a large rebuilding phase which added a gymnasium, auditorium, science room, and additional classrooms to the school and the iconic bell tower and stained-glass windows to the church.

The physical plant of our campus has largely remained the same since that time, having been maintained and updated over the years under the the strong and vibrant leadership of the long tenures of Msgr. McElligott and Fr. Purtell as pastors and Sr. Jean McGrath as school principal and the regular support and generosity of our parish and school communities. The lives and legacies of St. John Fisher and our forebearers live in all of us who continue to drive the success of our mission today. We continue to be one of the largest and most vital parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago, with nearly 2,000 registered parishioner households and over 600 students enrolled in our school, and we look forward to many more years of continued success together in the future under the leadership of Fr. Ken and Mrs. Nash.



# St. John Fishertoday

We are a vibrant, high-achieving community.



**632** Students enrolled  
**21** Student average class size



**19:1** Student-teacher ratio  
**35%** of faculty hold master's degree or higher  
**>100** Danielson evaluations and faculty peer observations completed annually



**100%** Graduate admittance to high school of their choice  
**~1/3** of the Class of 2019 earned merit-based high school scholarships



**Exceed National Average**  
Standardized test scores consistently outperform regional, state, and national results in all grades and subjects tested



**8** School-sponsored clubs  
**28** Active parish and parent organizations  
**>10** Service projects and fundraising initiatives supported  
**>2,500** Service hours completed by the 7th and 8th grade classes



**8** School-sponsored sports programs  
**45** Athletic teams  
**22** Athletic championships won in last five years, including 5 "gold ball" trophies

Our purpose is driven home by our mission statement.

St. John Fisher School is a Catholic educational community that facilitates the intellectual, academic, social and emotional growth of each student. A rigorous academic curriculum, robust religion education program and comprehensive student support services work together in cultivating critical thinkers and curious minds, compassionate Christian leaders and socially intelligent citizens prepared for the world today and in the future.

We share common beliefs and values.

All persons have **equal dignity** and the right to education.

All persons are autonomous beings with **unique thoughts, feelings and God-given talents** which allow them to impress upon and influence their family, community and the world.

Education encompasses **academic pursuits as well as spiritual, ethical and value-based decision making** that is often learned less formally through observation and modeling.



We set our sights high.

We plan with a focus on our future.  
We embrace lives of faith and service as cornerstones of our culture.

We challenge ourselves to engage our community, use data, and maximize our talents in our continuous pursuit of excellence.

We strive to lead fearlessly and responsibly.

## Strategic Plan Executive Summary

As we previewed above, over the course of the last fifteen months, the strategic planning committee has directly engaged over 200 individuals in live discussions and solicited feedback on a variety of topics, including but not limited to our **academic program** and curriculum; campus **space planning** and physical infrastructure; school and parish **finances and fundraising**; school and parish **culture and spirit**; our **organizational and human resources**; and general best practices, goals, and wish list items. We did this through a variety of open discussions, targeted interviews, and surveys including the following:

- Two “Desserts & Discussion” open community forums
- One “Faculty Feedback” session
- “5 Essentials” Survey of parents, teachers, and students
- Targeted survey of select stakeholders on school mission statements and logos
- Organizational interviews with over 20 parish or school affiliated group leaders
- 1:1 interviews with the local high schools SJF graduates most regularly attend
- Interviews with staff and volunteers at peer schools that have gone through similar processes
- Regular feedback from the School Advisory Board
- Targeted “SWOT” (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis and regular related feedback from the strategic planning committee
- Competitive benchmarking and data gathering by members of the strategic planning committee
- Review of over 50 similar strategic plans completed by other schools around the country
- Multiple meetings with Emmett Williamson, parish business manager
- Multiple meetings with school and parish leadership teams
- Ad hoc review of e-mails directed to the sjfspc@gmail.com inbox

A number of common themes emerged from these efforts. After compiling and reviewing our notes, evaluating where we thought we are best and worst positioned to pursue a number of clear, important big picture goals that were repeatedly articulated, and, importantly, working with school and parish leadership to make sure what we heard fit with their vision for St. John Fisher and vice versa, we are recommending we focus on six strategic objectives over the next 3-5 years.





## Our Shared Strategic Objectives

- 1** Create and maintain a **safe, welcoming environment** for our students, staff, families, and visitors inclusive of all backgrounds, abilities, and / or orientations.
- 2** Maintain and expand on our tradition of **academic excellence** by supporting the strength and skill of, and the resources available to, our faculty and upgrading our curriculum and classroom space to best serve the modern student.
- 3** Reaffirm SJF as the **cornerstone of our community faith life** and the mission through which we jointly and actively serve the Church and world.
- 4** Establish and **invest in a sustainable organizational and financial foundation** for our future.
- 5** **Manage our shared talents and resources** responsibly, efficiently, and transparently.
- 6** **Refurbish or rebuild the former SJF convent** to bring it back into use as a shared early education, community, and resource center.



