

# Unleashing Individual Potential

with student-focused teaching

A look into 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> grades at All Saints Parish School



*It is the dream of every parent for each child to be given the chance to fulfill his or her potential.*

*It is the goal of every teacher to have a classroom of students who learn, are challenged and achieve!*

All Saints has a long standing tradition of excellence in faith-based education. In order to maintain that excellence, All Saints is committed to seeing that each student achieves his/her potential and experiences continuous learning every year.

To do so, All Saints has taken a student-based approach, rather than a course-based approach to education. This shift to student-focused teaching will improve academic achievement for all students, better prepare them for the world of work and help them become lifelong learners.

In this fast-paced, technology rich, global economy, it is imperative that students be taught critical and

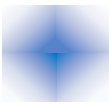
creative thinking processes. They must have better developed competencies in higher-order thinking and problem solving, as well as superior communication and leadership skills.

Years of experience and research have shown that one teaching method alone will not produce the desired results. Therefore, All Saints has incorporated a balance of teaching methods to provide continuous learning, while allowing for learner differences to ensure each student reaches his/her fullest potential.

All Saints Parish School is taking the lead to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century student. **Read on to learn more.**



*Higher academic standards based in faith.*



# Balance

To create a school climate that knows no limits to the academic success of each student, All Saints employs a balanced mix of teaching methods to meet each student's needs and unleash each student's potential.

## Flexible, Small Group Instruction...

Formative assessments are used throughout the year to group & regroup students into small learning groups. Teacher assessments, as well as MAP (Measurement of Academic Progress) testing (3 x/year) aid in identifying instructional levels and grouping. Students are grouped based on interests, activities, goals and individual need.

Small group instruction is used in subjects when mastering a concept is critical before progressing onto the next concept, such as in math & reading.

- Focus is switched to students' needs
- MAP testing aids in identifying instructional focus areas
- Students gain confidence working in groups of like abilities, interests or goals
- Pace of instruction can be adjusted to meet the needs of the entire group
- Concept material is more focused, leading to more effective instruction

## Subject Experts...

Teachers become experts in a particular subject and teach that subject to all students. This method is used successfully in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, so students are familiar with the process.

This concept is applied to subjects that do not build upon previous knowledge such as Social Studies, Science and Religion. Music, PE, Art & Guidance have used subject experts for many years.

- Students experience different teaching styles
- Students become accustomed to changing classrooms
- Since experts only focus prep time on one subject, time is available to develop a more creative & engaging curriculum
- Subject experts can apply knowledge beyond what is available in a textbook
- A two-year cycle allows teachers to delve deeper into a subject and cover concepts more thoroughly
- Comprehensive subject knowledge and a two-year cycle allow teachers to adjust the pace of learning to meet the needs of the students

## Looping...

Defined as the same group of students remaining with the same teacher for multiple years. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade students loop on a two-year cycle.

- Increases the teacher's responsibility and accountability for each student's progress
- Reduces the "get to know you" time of returning students
- Actual instruction begins sooner
- Reduces a student's anxiety of a new class & teacher
- Easier to establish academic expectations for returning students
- Improves student-teacher relationships
- Deeper relationships among classmates increases comfort & security
- Students demonstrate broader thinking, more intellectual risk taking & increased class participation

## Multiage Classrooms...

Multiage classrooms consist of a balance of students of different age groups with a range of achievement levels that capitalize on the diversity within the class.

All Saints has three multiage classrooms of approximately 21 students. Each class is a mix of 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> graders.

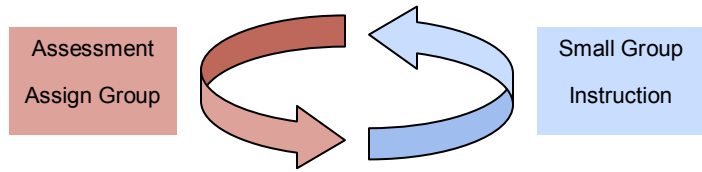
All Saints has identified subjects which are best taught at the graded level, such as: PE, Media & Music. Events such as service learning projects also remain at grade level.

- Eliminate learning limits based on a graded curriculum
- Allow for continued learning, especially for average and above average students who are able to work beyond a graded curriculum
- Provide opportunities for children with varying backgrounds, abilities, interests, personalities to interact
- Capitalize on the differences in the students' experiences, knowledge & abilities
- Established relationships with a older students ease middle school transition

# Tools

## Formative Assessments & MAP

**Testing** are used for Math, Reading & Language Arts in which mastery of a concept is important to ensure continued progress. These assessments are ongoing and aid teachers in designing productive small learning groups to meet students' needs.



Ongoing assessments ensure continuous learning so students reach their full potential.

**Cycled Curricula** Science, Social Studies and Religion concepts are not dependent upon a previous knowledge base, therefore learning concepts are divided into 2 different Curricula and rotated on a two-year cycle to ensure all students learn the required material.

All 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> grade students are presented Curricula A in Year 1 then in Year 2, Curricula B is presented. In Year 3, Curricula A is presented again.

