



HOLY SPIRIT PREPARATORY SCHOOL BLUE RIBBON SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE SUMMARY

Established in 1996, Holy Spirit Preparatory School promotes a classical college preparatory program of academic excellence and authentic Catholic faith formation for students in Preschool through High School. Students in Kindergarten through 6th grade are located on a multi-acre, newly refurbished campus. As a private Catholic School we serve students from all areas of Atlanta and surrounding communities.

Holy Spirit Prep's motto "Ministrare non ministrari", quotes Jesus who said: "I have come to serve, not to be served." This states our education goal which is at the heart of our school program. Each child is taught to recognize God as the center of their lives, and works to develop God-given gifts as fully as possible. Students learn to be drawn into selfless service to Him through their fellow human beings.

360 students comprise Kindergarten through sixth grade. Our maximum class size of twenty allows students to receive personalization in their academic programs. Faculty and staff include 34 teachers, 13 paraprofessionals, and other support staff. Administration consists of the Principal, Associate Principal, Student Success Director and Dean of Faculty. The Finance, Marketing, and Development departments are shared with the other campuses and are located offsite.

Holy Spirit offers an academically challenging curriculum, comprised of high standards. Our Personalized Learning Program provides individual enrichment for students, while our Resource Program provides for students who need additional support. The rigorous curriculum is composed of core academic subjects, along with foreign language, fine arts, physical education, technology, enrichment, and sacramental preparation. Sixth grade students are prepared for their transfer to Junior High School through additional responsibilities and privileges, along with the opportunity to pursue Honors level studies in many academic areas.

Student life is enriched through more than 30 school clubs, activities, and sports

programs. Almost every student has participated in at least one of these programs, with 77% of the students playing in at least one school-sponsored sport during the 2007-08 school year. Students are taught to serve through grade level service projects, ranging from Kindergartners making sandwiches for the homeless to fifth graders working with children of the Solidarity Mission.

Through the Parent Volunteer Association (PVA), parents answer the call to serve, as they support a multitude of educational as well as social activities. Science Day, Advent Night, All School Family Picnic, Field Day, and Fall Festival are some of the activities organized by the PVA. Each year, more than 85% of our parents volunteer their time and talents.

In just 13 years our school has evolved from a fledgling elementary school to a dynamic learning community dually accredited by the Southern Association of Independent Schools and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. We are members of the Georgia Independent School Association, Georgia Middle School Association, National Catholic Education Association, and National Middle School Association.

Holy Spirit Preparatory School offers students unique educational and character formation opportunities in a vibrant faith-filled environment while involving our families both as partners in the educational process and as active members of our broader faith and social community.

INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

1. Assessment Results:

Holy Spirit Preparatory School takes the complete battery of the Stanford Achievement Test, Form TA (Stanford 9) in kindergarten through the sixth grade and the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT) in the first, third, and fifth grades. Stanford 9 is a standardized test that allows year-to-year comparisons based on the “sameness” of tasks students must complete, procedures used to administer the test, and the methods used to score the test. The scores provide an “external” look at the performance of students independent of the school’s assessment of student learning. It is a norm-referenced test using norms from spring 2004.

In contrast to the difficulty in comparing percentile ranks to determine growth or loss, scaled scores can be used to make such comparisons because the Stanford 9 raw score to scaled score conversions in each given area are identical at each level of the test.

Additionally, each Stanford 9 subtest and content area total features a constant scaled score range, regardless of the grade tested, test level, or test form. This allows comparison of a given student's and school's achievement in a given subtest or content area total from year to year as well as over several years.

The reading area total consists of two subtests: vocabulary and comprehension. Overall reading scores are consistent across the grades, with mean student scores in the 83rd to 91st percentile. In reviewing scaled scores in the reading area total over the past five years, one notices consistent and steady progress. There have been strong gains year-to-year in reading across the grade levels. When one compares scores from the verbal section of the OLSAT with the reading scores on the Stanford 9 for grades one, three and five, it is evident that students' reading scores are significantly higher than what might be expected. Student performance indicates that they are being challenged. Reading scores are consistently above archdiocesan norms.

The math area total consists of problem solving and procedures. Overall math scores are consistent across the grades, with mean student scores in the 82nd to 87th percentile. In reviewing scaled scores in the math area total over the past five years, one notices modest and significant gains across the grade levels. There have been no losses in math during this five-year period. Cognitive abilities once again indicate that students perform at levels above the expected range. Math scores are consistently above the archdiocesan norms and indicate that the children are responding to a strong instructional program.

A positive impact of the test results for the accelerated student is the participation in Duke University's Talent Identification Program (TIP). Based on 3rd and 4th grade scores, 44% of students in grades four and five are qualified to participate in the program.