We firmly believe if we rally around these objectives as a community and orient our collective mission, events, activities, and fundraising efforts toward their achievement, SJF will be stronger at age 75 than it has been since its founding. We detail how we might do that for each on the following pages.

## Safe, Welcoming Environment

Many of us, our children and faculty and staff members especially, spend as much or more time in the classrooms, hallways, gym, and church building of SJF as we do at home. We regularly heard and strongly agree and believe the campus should welcome the community as our homes do our own families. It should equally provide safety, beauty, fun, and the practical necessities required to educate all our children and reinforce and, importantly, nurture the sense of dignity we all have in ourselves and each other. It should also affirm the value of the different skills, talents, and resources we each bring with us to campus every day and facilitate the realization of our sum being greater than our parts. To do so certainly involves some changes to and regular maintenance of our physical plant, but it also requires the community to embrace a set of shared values, to welcome each other equally whether long-time parishioners and friends or newcomers, strangers, and visitors.

Feedback on how we currently do on these fronts is mixed. We have a proud tradition of longstanding family ties to our neighborhood and parish and school communities. It underpins what was regularly described as a “rally around a cause” mentality that exists here like it does nowhere else. It also probably informs the sacrifices and investments we all make to keep Catholic education and SJF a priority in our families’ lives. However, we heard from many without those same legacies that our community can be “clique-y” and difficult to feel fully a part of. We’re too quick to cut ourselves down and feed the rumor mill or to let others “deal with it” instead of standing up and advocating for positive responses to critical feedback. These feelings trickle down to our students’ feelings and actions.

While over 90% of our students who completed the 5Essentials survey last spring agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that students proactively help each other learn and that teachers don’t let students give up and provide support when the work gets hard, over 40% also said students are often teased or picked on. There seems to be a dichotomy in some of the comments around culture and acceptance of “the ways things are” that no one is really happy with, and we think we can pretty easily and have already been trying to address as a school and parish community.

Below we lay out a number of priority action steps, some already completed or in process, and some aspirational, to do exactly that – foster a culture of respect, welcome, and inclusivity that we think forms the foundation for all of us in the community, but most importantly for our students, to have a ready and willing mindset to approach their days positively and happily when they step foot on campus and also when they are out representing SJF in the community. We want our “brand” to be easily recognizable and demonstrated by our actions and our collective efforts to promote that culture, and we want to make sure we have the resources and curricular focus available to ensure the results of those efforts are self-perpetuating over time.

We also want the excitement to be part of that culture to be represented by the stability and the safety of the buildings that make up our home away from home. Having pride and maintaining the conditions of our physical plant show we are rooted in our mission, dedicated to its vitality, and committed ourselves to jointly promote its successes, face down its challenges, and ensure its survival for many years to come.

Simply put, it’s our first strategic objective:

**Create and maintain a safe, welcoming environment for our students, staff, families, and visitors inclusive of all backgrounds, abilities, and/or orientations.**

## Safe, Welcoming Environment

| Priority To Dos  | Timeline |   |   | Responsible Party     | Progress | Notes   |
|--|----------|---|---|-----------------------|----------|---|
|  | 1        | 3 | 5 |                       |          |   |
| Refresh SJF school logo and redefine school tagline to be more relatable and inclusive   | ●        |   |   | SAB Comms Committee   | ●        | Rolled out in 2019-2020 school year   |
| Establish a joint school and parish welcome committee to encourage and coordinate registration and organization membership invitations via an SJF "Welcome Packet"                   | ●        |   |   | SAB Mission Committee | ●        | Working with org's and parish office to re-constitute SJF Welcome Committee                               |
| Hire a full-time school counselor and institute integrated social-emotional curriculum across grade levels   | ●        |   |   | Principal             | ●        | Mrs. Nichole Carey hired for 2019-2020 school year; Multiple classroom and school-wide programs in place. |
| Promote strength and depth of SJF Resource Program   | ●        |   |   | TBD                   | ●        |   |
| Create a targeted recruitment plan and promotional video(s) for young family open houses and social media campaigns  | ●        |   |   | Early Education Team  | ●        | Teacher-parent group est'd to review enrollment trends & re-K options; specific mktg plans to follow      |
| Institute and publicize a school-wide positive feedback program for all stakeholders (students, faculty, families, volunteers, etc.)   | ●        |   |   | TBD                   | ●        |   |
| Evaluate viability of various increased safety materials (e.g., self-locking doors by church vestibule, gym stairwells, and current early ed wings and closed-circuit camera system) | ●        |   |   | Facilities Committee  | ●        | Certain improvements in works; rest will wait on establishment of Facilities Committee                    |
| Ensure staff and volunteer VIRTUS compliance; publicize sex abuse protection initiatives and any substantiated failures  |          | ● |   | TBD                   | ●        | VIRTUS compliance enforced per Arch   |
| Re-introduce a "block captain" network throughout parish   |          | ● |   | Women's Club          | ●        | Outreach started  |
| Establish a new family buddy/mentor program  |          | ● |   | FSA                   | ●        |   |
| Establish a joint school and parish reunion committee  |          | ● |   | TBD                   | ●        |   |
| Provide regular funding for grounds and building beautification efforts  |          | ● |   | Parish Finance Board  | ●        | Gardening Committee to submit formal budget request   |
| Evaluate resurfacing of parking lot / recess areas   |          | ● |   | Facilities Committee  | ●        |   |
| Evaluate viability of whole-building vs. specific space (e.g., gym, labs) electrical, lighting, and HVAC upgrades  |          |   | ● | Facilities Committee  | ●        |   |

