

## Madonna Catholic Elementary School

### Elk Island Catholic School Improvement Program

January 15 - 17, 2020



**Review Purpose** – through the perspective of the principles of the “Five Marks of an Excellent Catholic School”: To provide the school information that can be used to support continuous improvement.

1. To celebrate the successes and strengths of the school.
2. To enhance capacity in the school and promote a culture of excellence.
3. Validation of what Elk Island Catholic is doing for continuous ongoing improvement.
4. Reinforcing that Catholic Education is our number one responsibility.

### **Commentary**

Madonna Catholic Elementary School serves Pre-K through Grade 4 students in the Sherwood Park area, including the Brighter Beginnings program, which caters to Sherwood Park area 3-5 year olds who require some extra care. The school serves 237 students, 13 teachers and 15 support staff. The review consisted of personal interviews with students, parents, staff as well as quantitative surveys of students, staff and parents. The review was conducted by Paul Corrigan, Assistant Superintendent, Alyre Morin, Principal, and Don Marceau, Retired Principal.

## Commendations

- When asked about learning to look out for and respect other people, one student commented that, “treat others like Jesus would treat them.” and she reinforced her statement by telling the story of the Good Samaritan
- Several students commented that they were aware of efforts to assist others who don’t have as much as they do. Specifically, they mentioned food drives, Valeda House, Turkey bingo and Toonies for Terry.
- When asked about how staff support my well-being, one student reported “when I am mad they talk to me to calm me down and they make sure that I am okay”
- One student commented that “ we have good teachers because they teach us to be kind and respectful just like God”
- In response to the comment that “Religion is an important part of my school” a student commented, “If my school was no longer a Catholic school, I will be upset and I will move to a Catholic School” when asked why the student provided the following justification “I do not want to attend a Public school, God is too important for me”
- When asked the question about what is the best thing about your school, many students mentioned the Religion classes but the most powerful comment from a student was “ All the teachers are so kind to everyone, including myself. I feel safe here.”
- When asked the question about how are school improvement decisions made and communicated to you, many staff feel that there is a sense of collaboration and support by all, including the administration team.
- When asked about the Connections Culture in the school, staff reported that they feel very connected to each other, it’s like a little family
- A teacher commented that, “Madonna has brought faith to the forefront. The culture has re-ignited my faith.”
- The schools faith is abundantly clear in the physical representation, beginning with the centerpiece of the school community the statue of Our Lady, moving into the centrally located chapel space and throughout the halls and classes.
- Many staff interviewed shared their very positive comments about the work that the Chaplain does to make the faith come alive in the school.
- All staff interviewed were aware of the service/charity events that the school is focused on for the year: Chalice Child, Valeda House, Pioneer Court visits, etc.
- Staff value the open door policy of the admin. and were confident that their voices were being heard and considered.
- Several teachers commented on the very supportive SC. A best practise is having a teacher present at SC meetings.
- The Connections Culture has been been transformative for several staff members....both in their professional and their personal lives.
- That the staff collectively identified a common faith goal (the study of Pope Francis’ writings) is an indication that they enjoy working together.
- One staff member commented, “when you come into this school, it is a very welcoming and friendly environment. No one is afraid to ask for help.”
- When asked about the Growing in Faith Growing in Christ religion resource, teachers responded positively. Two teachers indicated the the parent resources were awesome, this is a best

practice; we encourage all teachers to engage the parents via the parent portal.

