

Bishop Guilfoyle High School

Oral Report – October 31, 2008

Mr. Robert Gervinski, Mrs. Joan Donnelly, administrators, faculty, staff, members of the planning team, Members of the Board of Trustees, and students.

On behalf of the Validating the Vision visitation team and myself, thank you for the gracious hospitality that you have shown us over the last few days. You have truly made us welcome beginning with the warm reception and dinner on Tuesday evening and throughout our visit.

All schools – whether public, private, or Church sponsored – should strive to achieve the goal of academic excellence. However, Catholics believe that academic achievement is of itself not sufficient. Education is viewed as primarily aimed at developing the religiously and morally intelligent person. Faith and knowledge are not separable from each other, and every subject and fact that is taught can only be truly absorbed by the student in relation to an understanding of the nature of man and the purpose of life. As stated in Bishop Guilfoyle’s vision, “Bishop Guilfoyle High School . . . is a community formed and bonded across the generations by a deep-rooted tradition of Catholic identity and values. Their aim is to form the next generation of Catholic leaders securely grounded in Christian spirituality, academic proficiency, individuality, and social awareness. To this end they work to lead students to a high level of understanding of Catholic life and teachings, academic achievement, awareness of their individual gifts, and personal accountability, thus preparing them for lives of faith and service.”

The school recognizes the urgency to nurture the spirit, mind, and body of all students into healthy, faith-filled socially responsible adults who will understand and actively engage in the complexities of a global interdependent society, creating rather than accepting the future. For this reason the stakeholders at Bishop Guilfoyle have created a school system where religious and academic instruction go hand in hand. If God is the central reality of life He must be the central reality of education. The Bishop Guilfoyle community believes that centering education on a love of Jesus Christ harmoniously blends together faith, culture and life and that challenging students spiritually, academically, emotionally and physically provides a holistic educational experience. The unique identity of Bishop Guilfoyle is rooted in tradition, a legacy of caring while maintaining a challenging climate for developing lifetime skills as well as preparing for college.

Your belief that accountability for one’s actions and decisions and respect for all persons are necessary components of a disciplined and effective learning environment was made clear when talking with relevant stakeholders throughout our visit. It is a great testimony to the education you provide when alums and members of the business community give their time and support to advancing the mission of Bishop Guilfoyle while also trusting their children to you for their high school experience. A large percentage of current students boast a long family history at Bishop Guilfoyle.

The Validating the Vision Team:

Sister Christine Cunningham

Mrs. Angela Heinick

Mr. Brian Molka

Father Christopher Wakefield and I spent a whirlwind three days in meetings, observing classes and touring your facility. We spoke with a variety of stakeholders...from those who work behind the scenes to the ever present administration, faculty, and of course, the students you serve. Your students do you proud! They are a happy group of young men and women who were open with their opinions of the school. They have great insight into the happenings at Bishop Guilfoyle and were not shy about sharing their thoughts on the quality and quantity of the food, the quality of education they were receiving, the caring family environment that persists within these walls or their excitement about participation in the “dog pound.” They felt the administration was open to listening to student concerns and realized that sometimes an answer had to be no. They liked the small community environment, “everyone knows everyone else; teachers take a personal interest in you.” One student described a situation where she hadn’t done well on a test; she received a call from the teacher the evening of the test asking if there was a problem since this was not her typical performance in class. The student was given the opportunity to retake the test the next day.

One teacher was described as knowing the faith and possessing the ability to impart the knowledge without dumming it down. The student said, “The power of his words will drain the demons right out of you.”

Members of the Team asked students to describe their Bishop Guilfoyle experience in one word and we heard:

Welcoming, community, family, home, conservative, Catholic, educational, unique, belonging, traditional, helping, and together. When asked if they would send their sons or daughters to BG the overwhelming response was, “yes!”

Parents liked the Catholic centered values. In many cases attendance at BG was not an option but a tradition. Both parents and students relayed, “It was just expected that I would attend, my sister had, my mother/father attended, my four aunts attended.” Parents felt it was their responsibility to see that their students went to college, graduated, and became self-sufficient. As one parent commented, “BG helps make that happen by giving the students the skills they need to be successful on the next level.”

Statements such as these attest to the dedication of the Bishop Guilfoyle community to the mission of the school.