2. Using Assessment Results:

Each year the teachers and administration review the Stanford test scores to help guide future instruction, professional development efforts, and to serve as a benchmark in the pursuit of continuous improvement. The test scores are reviewed by grade level and compared to the private school and Catholic school norms in each subject area. Grade level scores are also compared against the school's running average for the past six years as a means of evaluating whether the program appears to be improving, weakening, or holding its own as our enrollment grows.

In addition, scores of each individual student are longitudinally plotted in each test area (for as many years as there is data for that student) against the national norms to evaluate individual student progress and growth. Finally, we compare the individual student

achievement scores on the Stanford with individual student ability scores on the Otis Lennon School Ability Test to ensure that each student is achieving at a level that is commensurate with his or her ability.

Science has been an area of focus for the past few years. Faculty in-service and meetings have been used to align the curriculum, as well as to discuss strategies to improve student learning. Full Option Science System (FOSS), a research based science curriculum was fully implemented across all grade levels this year. There also has been work to more fully integrate science throughout the school. Three years ago, an annual Science Day was implemented to stimulate students' interest in science. The annual science fair provides an opportunity for students in the upper elementary grades to develop a hypothesis and work through the scientific processes in an experiment. (NB: Significant gains were made in students' science scores on the 2008-09 Stanford testing.)

3. Communicating Assessment Results:

Faculty and administration are involved in ongoing communication with parents, with a commitment to respond to parental concerns by the next business day, at the latest. Individual conferences with parents to address more serious academic concerns are also scheduled in a timely manner. Bimonthly grade-level Student Success Team (SST) meetings among teachers and administrators facilitate remediation plans for students who are struggling to achieve academic success. Edline, a web-based program, is used to provide parents with updates of weekly grade-level tests, projects, and assignments. Parents of students in grades three through six have access to their child's grades on Edline at any time, with updated grades provided every Friday afternoon. Assessed student work is sent home every week for parents to review. Parents are required to sign the folder and return it to school the next day to ensure that they are aware of their student's progress. After-school tutorial is offered four days a week to students who benefit from extra support on an individual or group basis.

Students in grades one through six receive progress reports at mid-quarter and report cards at the end of each quarter. Parents of students in kindergarten and pre-1st receive report cards and Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) for their children three times a year at parent-teacher conferences. Parent-teacher conferences for the higher grades are held in the fall. Parents receive a copy of their child's Personalized Learning Plan at the fall conference. Updated versions for their child are provided at the end of the school year.

Standardized test scores are sent home at the end of the school year, with an invitation to parents to contact the Student Success Director if clarification is needed regarding their student's test scores.

4. **Sharing Success:**

With three distinct campuses, considerable emphasis is placed on communicating lower school successes to the other divisions, to the parent community, and to the community at large.

Administrative meetings are held monthly with the school president, division heads, and other key administrators there to share academic and extracurricular accomplishments. This same group meets once a month with the Parent Volunteer Association officers from the three divisions to plan and evaluate family events that unite the school community.

Various resources are used to reach parents, faculty, alumni, grandparents and community members to share school successes. The Principal's weekly newsletter highlights individual student achievement, including the honor roll lists every quarter, and keeps parents up to date on special events and advancements in the curriculum. *Ministrare*, a publication sent to the entire school community once a quarter, captures the successes of students and programs from all three campuses. Area newspapers often carry photos and descriptions of special events at the lower school.

Teachers communicate grade level information via weekly newsletters that are sent home in students' weekly folders, and through newsletters posted on homeroom Edline pages. Posted on the all-school Web site is a community page dedicated to the communication of successes throughout the school, as well as a section devoted to Lower School curriculum, clubs offering enrichment opportunities, special events and student accomplishments. A special e-mail address, news@holyspiritprep.org, was created for teachers and administrators to report any newsworthy projects or events.

Faculty and administrators have represented the school in educational workshops, such as the Georgia Independent School Association Conference, by presenting effective pedagogical strategies to colleagues from other schools. The lower school has also hosted Gesell training for teachers in the Atlanta area.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. **Curriculum:**

Holy Spirit Preparatory School offers differentiated and challenging curricula at all grade levels. It is composed of high standards that encourage all students to reach their full potential. All curricula are centered on Catholic beliefs, and the faith is woven throughout

all subject areas. Personalized learning is at the heart of Holy Spirit Prep's instruction, for each child is looked upon as an individual. Along with the curriculum standards, students have goals specific to them as learners. Classroom teachers receive support to help ensure students have the necessary learning experiences to achieve their individual goals.