- Staff were impressed with the visibility of the Parish Priests in the school.
- Several staff members commented on how much they respected and valued the school caretaker.
- Consideration might be given to the practise of having an EA present to staff on a child they work with so that their expert voice is heard and ideas shared.
- One staff member shared that the best feature of the school was “caring custodian, lovely secretary, and a faith session at every staff meeting.”
- A teacher commented that she was, “in awe” when she discovered that teachers openly prayed for one another.
- The Advent concert at OLPH Church was a highlight for staff, parents and parish staff. Called truly a “child centred concert” with a faith focus, it has become a celebration of the community.
- One parent commented that “student voice is important at Madonna.”
- Every student polled felt that it was clear that this is a Catholic School. Over 90% of students strongly agreed that this is the case.
- The two day retreat for teachers new to the division was seen as a very positive way to show teachers they were important and cared for.
- 93% of parents are satisfied or very satisfied that students show respect for one another. This is an extraordinarily high number.
- The bulletin board outlining the growth of the Social Justice initiatives throughout the course of the year is an amazing testimony to the community work done by the school and is a best practice in the division.
- One parent took the opportunity to celebrate the good work of the Principal, commenting on her positive presence in the school and the ability to listen to parent concerns.
- It was noted by Father Sathia and Father Balraj that some of the staff are key players in the parish life of OLPH. They also noted that they always feel welcome at Madonna. Upon entering the school, the Priests are greeted with hugs from students excited to see them arrive.
- Leadership at Madonna “bridges the gap” between staff and the parish, setting the stage for positive relations.
- Many Indigenous practices have become a regular part of school life, both for students events and in staff functions. Many staff spoke positively about initiatives such as sharing circles, talking stick and time with the Elders as some of the most valuable aspects of the school. Madonna Catholic is a divisional leader in this regard. Catholicism is often mixed with the Indigenous understanding, and while this can at times be appropriate, much care and attention needs to be paid to ensure the reason for our existence remains at the centre of what we do.
- 97% of students know that the administration and staff want the best for them.
- 100% of students feel good about the school gatherings for prayer and celebrations. 94% of students strongly agreed in this category. Also, 100% of students feel that they are receiving a high quality education.
- All students also felt that religion is an important part of the school, and all parents were satisfied with the quality of the program.
- 100% of staff feel that the school is a warm welcoming Christ-centred place.

## **Recommendations:**

**Love, First Last and Always:** Each year, the division chooses a faith theme, with its source in Scripture. This year, our theme “Love First, Last and Always” builds off the idea that we are all made in God’s image and likeness with the understanding that our proper response to God, and each other, is love, or willing the good of the other. While this year’s theme is present in the school, we recommend that it finds its way into the classrooms and regular activities of the students (i.e assemblies) in a more central and visible way.

**Professional Development:** While teachers in EICS have a myriad of professional development opportunities available to them (PD days, at the elbow consultant support, opportunities for SPICE, partnering with other schools etc) we know that in a small school, the opportunities to work with the grade partner, and the opportunities for individual PD are sometimes limited. This is more pronounced in a year in which mid-year budgetary adjustments had to be made. We recommend that Madonna Catholic School establish a PD committee, consisting of both EA’s and teachers, from both Brighter Beginnings, Pre-K and K-4 staff. This committee could come together to discuss and establish guidelines for professional development that honor staff professionalism and autonomy, as well as moving forward school and divisional goals outlined in Assurance Plans.

## **Love: First, Last and Always**

**Faith Integration** – We are pleased to share that every staff member expressed that they work to integrate faith into all their classes. Madonna is first and foremost a Catholic School; staff are called to be witnesses to Christ in every interaction they have. Integration of our Catholic faith is non-negotiable and an expectation for all. We encourage you to continue to find opportunities to share the ‘light of Christ’ with your students and be witnesses.

## **Final Thought**

While there may be much uncertainty as to what the future holds for Madonna Catholic School or indeed any school at this point in time, that uncertainty can be soothed by a caring and informed people of hope such as the staff of Madonna Catholic School. It is through their hope and compassion for those in their care that they are able to focus on what is truly important. The staff of Madonna Catholic School demonstrate daily that bringing students to an understanding of the message of Christ is central to the mission they have been called to.

A quote from the document the staff are studying, *Laudato Si*, summarizes the vision of Madonna Catholic School “To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God’s love and hope.” This is evident in the staff and students of the school. It is imperative to choose hope and opportunity in this time, so that the vision of Madonna Catholic School might be shared with all.