## Academic Excellence

“A rigorous academic curriculum” is the first of three pillars noted as key to facilitating “the intellectual, academic, social, and emotional growth of each student” in our school mission statement, and while easy to enumerate ways we can improve, we should first recognize our curriculum and our faculty as key, differentiating strengths relative to our educational peers locally and nationally.

A survey of the different Catholic high schools our graduates attend confirms the success our teachers have in embracing and molding the curious minds of our students. We regularly have a 100% placement rate into our students’ first choice high schools, and we hear our graduates are not only prepared, studious contributors but, more often than not, leaders amongst their peers at the next level. Evaluating our standardized test scores, we regularly outperform the Archdiocesan-wide average, which itself is generally better than the national average across all subjects tested. School-by-school comparisons vs. our closest competitors reveals the same trends. We owe this success to our families, over 80% of whom read with our children and supervise homework daily, and our faculty and staff, 53 truly dedicated and talented individuals with >15 average years of experience in the classroom and over 90% of whom wouldn’t want to work anywhere else and a full 100% of whom would recommend this school to parents seeking a place for their child.

Together, families and faculty working together, we are confident we can achieve our second strategic objective:

**Maintain and expand on our tradition of academic excellence by supporting the strength and skill of, and the resources available to, our faculty and upgrading our curriculum and classroom space to best serve the modern student.**

We should be proud of these facts and figures, and we should acknowledge them internally and tout them externally. They are a testament to the focus, effort, and loyalty we all share to achieve SJF’s core academic mission. We should not rest on our laurels, however, as the world of education and the competition our school and our graduates face in today’s global world are rapidly evolving. We need to keep up with that evolution to maintain our tradition of success.

As noted above, plenty of perceived weaknesses or areas for improvement were noted throughout our data gathering process for this strategic plan. Most regularly cited were a need for dedicated science lab space and more time for specials like foreign language and the arts across all grade levels. Concerns were also raised about the seeming lack of curricular continuum in certain subjects like math across grade levels.

The leadership of the school, in conjunction with the faculty and staff, have been working hard alongside this planning process to evaluate the appropriateness of our current curriculum. Certain investments in resource upgrades like the purchase of

the Fountas & Pinnell reading series have already been made to address their early findings. Professional development and regular assessments and evaluations have also been a focus for leadership. Year-to-date, more than 100 in-classroom evaluations have been completed. What leadership has seen has been impressive and has only reinforced our desire to get the best tools in the hands of our teachers, who we believe are among the best at their craft assembled in any one school. We are lucky to have them at SJF, and we want to do everything in our power to continue to earn their loyalty and retention by offering best-in-class professional development opportunities and appropriately compensating them.

## Academic Excellence

| Priority To Dos  | Timeline |   |   | Responsible Party                 | Progress | Notes   |
|--|----------|---|---|-----------------------------------|----------|---|
|  | 1        | 3 | 5 |                                   |          |   |
| Lengthen the school day to allow for enhanced specials instruction and common prep and PD periods for same-subject / grade-level faculty | ●        |   |   | Principal                         | ●        |   |
| Recreate and furnish formal science and art lab space and materials  | ●        |   |   | Asst. Principal for Inst. Support | ●        | Title funds applied for and earmarked to cover immediate needs  |
| Supplement reading curriculum with new, consistent guided reading materials and in-classroom aides                                       | ●        |   |   | Faculty Reading Curriculum Team   | ●        | Needs established; looking for financial “sponsor” to cover costs                                     |
| Build flex time into weekly or monthly schedule for cross-subject and cross-grade STEAM projects   | ●        |   |   | Principal                         | ●        | Already happening; more structure and formality planned going forward                                 |
| Re-evaluate pros/cons of in-class Chromebook and/or iPad availability across grade levels  | ●        |   |   | TBD                               | ●        |   |
| Re-evaluate pros/cons of combined pre-school grade levels  | ●        |   |   | Early Education Team              | ●        | See SO1 re: early ed enrollment and marketing review  |
| Introduce proactive data-driven educational decision-making* and differentiated instruction across all grade levels                      |          | ● |   | Principal                         | ●        | Formal professional development options being evaluated   |
| Add math-focused specialist/interventionist to Resource Program and refresh formal math program materials used across grades             |          | ● |   | Principal                         | ●        |   |
| Hold an annual STEAM Fair  |          | ● |   | TBD                               | ●        |   |
| Integrate service events and fundraising days into a schoolwide social service / justice curriculum                                      |          | ● |   | TBD                               | ●        | Informal integration occurring regularly; goal to more purposely prioritize and connect across grades |
| Build formal study skills, research, leadership, and communications tracks into upper grade curriculum                                   |          | ● |   | TBD                               | ●        |   |
| Refurbish and bring former convent building back into use as early ed, community, and resource center                                    |          |   | ● | TBD                               | ●        | See SO6 generally   |
| Reallocate early ed space in main building to dedicated specials classrooms and lab space  |          |   | ● | TBD                               | ●        | See SO6 generally   |

