



State of the School

January 2012

THE THUNDER ROLLS *Special Edition*

Dear Friends of St. James Academy,

It is rather amazing how quickly this school year has gone. It seems like yesterday that I was introducing our new academic leader, Principal Karla Leibham, to parents at the beginning of the school year. As the year progresses I watch with amazement and humbleness at the progress of our school, community and our now 698 students. Let's call this letter the St. James Academy State of the School, because so many accomplishments deserve to be noted.

Continuing to Focus on Community and Faith

On Monday, January 23, St. James Academy was represented by over 60 students and adults in Washington D.C. for the March for Life. At the same time, 100 students were on the steps of the State Capitol in Topeka at a Pro Life Rally. The rest of our students and faculty were in school where we held a pro-life prayer service. I was fortunate to speak about the process my wife and I went through when we adopted our son, Sam. The idea of someone choosing life so Missy and I could start our family has always affected the way I feel on the anniversary of Roe vs. Wade. What a gift it is for me to work in a high school that allows and encourages its members to share their Catholic faith. It always creates a bit of nervousness in me to step up in front of 600 people and speak, much less share a personal story. But it was all worthwhile when I walked down the hall after my talk and had eye contact from students who normally do not look at me as well as having students start conversations with me about my family. My experience is validation that St. James Academy is thriving in a culture of a community, faith and family.

Creating that culture was a process started at St. James Academy before we even opened in 2005. There was a great deal of time and energy given from many individuals to help establish the community of faith that our families are blessed to enjoy. As the President of this school, I am in daily prayer about maintaining and enhancing the school that St. James Academy has become. Continual growth could compromise the culture if we are not in constant dialogue about how to maintain a community of faith. We are very intentional about how to live our faith in the day-to-day operations of a school, in both words and actions. This is why I challenge our 70 staff and faculty members to evaluate their classrooms, teams, events and relationships to make sure they are aligned with the mission of St. James Academy.

Success in the Classrooms

The academic progress of St. James Academy is remarkable. As we spend time with prospective parents and students, I am always asked about proof of academic quality at our school. Some notable, measurable achievements include:

- Average ACT score of the 2011 graduating class was 24.9, ranking them among the top 20% in the nation. In the class of 2012, seventeen scored a 30 or higher, which is the top 3% of all U.S. students. Ranking in the top 10% nationally were 44 of our seniors who scored higher than 27.
- Two-thirds of the 2011 Graduates tested through Advance Placement college level courses. 89% of the 2011 class earned College Now credits. This year,

125 students will graduate with a total 423 college credit hours through College Now. These accomplishments provide college savings of \$300 per credit hour at a public, four-year university or \$1,200 per credit hour at a private, four-year university.

- In the class of 2012, 17 students received Kansas Honors based on a calculation of grade point average and ACT score. They are ranked in the top 10% of all students in the state of Kansas. Last year, 16 students earned Kansas Honors.
- Ten members of the Class of 2013 scored over 200 on the PSAT, which serves as a baseline for Nation Merit Commended recognition. This is more than the previous 3 years combined.



•The Class of 2012 has applied to 88 schools across the country, and made an average of 4.4 applications per student, totaling 719 applications. They applied to schools such as:

- Washington University in St. Louis
- Northwestern University
- Notre Dame University
- Vanderbilt University
- Boston College University
- Villanova University
- Cornell University
- Harvard University
- Rice University
- Embry Riddle University
- Yale University

The top ten schools receiving 2012 St. James applications: Kansas State, University of Kansas, St. Louis University, Creighton, Benedictine, Loyola University Chicago, Pittsburg State, Drake, Marquette and Washington University St. Louis.

- On Kansas State Assessments our students continue to excel. We are a three-year Standard of Excellence school in Reading, and a two-year Standard of Excellence in Math. The scores have increased significantly - three percentage points each year - in Math and remain steady on reading with one percentage point increase per year to 98.9% of our population achieving “proficient” in 2010-11.
- 20.4% of all St. James students are on First Honor Roll first semester 2011-12 because they achieved grades of 96% or higher. In the freshmen class alone, nearly two-thirds scored over 90%, qualifying them for Second or First Honors.

Mrs. Leibham likes to emphasize that the most current research tells us there are four indicators, “the 4 C’s”, of a 21st Century Learner: collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity. Proudly, all four of these indicators for future success are supported in St. James Academy classrooms as well as in our Community/House system.

But the real telling of our college-prep success comes from our graduates.

Our Graduates’ Success in College

Considering that we have graduated just three classes at St. James Academy, history of academic excellence is brief. But these real-life stories of St. James alumni are a testament to our academic excellence.

- Five members of the class of 2009 (just 103 graduates) were accepted as college Juniors into the highly competitive College of Pharmacy at the University of Kansas.
- 70% of 2011 SJA Graduates entered college with academic scholarships averaging more than \$7,900 per year. Scholarship offers average over \$7,000 for the class of 2010, and 50% of those awards were from state universities; those from private schools were significantly higher.
- Members of the class of 2011 most recently returned to St. James Academy over the holiday break, sharing with staff how well they are doing in college courses. They compare their knowledge of course content,



organizational skills, and comfort with technology, to those of roommates and classmates who attended other high schools. SJA Alumni feel they have a definite advantage in collegiate academics, thanks to the skills acquired at St. James.

- One elated parent of a 2011 grad called several SJA administrators when she learned her son made the Dean's List his first semester of college, while also participating on a Varsity sports team.
- Our true test of success will come in May 2013 when the first St. James graduating class participates in college commencement ceremonies. Then, we will have firm confirmation that preparation we provide at St. James boosts success at the university level.



Enrollment for 2012

We had 200 eighth graders take the placement test this month. They came from 30 different junior highs and home schools; they will be driving to St. James from nearly all Johnson County parishes and school districts, Wyandotte County, Leavenworth County, Lawrence, and Louisburg. Net growth for the 2012-13 school year is anticipated to be 40 students.

Last fall's open house had one of the biggest turnouts in our history. In January, 7th & 8th grade night at the basketball games saw a record 190 guests. We also invited prospective parents to visit classrooms in the fall semester. These visits were hosted by current St. James parents and provided a look at every-day life in our school and several 8th grade parents stated that this experience was the deciding factor in their choice to enroll their 8th grader at St. James Academy.



We gained 9 new students, freshmen, sophomores and juniors, as transfers second semester.

This spring several new programs will be introduced, to begin forming relationships with junior high families in the Johnson County region.

Response to our programs and events indicates continued growth and stability for the St. James Academy community for a long time to come.

Accreditation

St. James Academy is fully accredited by the Kansas State Department of Education and AdvancED. Years ago, accreditation was a measure of books, desks, and other resources. The pendulum changed in the early 90's to include student performance. On February 7, St. James Academy has its first external team visit. The six members of this team will interview teachers, students, parents, and community members to gather information about the seven standards (student performance included). We will be happy to share the results of this visit when the team gives us their commendations and required actions. We will never settle for status quo.

Thank you for your ongoing support of St. James Academy. We are blessed to partner with so many families, friends, businesses and other allies of Catholic education to pass on the faith to future generations.

In Christ,

Andy Tylicki
President