Year 1				Year 2			Year 3	
2nd	3rd	4th	5th	3rd	4th	5th	4th	5th
[Grid]	[Grid]	[Grid]	[Grid]	[Grid]	[Grid]	[Grid]	[Grid]	[Grid]
Curricula A				Curricula B			Curricula A	

**Rubrics** is a tool used to aid students in setting performance goals and tracking progress of a project. The use of Rubrics is expanded in the upper grades to aid students in goal setting and giving them more authority on the success of their assignments.

Oral Communication (Discussion) Rubric (adapted by W. Atkins-Sayre, Fall 2007, from USM OEP Rubric)					
Criteria	D-F (Unacceptable)	C (Minimally Acceptable)	B (Proficient)	A (Advanced)	Score
Content	Central idea/purpose is not stated; content is erroneous or irrelevant; support for assertions is largely absent.	Central idea/purpose is stated; content is accurate but not always relevant; support is offered but inadequate for some assertions.	Central idea/purpose is clearly stated; content is accurate and relevant; credible support is provided for each assertion.	Central idea/purpose is vividly stated; content is accurate, thorough, and directly on point; strong support is provided for each assertion.	Score: (out of 40)
Organization	Little or no structure present. Discussion is confusing to the audience; no logical sequence of ideas; frequently off topic.	Thoughts are unclear; may contain several statements out of place and occasionally deviate from topic.	Thoughts are clear with few statements out of place.	Thoughts are presented in a purposeful, interesting, and effective sequence and remains focused.	Score: (out of 20)
	Grammar, pronunciation,	Isolated errors in grammar, pronunciation, and/or word	Speaking is free of serious errors in grammar,	Speaking is free of errors in grammar and	Score:

**Technology & Projects** Rather than regurgitating concepts learned through worksheets & testing, students demonstrate knowledge through an increase of project based assignments. An increasing use of technology is incorporated into these assignments to prepare students for a technologically rich society.

# Developing Leaders & Life Skills

All Saints continues to educate the *whole* child and these enhancements to the school program provide additional opportunities to develop faith-based character development and leadership skills necessary in every day life.

- Students serve as mentors (though do not replace the teacher's role of educating)
- Multiple small groups increases opportunities for more students to assume leadership roles (often ones who might not do so in a larger setting)
- Students are encouraged to become independent learners & take more responsibility for his/her own achievement
- Higher-order thinking continues to develop
- An atmosphere of cooperation is expanded through an increase of student interaction
- Students serve as role models as they learn from role models

# FAQs

**Q. Do 5<sup>th</sup> graders repeat the 4<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum?**

A. No, as with any grade there is some review, though this method actually reduces the amount necessary. Students are offered continuous learning in all subjects and are offered the opportunity to learn with more direct instruction from the teacher through the use of small group settings. Students are taught at their individual instructional level in *flexible*, small groups, which is the exciting part of this process.

**Q. What is Continuous Learning?**

A. Simply put, continuous learning is the ability to learn to learn. This allows a student to continue the learning process at the pace necessary to keep the student engaged and challenged during their learning day. The methods used at All Saints keeps the student motivated and allows every child the right to grow and learn.

**Q. Is it difficult for teachers to teach small group math classes?**

A. Yes, but All Saints teachers have the preparation time and support necessary to deliver quality math learning. Math is very important for our students, and our teachers do what is best for children. *Flexible*, small group settings based on individual instructional levels are what is best for our students.

**Q. Was the decision to use multiage classrooms solely driven by budgetary restraints?**

A. While this method does create efficiencies in educating students, taking a student-based approach to educating students is best to ensure continuous learning. The philosophy of teaching students in a non-graded environment is very appropriate for the learners we have at All Saints School and balancing this with other methods, provides benefits to students they would not otherwise see. The ICORE requirements mandate all elementary schools take a student-focused approach by 2012.

**Q. How is religious instruction affected by these programs?**

A. Religion will continue to be integrated in everything we do. Students will have more opportunities to put into practice the religious values and character development through an atmosphere of cooperation.

**Q. What about special grade level events?**

A. Students participate at their own grade level for events such as Service Learning projects and field trips. Holiday parties were originally scheduled to be only at grade level, but the kids wanted to keep them combined - so we listened to them!

**Q. Are the 5<sup>th</sup> graders allowed 5<sup>th</sup> grade privileges?**

A. Absolutely! Prior to implementation, we talked to the students, who gave us some great ideas. The 5<sup>th</sup> graders have many leadership opportunities such as running the Bruins Shop, taking the lead in morning prayer and many more!

*"I have gotten to know more kids this year and have more friends than I would have if only 5<sup>th</sup> graders were in my class."*

*~5<sup>th</sup> grade student*

**Q. What about lunch & recess?**

A. Both 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders have recess everyday either outside or in the gym, if the weather permits. The grades are mixed for both lunch and recess, which gives the students a chance to develop more friendships.

**Q. How can parents get involved and support their child in this new approach?**

A. We are fortunate to have very involved parents, which is one of the reasons our students are so successful. The tools mentioned earlier, MAP testing, Rubrics, etc. are helpful in tracking a student's progress. Continuing constant communication with teachers and staff is key, as well as the continued attention to your child's assignments. We feel we have the right type of students and parents to make a student-based approach to teaching a success.



*The mission of All Saints School, a shared responsibility of educators and family, is to provide and reinforce a quality, Catholic education. We are committed to enhancing the spiritual, moral, intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of each student.*