*\*Data-driven educational decision-making is when the teachers examine assessment data to identify student strengths and deficiencies and apply those findings to their practice. The data used comes from numerous places – informal assessments, formal standardized testing, formal classroom / grade-level testing, teacher-generated tests, program-generated tests, end of unit assessments and tasks, running records, diagnostic screeners, student surveys, classroom discussions, learning profiles, teacher observations, anecdotal records, and pre-tests.*

## Faith in Action

Foundational to our existence as a Catholic school is a firm belief in God's central place in our lives and the importance of serving the spiritual needs of our students and families, so we can freely and openly embrace and nurture that belief. In today's world full of busy schedules, ubiquitous promotion of self-interested, consumer-driven mindsets on social and mainstream media, and the horrors of the Church's sex abuse crisis and other clerical missteps permanently impressed in our minds, while SJF may be a place we can freely and openly embrace our belief in God, we have heard throughout this process and would agree it's often not that easy to actually do so. Yet, nearly 90% of parents who responded to the 5Essentials survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that Catholic identity was an important reason in our decision to send our children to SJF. Many more commented that they viewed SJF as the "cornerstone" of our community and saw the church bell tower as a common symbol of our steady belief in God and a beacon in the community calling us to put our beliefs into action.

These comments were among the reasons the refreshed logo the school unveiled this past summer kept the bell tower as its central image. They are also why the tagline notably puts equal emphasis on nurturing compassionate hearts as it does embracing curious minds. As a Catholic school and parish, we purposefully stand for something different and more than our secular counterparts. Over 95% of our students reported their teachers encourage them to grow in our Catholic faith and over 90% that their parents did the same. This school-home partnership is key to maintaining our faith's connection to our educational and social goals. We feel that including the church and parish as a third contributor to that partnership is just as important, though, and on this front, we face a bigger challenge.

This is our third strategic objective:

**Reaffirm SJF as the cornerstone of our community faith life and the mission through which we jointly and actively serve the Church and world.**

While over 50% of both parents and students report they pray together as a family at least 1-2 times per week, just over 25% report they weekly attend mass, and only 30% report they participate in a parish ministry at all at least once per year. Further, while our children's sacramental prep and day-of celebrations were highly commended across most groups as "unmatched" for how they create unforgettable and relatable experiences for students, families, and the parish community alike - filling our church with smiling faces, strong voices, and loving supporters - our regular mass-going experience was noted as inconsistent and less meaningful / impactful on our daily lives.

Related, our faith lives were noted as needing to be more active. This includes broader participation of the community in mass, whether in formal ministry roles or attendance, surely, but also more integrated, intentional service projects and missions to live out the social justice message of the gospels. We're aware of the benefits of service, and we clearly thirst for opportunities to participate in it - nearly 100% of students and partners reported SJF teaches and encourages us to help those less fortunate than us - but

our community repeatedly told us it's disjointed or disconnected from curriculum, publicized poorly, and / or not calendarized effectively to invite community support across ages. We also heard from select high schools that proactive participation in service projects is the one area where our students lag those of our peers. We view this as a key opportunity to re-light and keep lit the fire of the Holy Spirit among us while furthering good in our community. We have many diverse, unique talents and skillsets that can and should be celebrated and coordinated to maximize their positive impact, to show our faith in action to our students, and to bring us closer together as a community of believers.