Religion permeates all subjects and activities. Students grow and thrive in an environment where Catholic faith is at the center, providing them with a strong foundation for how they should live their lives. Religious concepts and doctrine are taught in the classroom, and through a virtues program, the sacraments, liturgical feast days, prayer, and service to others. Students learn about their faith, how to live it out in daily life, and, share it with others.

The Language Arts program incorporates all aspects of literacy – reading, writing, listening, speaking and viewing. The workshop format is used for both reading and writing. Small group and individual instruction allow each student to read and write on their individual level and discover what books, genres, and topics they enjoy. Phonics, spelling, and grammar are all taught in context, enabling students to apply what they are learning, and see the meaning and purpose of these skills.

Through Science, all students actively construct ideas using scientific inquiry, investigation, and analysis. This enables students to learn important science concepts, think critically, and fosters in them an appreciation for the importance of scientific processes.

The Social Studies curriculum is focused on developing each student's awareness of self and their place in this world. Students build an understanding and appreciation of the various places, people and cultures in our world. Geographic concepts are taught at all levels, with older students having an opportunity to participate yearly in the National Geographic Geography Bee.

The Math curriculum works to fully engage all students in the understanding of mathematics through cooperative learning groups and independent work. Through the use of manipulatives and real life problems, students work to develop their mathematic reasoning and problem-solving skills. The curriculum progresses through Pre-Algebra in the sixth grade.

The Spanish program is designed to facilitate communication in Spanish and to increase an understanding of different cultures. Students are encouraged to communicate in Spanish right from the start, and to practice interpreting, expressing and negotiating meaning through extensive and frequent peer interactions. The Spanish curriculum

includes vocabulary, grammar and cultural study.

The Fine Arts curriculum includes Music and Art. Art classes introduce students to varied art mediums, while encouraging creativity and self-expression. At every grade level, art history is integrated into the curriculum through the study of famous artists both past and present. Music classes introduce students to sacred and secular music, as well as drama and movement. Every student in every grade participates in a theatrical production each year.

The physical education program works to develop each student physically, mentally, and socially to the extent of their ability. The curriculum involves practices that are both instructionally and developmentally appropriate for students in kindergarten through sixth grade. Classes incorporate active participation, games, fitness, and the development of skills in a safe, supportive environment.

The technology program not only strives to prepare students to use the tools of a modern electronic world, but also works to develop students' organizational and strategic-thinking skills.

2a. Reading:

The goal of the reading program is to create lifelong readers and a true appreciation for literature. Reading is taught using the Readers' Workshop format, which provides students with an opportunity to read independently every day. It also provides teachers with ample time to work with individual students and students in small groups to meet each child's needs. Students choose books that are on their individual reading level and are based on their own unique interests. They work independently and cooperatively to respond to and discuss books read. Throughout the school year, students encounter a wide variety of texts and learn to appreciate different genres and authors.

Through the Rigby Literacy program, guided reading is used as needed in the primary grades. Small group work enables students to develop the necessary decoding skills to read fluently. Teachers in the primary grades are Orton-Gillingham trained and use this multi-sensory approach to teaching phonics skills and strategies. The reading comprehension strategies of proficient readers are a large part of the curriculum at each grade level and are modeled continuously throughout the school year. In the upper elementary grades, class novels and literature circles are used to foster a love of reading and to promote discussion skills. Through read-aloud activities, shared reading, independent reading, and small group work, students expand their vocabulary, deepen their comprehension, and grow as readers.

Reading is also used as an avenue for the students to grow as a community and to support one another. Through the Buddies Program, fourth graders read weekly with Kindergartners, and third graders read monthly with pre-school students. Third through sixth grade students have the opportunity to work together on teams to read a variety of novels and compete in the annual Battle of the Books competition.

3. Additional Curriculum Area:

Science is integrated throughout many aspects of Holy Spirit Prep as students learn important science concepts and to think critically about how the world around them works. Full Option Science System (FOSS), a research based science curriculum developed at the University of California at Berkley, is used to provide meaningful science education for our students through exploration and investigation. The science curriculum encourages students at all grade levels to explore, investigate, inquire, and analyze.

The science lab is used to further students' appreciation and understanding of science and how it connects to their everyday lives. The lab is home to many animals, including hundreds of horseshoe crabs, which are part of a grant-funded study through the University of Georgia to gather data on the growth parameters of horseshoe crabs. Students also use a trail on our campus to study plants in their natural habitat. Recently, students worked on a project with the city of Sandy Springs to name a creek that flows through school property near the trail.

Students also experience science in its natural setting on a variety of overnight field trips. Fifth graders journey to Elachee to deepen their understanding of life science. There they classify trees using dichotomous keys, wade in streams collecting larva, and navigate the Elachee hiking course. Sixth graders visit Skidaway Island, an undeveloped island off the coast of Georgia, to study oceanography along estuaries, salt marshes, and tidal zones.

