



Baton Rouge Lutheran School Baton Rouge, Louisiana

March 21-22, 2019

**Lutheran School
Consulting Service
(LSCS)**

**Assessment Visit
Report**

LCMS School Ministry
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LSCS ASSESSMENT VISIT REPORT DISCLAIMER

This report is a privileged document submitted by the LSCS assessment consultant directly to the school and congregation. The distribution of the report and its availability for public consideration beyond that point rests solely in the hands of the school and congregation. A copy, however, is sent to the LSCS office and to the LCMS district education executive. Beyond that, distribution is limited to those individuals with whom the school and congregation wish to share the report. The LSCS consultant, the LSCS office, and the district education executive may not release any of the information contained in this report without the approval of the school and congregation.

The LSCS consultant has utilized his best professional judgment in drawing the conclusions reported in this document. The LSCS consultant is not to be held accountable for any injudicious or unauthorized use of this document.

The primary purposes of the assessment visit were to identify school opportunities and challenges and make helpful recommendations to guide school improvement. The observations, opinions, concerns, and recommendations made in this report are based on the application submitted by the school, the observations made by the consultant during the visit, and the information received from a variety of individuals and groups.

The recommendations in this report are not requirements. They reflect the best thinking of the consultant and are intended to be helpful. This report will be used effectively if it is used to assist improvement.

SCHOOL: Baton Rouge Lutheran School
 Baton Rouge, Louisiana

ASSESSMENT DATES: March 21-22, 2019

LSCS CONSULTANTS: Dennis Gehrke
 Retired Director of Lutheran Schools
 Missouri District

INTERVIEWS

I had the opportunity to talk with the following people or groups during the visit:

- Pastor
- Interim Principal
- Next Principal
- Preschool Director
- Teachers
- Board of Directors
- Eighth Grade Students
- Parents
- Grandparents
- Chief Operations Officer
- School Secretary
- Volunteers

SURVEY RESULTS

The Lutheran School Consulting Services program administered a survey prior to the assessment visit. Ninety-nine constituents responded to the survey. The results and comments are given to the contact person. The survey identified the following top-five items for the church/school:

1. It easy to see that the school's focus is on Jesus Christ.
2. The principal is the leader of the school in words and actions.
3. The school is Gospel centered; a place of prayer, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
4. It is obvious to visitors that this is a Christian school.
5. The teachers are effective teachers (skills and abilities).

The survey also identified the bottom-five items:

1. The school has an effective PR, marketing, and student recruitment plan.
2. The school has a viable future.
3. Church and school do strategic planning together for the common good.
4. The school is keeping pace with current trends in education.
5. School tuition income provides adequate financial support for the school.

In addition the results identified and divided respondents into three categories (definitions included with results):

- | | | |
|----|------------|----|
| 1. | Promoters | 52 |
| 2. | Passives | 17 |
| 3. | Detractors | 28 |

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Baton Rouge Lutheran School has many blessings. Often constituents focus on the concerns and forget about all the positive blessings that God has provided. The following observations are evidenced from the site visit interviews:

1. Trinity Lutheran Church has served the Baton Rouge community since 1957. Kindergarten classes, originally located at First Lutheran Church were moved to Trinity in 1964
2. The church has a strong commitment to Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod doctrines and practices.
3. Board of Director members expressed a strong desire to continue to maintain a Lutheran School.
4. Pastor David Buss faithfully serves the congregation and is supportive of the school ministry.
5. Gordon Chamber is a highly-qualified and capable administrator of the school who has been serving as interim principal since December.
6. A passionate and dedicated teaching staff interacts with students, their families, and in the community.
7. Parents and grandparents expressed great appreciation for the quality, Christian education that their children are receiving.
8. The decision to move all programs to the Trinity Oaks location has answered many questions about the future of the school.
9. The Trinity Oaks location is a beautiful setting for a church, school, and preschool.
10. The church and preschool facilities at Trinity Oaks are well done and make a positive first impression to visitors and constituents.
11. A new principal has been called beginning in the 2019-20 school year. She has many years of experience at the school and is respected by teachers, families and staff.
12. Many people expressed appreciation for the positive communication that is now coming from school administration.

13. Parents/grandparents value the safe, welcoming, and nurturing environment that the school provides.
14. Most people that were interviewed expressed excitement about the relocation of the school and the opportunity to have all ministries of the church at the same location.
15. The decision has been made to change the name of the school to Trinity Lutheran School.

CONCERNS

Many changes have come to Trinity since the original application in early December for a Lutheran School Consulting Services visit. During this time an interim principal was put in place, decisions were made to move the school to the Trinity Oaks location, and the present site has been put up for sale. Consequently, the recommendations that are now being made now vary significantly from what probably would have been done at an earlier date.

1. New location for the school

A frequently occurring comment made in the survey comments was, "the church has abandoned the school". It appeared that there may be some tension between church and school. Now that the decision has been made to move the school, it is time for everyone to get on board and celebrate the ministry opportunities at Trinity. Move forward with excitement and see how God is going to bless all the ministry efforts in this one location.

The fairly large number of "detractors" from the survey should be immersed with communication about the blessings at Trinity and the fact that students, families, and the community are being touched by the Gospel.