## Faith in Action

| Priority To Dos  | Timeline |   |   | Responsible Party              | Progress | Notes  |
|--|----------|---|---|--------------------------------|----------|--|
|  | 1        | 3 | 5 |                                |          |  |
| Re-institute monthly grade-by-grade and/or “prayer partner” family masses  | ●        |   |   | FSA                            | ●        |  |
| Re-institute various special invitation vocational masses (e.g., “Blue Mass,” teacher mass, volunteer mass, etc.)  | ●        |   |   | TBD                            | ●        |  |
| Evaluate regular involvement of children’s choir and children’s lectors at weekly 10a mass   | ●        |   |   | Religious Education Director   | ●        |  |
| Evaluate best mass times for families generally (e.g., 9a vs. 10a)   | ●        |   |   | SAB Mission Committee          | ●        | Parent survey in works   |
| Evaluate mass attendance / report requirements as part of sacramental prep   | ●        |   |   | Religious Education Director   | ●        |  |
| Integrate Youth and Young Adult Ministry library of virtual ministry into SJF website as an online space to pray, reflect, and grow our relationships with God | ●        |   |   | Youth and Young Adult Ministry | ●        | Separate website materials in works and available; integration to come |
| Embrace, encourage, collaborate, and participate in Youth Ministry’s 52 Weeks of Service project   | ●        |   |   | Youth and Young Adult Ministry | ●        |  |
| Integrate service events and fundraising days into a schoolwide social service / justice curriculum  |          | ● |   | TBD                            | ●        |  |
| Create annual parish- and school-wide service day(s) in support of current parish missions like Pro Labore Dei   |          | ● |   | TBD                            | ●        |  |



## Foundational Investment

None of what we do at SJF comes cheaply in terms of financial or human resources. To operate our school and parish, let alone to set out to achieve the many objectives and priorities described in this plan, we necessarily rely on and will continue to rely on the sacrifices and generosity of those in our community that support our mission through tuition, weekly giving and other donations, and / or volunteering their time and talents. The leadership of our school and parish can't thank you enough for your giving spirit. It has allowed us to grow and thrive for nearly 75 years.

Now is the time to re-commit to our growth for the next 75 years. To do so, we need to re-solidify our financial position as well as identify the short- and long-term financial, physical, and human resources required to ensure that growth occurs. Expenses have risen faster than revenues across both the school and parish operations for over five consecutive years as student enrollment and mass attendance have both declined. Fundraising and capital spending coordination among the various parish and school constituencies has also seemingly declined in recent years. There are many reasons for this, chief among them recent turnover in the leaderships of both the parish and school as well as many parish organizations. Regardless of the causes, the result has been a corresponding decline in the balance of our long-term reserves.

We need to methodically and intelligently work to first halt and then turn this trend around for the future of our school and parish and the good of the children who walk through the doors of SJF every day. We face a situation where current tuition does not cover the base cost of our children's education, but nonetheless we aspire to continue to raise the standard of that education and appropriately compensate our faculty and staff such that their interest in and dedication to our mission and our children isn't overwhelmed by the prospects of financial rewards elsewhere. We can't practically do this nor do we think it's right to do so on the backs of our school families through tuition hikes alone. Where we do ask our school families to shoulder an increased share of this financial burden, we will do so transparently, in advance, and in ways where we think the mutual benefits will outweigh the costs.

This is our fourth strategic objective:

**Establish and invest in a sustainable organizational and financial foundation for our future.**

Building up our school starts with fostering a stronger connection between our school and the SJF parish community. As such, we will primarily ask the parish and our community at large – alums, foundations, local business partners, individuals and families than can afford to do so – to join us in championing our mission and supporting our goals with the faith and knowledge that a strong and healthy SJF directly relates to the strong and healthy Beverly, Mt. Greenwood, and Evergreen Park communities where we work and live. We will also ask each of us – individually and organizationally – to prioritize SJF as a deserving charitable cause and a priceless investment that advances the wellbeing and potential of our children more than any other one we could make.

In doing so, we will build a pool of resources that can aid in our efforts to aim higher, to push ourselves and our children to embrace the future, to invest in ourselves and themselves, and to bequeath future generations the same advantages we have enjoyed from our grandparents and parents – the gifts of faith, of family, and of friendship and the privilege to be educated in an environment and by people who nurture those gifts and nudge us all to strive for excellence in everything we do and to fulfill our God-given potential.