Science Day is an annual event designed to stimulate students' interest in science. Parents volunteer their time to present different elements to students in an engaging, hands-on way. The annual science fair provides an opportunity for students in the upper elementary grades to develop a hypothesis and work through the scientific processes in an experiment.

4. Instructional Methods:

Holy Spirit Prep's goal is to reach all students at their level; therefore, differentiated

instruction is a major strategy utilized by all teachers. Students are taught in whole group settings, small groups, pairs, and individually, based on their needs for the particular concept or skill. Different learning styles are addressed through various teaching strategies. Cooperative learning groups are used to foster communication skills as well as teamwork. Differentiated assessment is also used to ensure all students have a fair opportunity to display their learning. A resource teacher works individually with students in need of extra assistance.

Orton-Gillingham's multi-sensory techniques for teaching phonics and reading are used by the resource and primary teachers to meet the needs of students with reading difficulties. Through individual reading and writing conferences, students receive one-on-one guidance and feedback from their teacher, enabling students to reach their full potential. Manipulatives and real-life problem solving situations facilitate students' understanding and application of mathematical skills. Through laptops and Smart Boards, students make use of their technology skills to further understand other subject areas.

Holy Spirit Prep also uses an interdisciplinary approach, connecting all curricular areas for maximal learning experiences. Students annually experience an Interdisciplinary Day, with a particular theme, such as the Renaissance or the Olympics, which is then carried throughout the year. Drama is an avenue that is used to connect various curricular areas, through plays that address religion, language arts, social studies, and fine arts standards. All grade levels take field trips that are tied to the curriculum standards, such as the third grade who attends *Journey Through Justice*, where they conduct a mock trial to learn about our country's judicial system.

5. Professional Development:

Professional development and growth is a priority and highly valued at Holy Spirit Prep. Educators are provided with many opportunities- on and off campus- to attend professional development workshops and participate in continuing education programs.

On campus, teachers have many opportunities to further their educational knowledge and growth as professionals. Holy Spirit is approved by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission to provide courses where teachers can earn Professional Learning Units for Georgia Teaching Certificate renewal. Study Groups, facilitated by the Director of Student Success, are one way for teachers to earn Professional Learning Units during the school year. These groups present an opportunity for teachers to reflect upon, review, and integrate new thinking into their classroom instruction. Study groups lead to new thinking and allow teachers to see each other as experts through discussions of additional possibilities for implementing instructional practices. Mini-workshops on applicable

topics for our teachers, such as Writers Workshop and Literature Circles, are offered on campus as well.

Each grade-level team has the opportunity to share new insights and understandings with colleagues during faculty meetings. These presentations of best practices ensure all are informed of current educational research and trends. In addition to coming together to learn, the administration selects research-based, professional books for teachers to read over the summer. Information in the text is referenced and used throughout the following school year.

Fund-raising and parent donations have created a large sum of money that is used to fund off-campus professional development and continuing education for teachers. Every teacher receives money to use for conferences, workshops, or advanced degrees. All are encouraged to attend courses to further their educational knowledge and skills. Many teachers have used this money to attend Orton-Gillingham training, the National Conference on Differentiation Instruction, and for graduate school courses.

6. School Leadership:

Administrative leadership at the lower school includes the Principals, the Dean of Faculty, (on campus two days a week), and the Student Success Director, who provides support to teachers, students and parents. The School President and the Business Manager, both located on the upper school campus, provide additional support. The school's collaborative leadership model is one of shared vision and decision-making to encourage contributions from faculty and staff and to develop teacher leaders. From this structure a sense of community and a commitment to excellence have developed throughout the school, with teachers and staff who model the virtues of their faith. Concrete examples of the contributions our faculty have made are evident in the programs selected after extensive research into meeting the needs of individual learners: Reader's Workshop, Writer's Workshop, *Sitton Spelling*, and *Everyday Mathematics*, all of which offer differentiated instruction. Decision-making is shared among administrators and grade-level teachers at bi-monthly Student Success Team (SST) meetings and at faculty meetings. A study of students' scores on Stanford testing resulted in the formation of teacher-led committees in the areas of mathematics, science, study skills and interdisciplinary learning, with recommendations that were shared school-wide. Faculty meetings are devoted to differentiated instruction, focusing this year on the best practices of faculty in the areas of performance assessment and gender differences. Once a month teachers meet with grade-level colleagues to address issues and challenges pertaining to their specific age group of students.

Administrators practice an open-door policy with both faculty and parents, resulting in improvements to classroom procedures, and in areas that have ranged from more nutritious student lunches to safer carpool procedures.