2. Combined classrooms

Initially, some people may express concern about combined classrooms and it may have an impact on enrollment. It is important to be prepared for those concerns and:

- a. Study the research about students in combined classrooms.
- b. Communicate the positive advantages of students that have experienced combined classes. A few are listed below:
 - Research has shown that there is no difference in academic achievement.

- Split-grade students are less competitive with one another.
- Younger children gain self-confidence and maturity by being exposed to older students.
- Some students benefit from having the same teacher for two years.
- Students tend to take greater personal responsibility for their learning.
- There is greater peer-to-peer learning and friendships are developed across grade levels.

c. Celebrate the successes of students

3. Financial Ramifications

The move to the new campus and the potential loss in enrollment may cause concern for the amount of money that the school is costing the congregation. It is extremely important that Trinity Lutheran give the new arrangement at least two years to develop. As enrollment grows, the school will take on more responsibility for the finances necessary for operating a school.

4. Policy Based Governance

The congregation has recently adopted Policy Based Governance for operation. While this form of governance has been officially instituted, it has not been fully developed. Here are a few thoughts as you develop the governance model at Trinity:

- a. It is essential to develop a policy manual that spells out board's roles, responsibilities, limitations, and targets.
- b. Establish a procedure for getting reports from the department heads. This can be done in person or in writing, but in-person communication at board meetings enhances communication from the departments to the board, and communication from the board back to the departments and their constituents.
- c. Establish an appeals process for the school so that parents know the procedure and where final decisions are made.
- d. Provide training in policy based governance for all new board members.
- e. Establish a strategic planning process for the school and congregation.

5. Lack of Accreditation

Quality schools are accredited by national accrediting agencies. The value of accreditation is not just gaining the certificate, but the self-study process will improve the school. National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) recognizes

schools that provide quality Christian education and continually seek to improve. Once the school is firmly established at its new location, hopefully within two years, begin the accreditation process.

6. Lack of Technology

Staff, parents, board members and students expressed concern that technology is not sufficient to meet the needs of students today. Potential families visiting the school are expecting that their children will have access to current technology.

When attempting to improve technology it is important to focus on three aspects; secure internet access, current equipment, and training for teachers.

At one time it was common to establish a computer room and hire a computer teacher. Today, a greater emphasis is put on training teachers to use technology in their classroom and incorporate its use in many subject areas to help prepare students for the technological world in which they already live.

7. Small class size

While parents are greatly appreciative of smaller class sizes it can also be a negative to the school financially as well as limiting potential growth. In most Lutheran schools it is best to have at least 17 students per full-time teacher. The additional revenue from more students would enable the school to be more financially accountable.

Embark on a targeted marketing program or approach to increase enrollment. There are multiple processes available for study and implementation. The most effective approaches make use of "word of mouth" tactics and in many places the use of an Admissions Director.

8. Vouchers

Trinity has consciously made the decision to not make use of the voucher program available in Louisiana. It is feared that the voucher program could significantly change the culture of the school. Many private schools successfully use voucher programs without harming their school climate. Vouchers can be an important source of revenue and encouragement for families to enroll in the school.

Establish a committee or task force to study the implementation of vouchers. Contact private schools that use the program and determine the ramifications. After study, report back to the Board of Directors with potential options.

9. Website

The website for Baton Rouge Lutheran School is outdated and not conducive to encouraging new families to contact the school. A significant amount of families today that are looking for a new school will first go to the internet. If they are pleased with what they see on a school's website, they will then drive around the school to see the facilities. After these two steps they may then contact the school for a personal tour.

It is probably wise to develop a brand new website for Trinity Lutheran School. Seek help from people with expertise in website development and assign responsibility for maintaining the website.

10. Fellowship Hall/Gym

At the Trinity Oaks location a need exists to have facilities that can be used for larger gatherings for the congregation and also be used for programs of the school including athletic events. Hopefully the Florida Blvd. site will sell quickly and put the congregation in a position to consider the building of a new fellowship hall/gym. This new facility will enhance opportunities for congregational activities as well as meet the expectation that potential families have for a school.

IMPLEMENTING THE LSCS RECOMMENDATIONS

School improvement is an ongoing process; and it is necessary in order for a school to maintain a quality Christian education program. The LSCS recommendations are intended to provide action plans that will direct the school to develop improvement. The LSCS consultant encourages the school to develop and implement action plans to address the issues highlighted in this assessment report.

It is recommended that you:

1. Pray for God's guidance and direction as you seek to develop and implement the school improvement recommendations.
2. Print and distribute the report to all constituents (teachers, staff, and board members). While the entire report need not be duplicated in its entirety, sections of the report should be communicated to the respective groups.
3. Read and become familiar with the assessment report.
4. Commit to assisting in implementing the recommendations of the assessment report.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Although the LSCS visit was only for a short time, it was very apparent that Baton Rouge/Trinity is a good school with a dedicated Christian staff that loves the Lord and desires to provide quality education for the students and families. This important school ministry needs to continue in Baton Rouge so that additional families may be touched by the love of Jesus Christ and His kingdom expanded. I am willing to assist the school and church as a resource person. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.