The newly formed Board of Trustees brings many changes to the Bishop Guilfoyle community. One person described it as blending sound business practice with Catholic tradition. This unique partnership

holds an amazing amount of promise for the school community. Effective communication on all and among all levels is essential to making that promise a reality. Change is always difficult and there will be times, as in all families, members may not always agree yet pull together for the common good, in this case the education of the students entrusted to their care. The cooperation among the Board, administration, faculty and staff to work toward that common goal is a tribute to the vision that binds the fabric of this school community.

During our visit the Team found:

- A healthy and productive planning process. The school demonstrates a good understanding of where they have come from and where they are going.
- Mission and belief statements that continue over time to reflect the values and goals of the community.
- Objectives that represent a true concern for the academic achievement and the Catholic values in students' daily lives.
- A faculty who is dedicated and committed to the planning process and accessible to students.
- A curriculum that is broad enough in scope to include college dual credit courses as well as Advanced Placement courses; with a plan in place to accommodate students with special needs.
- A well designed, maintained, and secure facility.
- A positive, supportive board of trustees who provide encouragement and a desire to facilitate the continued success of Bishop Guilfoyle High School.
- A remarkably high rate of student participation in activities that support the schools mission related to the holistic development of the individual.

The school's focus over the next few years should be on:

- New and innovative ways of sending the "message" of Bishop Guilfoyle High School to prospective students and families.
- Preparing for the new population of students currently in feeder schools by taking advantage of professional development opportunities dedicated to instructional methods that will ultimately reach students at all academic ability levels.
- Embracing a model of supervision that will support the instructional needs of the teachers.
- More completely incorporating the school's wellness policy in the school, particularly with respect to food services.

- Implementing action plans that will validate the objectives. Re-examine regularly the success of the action plans and define the process for modifying strategies within the action plans, as well as for communicating these changes and the success of the plan to members of the community.
- Maintaining open lines of communication to help build confidence and trust within the organization that flows in all directions.
- Continued emphasis on providing the caring environment unique to Bishop Guilfoyle.
- Trust in and maintain the integrity of the VTV protocol.

As a validation team we are asked to make an accreditation recommendation to the Commission on Secondary Schools at the conclusion of our visit. Our five member team has unanimously concluded that:

1. The school has clearly outlined appropriate objectives.
2. The school has established actions plans under which those objectives can be achieved however some adjustments may need to be made in order to address all aspects of the objectives.
3. The school is actively working toward achieving the objectives.
4. The school should be able to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

In addition, this Team believes that Bishop Guilfoyle High School has shown evidence that each of the following Validating the Vision parameters are in place.

- There is a focus on student performance and school improvement efforts are aimed at student learning, student performance and student results.
- The objectives are measurable and there is a viable internal monitoring process in place.
- The school is engaged in continuous clarification of its' unique mission, beliefs, and expected student performance objectives. The school is action oriented as show by the development of long-term strategic action plans that integrate programs, services, facilities and support to address growth needs.
- The school is committed to continuous evaluation, an annual review process, and a dynamic process with the flexibility to modify action plans.
- There is a climate of inclusiveness and evidence exists of the involvement and collaboration of stakeholders in the planning process.

The Validation Team will be pleased to recommend the continued accreditation for Bishop Guilfoyle High School.

When participating on a Validating the Vision Team visit, team members always walk away with renewed vigor and inspiration. We leave Bishop Guilfoyle High School enriched by our interaction with each other and from our contact with and experience in the environment created by the virtues of the Bishop Guilfoyle community: Goodness, Discipline and Knowledge.

Next Steps:

A preliminary report will be compiled from the team sections.

Mrs. Donnelly and/or Mr. Gervinski will review the report for technical information. They are not able to share the information with you at that time.

I will finalize the report once they return it to me and send it to Middle States. At that point Middle States takes over. They will be your point of contact as work continues with your plan.

In about 2 and a half to three years you will be visited once again by a member of the team to conduct a mid-point review. The reviewer will check for progress toward meeting the objective and determine how the community has been kept informed of your progress.

You will need to continue documentation and communication until the final report is due, at which time, as you know since you have been through the protocol before, you begin the process all over again.

Good luck in your journey. I'm sure it will be an enlightening and exciting one for school renewal, especially with the new corporate structure in place. You are at the beginning of a process; have patience and trust in God and the knowledge that you are making it possible for the caring, faith community of Bishop Guilfoyle High School to become a reality for students in this area.