

## “STATE OF THE SCHOOL”

**Tuition Collections:** To date, over 91% of tuition has been collected for the 2008-09 school year. We thank our parents for their commitment and sacrifice to provide a Catholic education for their children. In this difficult economic time, such support is even more appreciated. Next year’s tuition rates will not be raised and fees will be waived for next year’s registration to ensure that the administration can complete plans for next year’s program. Will there be three or four Kindergarten classes and three Grade 5 classrooms next year? Until all re-registrations are received, it is impossible to answer this question. If you have not yet done so, please contact Mrs. Brown, at the Tuition Office, to re-register as soon as possible.

**Fundraising:** Bingo revenues are so much higher than was projected for this year that the unexpected income to date was used to purchase new 20-inch flat-screen monitors and 28 new computers for the Media Research Center. Existing computers were then placed in classrooms, so that, beginning in September, 2009, teachers will be able to post homework on the website and to receive e-mails from parents. The lack of computer access was the major reason that this has not been done to date. Thank you so much to Deacon Dan Sullivan, whose commitment to improving our school’s technological resources is the reason we have been able to make such phenomenal progress in this area in the past few years. The school’s optional lunch program accounts for much of our other fundraising income, grossing over \$100, 000. However, the expenses for this program are very high (over \$42, 500 to date). However, because of the efforts of coordinators, Mrs. Dinah McDonald and Mrs. Alex Carroll, the low expenses incurred for the Winter Windfall Calendar Drive makes this fundraiser one of our most profitable to date, grossing over \$25, 000. A major fundraising effort is the school’s annual Auction. If, despite the present economic crisis, the Auction’s net income is equivalent to past years, then the school will meet- and exceed- its annual budget projection for fundraising. Look for details of our final fundraiser which will begin next month.

**School Tax:** All parishes without schools are expected to contribute 6% of their annual offertory collection to the support of Archdiocesan Catholic schools. Those parishes with students attending local Catholic schools may choose to send this tax directly to the school, or parishes may send this tax to the Archdiocese, which then sends allotments to individual schools. Last year, the school received \$16, 813.50 from this tax. This year, we have already received \$25, 229 from parishes whose students attend our school. Pastors recognize the need to provide quality Catholic education for their parishioners and so support those parishes who can provide it to them. We expect more Archdiocesan support for our St. Agatha School before the end of this fiscal year.

**Mission Monies/Christian Outreach:** This year, revenues from dress down days and monthly mission collections from each classroom have been used to support the Walk for Autism, Walk for Breast Cancer, Team Heart, Bishop Cordone’s African mission, and Water for Sudan, to name a few. Mission monies have also been expended to transport Kindergarten students to Eventide and Grade 8 students to Fr. Bill’s Place. These two programs are important components of our missionary efforts.

**Extra- and co-curricular activities:** This year, in response to requests from parents, an after-school activity for students in Grades K-2 was added to the school program. Lego Club was initiated by Mr. and Mrs. Crowley. It serves more than 90 students with assistance from many

parents and older students! It has become one of the most popular extracurricular programs to date. Mrs. Brinn, with the assistance of many parent volunteers, has developed a before school Math Club, which offers students in Grades 3-5 challenging math enrichment activities. The enthusiastic participation of these students in this program is inspiring to witness. This spring, Mr. Willis, our PhysEd instructor, will again provide an intramural sports program for students in Grades 2-5. (NOTE: student interest in this program was too low to offer in Grades 6-8.) These activities were planned and administered by interested parents, who were willing to give their time and efforts to sponsor extracurricular activities in our school. At Mrs. Carey's suggestion, we are looking forward to initiating a Karate program next year. The school administration is always willing to work with parents to develop and improve school programs at any time during the school year. THANK YOU to all parents who give so much of their time and talent to provide these activities to our students.

The middle-school Spanish teacher is now also responsible for our Kindergarten Spanish instruction. Mrs. O'Neill also meets with volunteers who teach weekly classes in Grades 1-5. Her collaboration helps to integrate the Spanish curriculum throughout the grades.

Students in Grade 8 began an elective program this year. Students may choose one of the following subject area: Music, Art, Computer, and Peer Leadership. This has been a most successful program and will continue in the 2009-10 school year.

At the annual school concert, contributions were made at the door to fund a drama program, but revenues received were so low (\$30) that the funds were instead used to purchase instructional music videos for use in the classroom. It is hoped that one day soon our school will be able to fund a drama club.

**Facility Maintenance:** The custodial staff continues to maintain clean, safe facilities for our students throughout the school year. In the summer, 2008, blinds were placed in our new media research center. The total expenses for furniture, computers, wiring, for the center totaled over \$40, 000. This center will become an educational resource for all students and teachers in the years ahead. This summer we expect to add shelving to the center to provide printed resources for expanded research in the center. We will continue to replace ceilings until all ceilings have been replaced. This process was begun three years ago and will be completed when all classrooms, the cafeteria and the faculty room ceilings have been replaced. It is expected that all school hallways will be painted this summer. Colors will be chosen according to latest research, i.e., the best colors for use in schools. Classrooms will be renovated as indicated by school enrollment projections.