## Foundational Investment

| Priority To Dos  | Timeline |   |   | Responsible Party                            | Progress | Notes  |
|--|----------|---|---|--|----------|--|
|  | 1        | 3 | 5 |  |          |  |
| Clearly define and jointly agree on missions – operational and financial – for various school and parish organizations   | ●        |   |   | SAB Planning Committee & Parish Council      | ●        | Interviews completed and org structure discussion ongoing  |
| Spec and hire parish and school director(s) of advancement / development / marketing / operations  | ●        |   |   | Pastor & Principal                           | ●        | Job spec being reviewed; looking for financial “sponsor” to cover initial costs                              |
| Create and publish a 5-year financial plan outlining both operational and capital expenditure needs and resources  | ●        |   |   | SAB Finance Committee & Parish Finance Board | ●        | Preliminary plan complete and in review  |
| Identify a regular, sustainable funding source to enhance faculty and staff compensation and aid in teacher retention and recruitment                            | ●        |   |   | SAB Finance Committee                        | ●        | Preliminary recommendations made re: focusing certain parish org’s resources here                            |
| Refresh and publicize Manna incentives and evaluate role mandatory Manna spending could play in offsetting / eliminating required school family fundraising fees | ●        |   |   | SAB Finance Committee & Manna Team           | ●        | Historical trends reviewed and Manna marketing push in process; longer-term recommendations in process       |
| Spec and hire school athletic director   | ●        |   |   | Principal & Athletic Board                   | ●        |  |
| Strengthen relationship between the school and Youth Ministry to enhance connections to young alums and graduates’ families                                      |          | ● |   | Youth and Young Adult Ministry               | ●        |  |
| Create and maintain an active parishioner and school alumni registry   |          | ● |   | Director of Development                      | ●        | Work started by SAB Mission Committee; envisioned as a responsibility of Director of Development longer term |
| Target a self-sustaining school enrollment that maintains a min-max class size of 16-24 depending on grade level and minimal annual tuition hikes                |          | ● |   | Principal                                    | ●        | Planning for transparent communication of long-term needs in conjunction w/ 5-year financial plan            |
| Return parish finances to a position of ability to subsidize school operations in the annual amount of at least \$100,000  |          |   | ● | Pastor & Parish Finance Board                | ●        |  |



## Responsible Stewardship

The gospel of Luke memorably states, “to whom much is given, much will be required.” Whether or not strategic objective #4 is achieved, we can confidently acknowledge much is regularly given by our community to SJF. It will hopefully be true going forward that this will be the case even moreso. In response to what we are given and the investments the community makes in SJF, SJF, in turn, needs to demonstrate an ability to be an efficient and effective steward of those investments.

We heard time and time again over the last fifteen months that there exists a perceived lack of accountability for our shared finances. Whether it be tuition, church donations, organizational fundraisers, or various participation and activity fees, SJF clearly does not currently have the trust of our community to appropriately raise and invest or spend our fiscal resources. This is an untenable situation and one this strategic planning process aims to rectify as an immediate priority.

As it stands today, we’ve heard too many groups are independently asking for money, often at the same time, making families feel like they’re being “nickel and dimed.” We’ve heard there is a lack of transparency and follow-through around whether most fundraising initiatives are actually successful or not. And, importantly, whether it’s FisherFest, Queen of Hearts, Comedy Night, or Manna spending, we’ve heard people are confused as to what their various donations and investments actually go toward. We have taken this feedback on board and below recommend a number of steps and best practices that will eliminate such confusion and lack of coordination.

It is imperative that one of our strategic objectives embody this hope, thus our fifth one is this:

**Manage our shared talents and resources responsibly, efficiently, and transparently.**

In addition to enhancing transparency, we also want to make sure we’re taking advantage of the various ways we can modernize our operations, reduce extraneous expenses, and maximize the value of our community’s investments in SJF. Whether through creating economies of scale through smart partnerships and purchasing with our Renew My Church cohort, better monetizing our current events, looking for match opportunities on spending or donating we’re already doing, or improving the utilization of volunteers for key tasks, we have an opportunity to reject the financial status quo, implement various accountability metrics, and embrace the same priorities as common planning tools for a single, cohesive parish and school community agenda. We shouldn’t just view this as an opportunity, but, frankly, we should demand it as a core responsibility of our staff and organizational leaders.

In doing so, we hope our collective inclination to give to SJF and our corresponding ability to deliver a better, more well-rounded education and faith life are both enhanced over the short- and long-term.



## Responsible Stewardship

| Priority To Dos  | Timeline |   |   | Responsible Party                       | Progress | Notes  |
|--|----------|---|---|---|----------|--|
|  | 1        | 3 | 5 |   |          |  |
| Clearly define and jointly agree on controls and accountability – operational and financial – for various school and parish organizations                            | ●        |   |   | SAB Planning Committee & Parish Council | ●        |  |
| Create a joint school and parish finance committee that annually reviews organizational budgets and coordinates on fundraising and spending priorities and calendars | ●        |   |   | Pastor & Principal                      | ●        | SAB Planning Committee has made structural recommendations to Parish Council; Pastor & Principal reviewing |
| Create a joint school and parish facilities committee that annually reports on and prioritizes building and campus plant maintenance needs                           | ●        |   |   | Pastor & Principal                      | ●        | Volunteers identified to lead and establish; specs and responsibilities tbd                                |
| Publish a regular joint school and parish newsletter promoting the activities, operations, and fundraising of our school and parish                                  | ●        |   |   | SAB Comms & Mission Committees          | ●        | Initial newsletter published last year; reformulated version in process                                    |
| Promote ways to easily maximize value of donations to SJF (e.g., company matches, Empower Illinois, etc.)  | ●        |   |   | SAB Finance & Comms Committees          | ●        | Numerous grants applied for this year; awaiting feedback   |
| Hold an annual volunteer fair where needs of school and parish are identified and community members can sign up to use their talents and resources to address them   |          | ● |   | SAB Planning Committee                  | ●        | Was to be incorporated into May SAB mtg; now tbd   |
| Hold an annual State of the School event that reports on and seeks community feedback on vitality of academic, social, service, and financial missions of SJF        |          | ● |   | Principal & SAB Planning Committee      | ●        | Follow-up to “Desserts & Discussion” likely to occur in September  |
| Create a grants committee that seeks to identify 3rd party financial resources to subsidize at least 5% of annual operating budget by                                |          | ● |   | SAB Finance Committee                   | ●        | Numerous grants applied for this year; awaiting feedback   |
| Evaluate opportunities for shared services and outreach efficiencies among neighboring schools and parishes through Renew My Church                                  |          | ● |   | TBD                                     | ●        |  |