**Standardized Testing/Curriculum Development:** The Principal met with the Superintendent of Schools in December to review St. Agatha School's scores on the *TerraNova* testing, given in October. The median national score on these tests is 50% in any given subject. St. Agatha School, like all Archdiocesan schools, is far above the national average. Faculty and administration continue to use these scores to determine areas for curriculum development. At this time, the faculty is also engaged in a review of *MassCurriculum Frameworks* and Archdiocesan standards to ensure that the SAS curriculum meets or exceeds any available standards in all subject areas. Presently, St. Agatha School's Principal serves on the Archdiocesan Assessment Committee, which is charged with the review and purchasing of an assessment instrument that will serve our Archdiocesan schools for the next 3-5 years. *TerraNova* has a 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, which if the diocese continues with *TerraNova*, schools will necessarily purchase this new edition, a very costly expense for all schools. Now is the time to determine if the diocese should continue with the *TerraNova* testing instrument or choose a better alternative to measure student achievement next year when spring testing will become the

norm for Archdiocesan schools. Teachers are most pleased with the change from fall to spring testing because they will be able to assess student learning in time to re-teach areas in which they did not score well. Planned curriculum updates for the 2009-2010 school year already include Gr. 5 language arts and primary Science/Social Studies, and a school-wide writing program.

**NEASC Accreditation:** An interim report must be submitted to NEASC every two years to maintain school accreditation. On April 1, 2009, St. Agatha School will submit this report which represents the work of the faculty, staff and board members as well as results from our “3 Key Questions” survey which parents completed in January. The Principal will report the results of NEASC review as soon as it is received in June. A preliminary review of this report was presented this month to NEASC Associate Director, who reported that our report shows that “St. Agatha School is a strong learning community that knows where it is going and how to get there.”

**Strategic Planning:** The school board and administration have revised the long-range strategic plan to include a timeline and funding for the plan. This plan will be submitted with school’s Interim Report on April 1. The Pastor, Principal and Operations Mgr. meet regularly with representatives of the other 4 Milton-Quincy schools, the Superintendent of Schools and the Associate Superintendent to develop a plan for the future of Catholic schools in Milton-Quincy. The goal of these meetings is to review the data of each individual school to develop a model to meet the needs of all schools and to strengthen the resources of Catholic schools in our area. Plans generated at these meetings will be presented to our school members as they are developed at these meetings.

**Technology Update:** As noted above, it is expected that homework will be posted and e-mail addresses available for all teachers in September, 2009. In the meantime, the school continues to develop plans to better integrate our technological resources with the curriculum. Our new Media Research Center has been used to provide weekly Writing Workshops for Gr. 8 students, Vocabulary Workshops for Grade 7 Spanish students, for research in Grade 7 Geography classes and research projects in many other grades. During open lab times, classroom teachers also visit the center to plan lessons, do research and/or receive training in the use of this technology. In-service programs for faculty members, and other meetings, which include PowerPoint presentations, have also been held in the center this year. Two computers in the center are used exclusively by teachers to plan and design lessons for their students. In September, 2008, parents were invited to contribute to a newly established technology fund and to date \$3200 has been contributed to this effort since that time. The center will be completed when library materials have been added to the center’s inventory. It is also hoped that before the end of this school year, we will have implemented a closed circuit morning and afternoon TV program on which school announcements and prayer will be broadcast by our students.

**Before and After School Programs:** Introduced in September, 2004, these programs remain two of the most successful programs in our school. There are 120 students enrolled in this year’s St. Agatha Extended Day program. The program remains well-staffed with 4 five-day supervisors, who are assisted by other two-or three-day personnel throughout the week so that group sizes are no more than 9 students each. The new director, Mrs. Eastep, has worked hard to offer creative, enjoyable programs for students. Such projects and/or programs include: cheerleading, yoga, homework club, newspaper club, arts & crafts, and mixed sports and games. Mrs. Sheila Sullivan, our Grade 5 teacher, supervises students who arrive early to school. She provides space and time for students to quietly engage with one another. They play board games,

draw, and read. Although this program is intended as a service to our school families, whose schedules necessitate early drop-off for our students, it also helps children quietly prepare for their school day.

**Milton-Quincy Catholic School regional meetings:** Our Pastor, Fr. Peter Casey and our school Principal continue to meet with the pastors and principals of the other four Catholic schools in our area. These meetings now regularly include the Supt. of Schools and the Associate Superintendents of the Archdiocesan Catholic Schools. The purpose of these meetings is to assess the present state of each individual school and to plan for a more integrated, collaborative use of these schools to ensure that all of our schools, “thrive, not just survive.” Presently, there is no plan for school mergers or closings in our area. Rather, the conversations at these meetings focus on the projected demographics in our area and how to maintain strong enrollment, quality educational and formational programs, and provide equitable salaries for all school personnel. There is much that we can learn from another and many ways we can assist one another in a time of transition for all Catholic schools, and so we look forward to continue to work together to plan for the future of Catholic education in the Milton-Quincy area.

**Looking Ahead:** Through careful planning and monitoring of the school budget throughout the year, school leaders believe that the school can continue to grow and expand. Presently, we are hoping to ensure the school’s financial security by finding ways and means to develop a capital improvement fund, an endowment fund, and a tuition assistance program. But, all school constituencies must work to achieve these far-reaching goals. Suggestions are always welcome, especially in these areas. In the meantime, St. Agatha School continues to provide an excellent academic program in a strong, nurturing, fiscally responsible, and Catholic environment, because of the commitment and collaboration among all of the wonderful members of this great learning community. If you have not done so to date, please re-register your child now if you plan on returning in September.

Respectfully submitted,  
Maureen C. Simmons, Principal  
St. Agatha School, Milton, MA  
March, 2009