## Tangible Legacy

As is laid out in the introduction to this strategic plan, while the work outlined here may be difficult, our overarching goal is a simple one: understand our strengths and weakness and envision the opportunities and threats that exist for us to navigate over the next 3-5 years to make sure we reach and are able to celebrate our 75th anniversary in a much stronger position than we are in today. That is not to say we are in a poor position; in fact, it's quite the opposite, but we believe it is always better and easier to set out to improve from a position of strength, not weakness, and it is important we take advantage of the fresh perspective and energy our new leadership teams have brought to SJF over the last few years. We are confident we have the makings of a foundation from which we can grow, and we owe it to our children and our forebearers alike to pursue that growth with a zeal for knowledge and life befitting our many talents and resources.

After taking in the various comments, suggestions, critiques, and feedback from all corners of our community over the last 12-15 months, we believe an obvious way to leave a visible mark on our community and to “top off” this strategic plan is to celebrate our 75th anniversary with a transformation of our former convent building – currently standing basically empty, unloved, and unused – into a symbol of welcome and support, of academic excellence, of commitment to our faith, and of investment in our future.

We envision doing so by revitalizing or rebuilding it into a state-of-the-art building that jointly would house our early education center, a community welcome / meeting room, and our best-in-class resource and counseling programs. In doing so, it would tie together all of the goals of this process in a public campaign and leave a tangible legacy of our efforts, and it would serve as a symbol of our big-picture priorities both now and in the future just as our bell tower symbolizes our community spirit today.

We think this campaign is the right culmination of that encouragement and this strategic plan and thus it is included on a standalone basis as our sixth and final strategic objective:

**Refurbish or rebuild the former SJF convent to bring it back into use as a shared early education, community, and resource center.**

Those priorities tie to each of the strategic objectives noted in these pages and are more simply stated as follows:

- Safe, welcoming environment
- Academic excellence
- Faith in action
- Foundational investment
- Responsible stewardship

Admittedly, while maybe the most exciting piece of this plan to announce, it is also the most daunting. Transforming the building will require consistent vision and planning, material fundraising, and strong momentum across the priorities we can more immediately accomplish, so we can build and sustain community support for and momentum behind a capital campaign. Particularly in the economic and social environment we find ourselves in today, it is likely it will take at least the next 2-3 years to raise the funds for it, and only then would we embark on a major construction and logistics project 3-5 years from now. Nonetheless, we were strongly encouraged by both the community and our school and parish leadership teams to think big, to push the envelope in terms of operational and financial goals, and to put something in the hands of the community that we all could get excited about.

## Tangible Legacy

| Priority To Dos  | Timeline |   |   | Responsible Party   | Progress | Notes   |
|--|----------|---|---|---|----------|---|
|  | 1        | 3 | 5 |   |          |   |
| Widely publicize and seek continual feedback on strategic plan and related needs / wishes / goals  | ●        |   |   | TBD   | ●        |   |
| Establish a formal capital campaign committee to lead event and fundraising in conjunction w/ strategic planning initiatives                 | ●        |   |   | Pastor, Principal, & SAB Planning Committee                     | ●        | Volunteers identified to lead and establish; specs and responsibilities tbd |
| Review engineering needs and architectural design options that would meet building objectives  | ●        |   |   | Facilities Committee  | ●        |   |
| Select partner architect and finalize revised blueprints for the building  |          | ● |   | Pastor & Principal  | ●        |   |
| Establish preliminary building costs and other related needs through formal bidding process  |          | ● |   | Facilities & Capital Campaign Committees & Parish Finance Board | ●        |   |
| Finalize formal capital campaign goals   |          | ● |   | Director of Development   | ●        |   |
| Formalize alumni outreach plan   |          | ● |   | TBD   | ●        |   |
| Hold a major fundraising / campaign kick-off event   |          | ● |   | TBD   | ●        |   |
| Hold all-school reunion in conjunction with or in anticipation of SJF's 75th anniversary   |          | ● |   | TBD   | ●        |   |
| Confirm pledge fulfillment on the part of donors and ensure required funds fully raised / adjust project scope to meet fundraising successes |          | ● |   | TBD   | ●        |   |
| Begin / complete construction project  |          |   | ● | TBD   | ●        |   |
| Backfill early ed classrooms in main building with formal lab and/or specials space  |          |   | ● | TBD   | ●        |   |
| Hold 75th Anniversary celebration and community open house   |          |   | ● | TBD   | ●        |   |
| Facility opening for 2024-25 school year   |          |   | ● | TBD   | ●        |   |





## Our Call to Action

Please consider joining us as we transition our “**Drive to 75**” from its initial data gathering and planning phase to one of action, reflection and refinement, and continuous improvement. We had planned a series of launch events to build consensus and excitement around our shared vision and priorities for our school and parish and we remain committed to making ourselves available in spirit even if we can't in person. Further details on these events are below (noting all dates and times are tentative and subject to change):



### Public Preview of this Strategic Plan

**January 26, 2020**

Catholic Schools Week

### Organizational Leader Meeting

**February 4, 2020**

Discussion of interest in leading various priority to-dos among parish council and school board reps

### Full Strategic Plan Unveiling and Virtual Volunteer Fair

**May 2020**

Presentation and discussion of planning stage findings and recommendations; Opportunity for everyone in community to sign up for roles in support of shared strategic objectives



### State of the School Report

**September 2020**

Open meeting to present an initial progress report against strategic planning objectives and overall school vitality followed by 2nd annual Desserts & Discussion feedback forum

### Capital Campaign Kick-off

Stay tuned for more details for a parish-wide gathering later in the year



**We need your help**  
to ensure our success  
and to secure our  
shared future.



# Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all of those that actively contributed to the creation of this strategic plan. It is the result of countless hours of research, feedback, data analysis, and discussion, and hopefully it is reflective of the needs and wants of the entire community. That is certainly our intention. At the risk of leaving individuals out, we wanted to especially thank the following individuals for their time, attention, and assistance over the past 12-15 months:

## St. John Fisher School Faculty

Karen Ade, Katie Altman, Win Biernacki, Carmen Briseno, Karen Brogan, Cathy Browne, Mary Donna Caffrey, Nikki Carey, Sally Caulfield, Elena Chermak, Megan Corley, Erin Deering, Katie Fadden, Nancy Fanjoy, Patrice Folliard, Beth Foran, Mary Beth Furlong, Courtney Garrity, Michael Gibson, Maura Grochocinski, Tyler Hakanen, Lisa Healy, Sherry Hughes, Meg Kellam, Kate Keller, Laura Kovatch, Claire Larmon, Annmarie Lindgren, Adan Madrigal, Delphine Maxwell, Amanda McAndrews, Bill Mulchrone, Daryce Nolan, Diane O’Grady, Camie O’Shea, Sue Power, Holly Psik, Bridget Quinn, Erin Rech, Therese Regnier, Carole Scannell, Mary Schiavone, Amy Schiller, Margie Sefcik, Phyllis Sullivan, Lauren Surin, Lindsey Surin, Judy Vittori

## St. John Fisher Parish and School Staff

Al Gatz, Pawel Herdzik, Kim Madonia, Linda Murray, Mary Margaret Redmond, Kate Spadoni, Fr. Dan Tomich, Emmett Williamson

## School Advisory Board Strategic Planning Committee Members

Mike Berger, Maureen Connolly, Jane Curran, Jason Erwinski, Tom Inzinga, Mary Nitsche, Peggy O’Connor, Therese Regnier

## 2018-19 and 2019-20 School Advisory Board Members

Tim Bush, Nikki Carey, Molly Condon, Kathleen Girzadas, Pete Gribble, Mary Kopale, Sara McGann, Mary Walsh Neumann, Carrie Nowicki, John O’Connor, Katy Spreitzer, Bob Urchell

## Current and Past School and Parish Organization Leaders

Terri Berger, Missi Brady, Pat Brandt, Raphael Brandt, Dave Cahill, Dave Clisham, Lynn Faculak, Mike Fitzpatrick, Erin Goldrick, Chas Hayes, Janet Joyce, Kate Keller, Jackie Long, Jenn McVickers, Diane Nichols, Mary Jo Ochs, Larry O’Connell, Marty O’Hara, Dan Olsen, Matt Rafferty, Brigid Riley, Deb Ryan, Tom Scannell, Kristen Schiesl, Sean Slevin, Bridget Stalla, Ken Stubitsch, Joe Sullivan, Brendan Winters

## Admissions, Counseling, and Development Representatives from our local Catholic high schools

Brother Rice, Marist, Mother McAuley, Mount Carmel, St. Laurence, St. Rita, St. Ignatius

## Generous friends and neighbors from other parish councils, school boards, capital campaigns, and staffs

Christ the King, Most Holy Redeemer, Queen of Martyrs, St. Barnabas, St. Bede, St. Cajetan, St. Catherine, St. Christina, St. Francis Xavier La Grange, St. Francis Xavier Wilmette, St. Walter