

Schools That Can: A Validation Report For
HOLY FAMILY LUTHERAN SCHOOL
CHICAGO

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July 19, 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

VALIDATION STUDY REPORT

APPENDICES

A. CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP

B. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

INTRODUCTION

Schools That Can (STC) is a national network of unaffiliated safe, high achieving schools located in inner cities and serving a largely poor minority population of students. Academy of the Holy Family Lutheran School, Chicago, has been identified as one of these high-performing schools. As more schools are identified, they are included in the network subject to a validation of their education program. The network aims to celebrate, support and promote these schools' accomplishments. The entire list of criteria for inclusion into the network appears in Appendix A at the rear of this document.

After a school has been identified and initially vetted by Schools That Can representatives the actual validation begins. The validation process for each school is consistent, subject to variations in teachers' and school's schedules and parent availability. Typically the process includes the following steps:

- Two to three weeks before a site visit, administrators are mailed a one-page parent survey to be completed by a representative 15%-20% sample of parents and a one-page survey to be completed by all teachers. These survey forms are collected at the time of the site visit.
- Each site visit typically lasts for an entire school day, or close to that amount of time. Depending upon scheduling considerations, the visit begins with a brief meeting with the school administrator, who provides the visitor with the schedule for the day as well as any published or printed information about the school. Classes are then visited for about 20-30 minutes each when instruction is occurring. Usually five to six classes are visited. Classroom management styles, techniques for behavior management and nature and style of instruction are observed (e.g., whole class, small group, lecturing, modeling, active or passive learning requirements)) Time is allotted to interview teachers individually, although because of time constraints teachers are occasionally interviewed in small groups. Often but not always, a sample of curriculum materials is collected. Parents are interviewed either at the beginning or end of the visit, depending upon availability, and these interviews focus on their satisfaction with the program and why they sent their children to the school as opposed to their local neighborhood school.
- Academic performance data for the schools are then downloaded from the city or State website. Comparable data for neighboring schools, the entire city, and the state are also downloaded for comparison purposes. Occasionally, some schools do not participate in the state assessment process either because the state does not allow them to participate or because they opt not to. These schools invariably administer alternative standardized test data, and these data are used and compared to national norms the particular assessment device and/or are evaluated for performance over time.

- An exit interview is usually held with the school leader at the end of the day to provide him/her with a brief and general overview of the results.
- Information from the classroom observations, interviews and academic performance are then analyzed and a report is produced within two weeks of the visit.

This report provides results of observations, interviews of parents, administrators, and teachers, and a review and analysis of academic achievement data to support the inclusion of Holy Family Lutheran School in the STC network.

Holy Family Lutheran School-Chicago

History and Mission. Holy Family Lutheran School, serving grades K -8, is affiliated with the Holy Family Ministries and was opened in 1985. The school is dedicated to having its students:

- experience spiritual growth and develop Christian values,
- acquire knowledge and create a positive vision of their future,
- obtain a quality education for life,
- build self-esteem,
- identify personal purpose and meaning,
- do God's work and accomplish miracles; and,
- be the best they can be each and every day

The recent history of the school may be described as having experienced significant turnover. The school has had five principals in the past nine years, and six new teachers –out of nine classroom teachers, in all– have been hired for the current school year. The current principal, Cheryl Collins, is in her second year at the school and the previous principal was in office for two years. Ms. Collins was recruited from Providence-St. Mel, another school in the Schools That Can network.

Holy Family currently enrolls about 150 students in grades K-8, but plans to double its enrollment when it moves into its new space in Homan Square. The school is presently located on Walton Ave. in Chicago and serves a population that is virtually entirely African-American, although one Hispanic student is attending during the current school year. The school is physically attached to a church, and the chapel of the church is used for religious services. The overall first impression is that the school is cramped for space..

The current cost per student at Holy Family is about \$5,600 and the tuition charged averages about \$1,320. The average aid amount is \$3,500 annually. Virtually all students who apply to the school are accepted, and 90% of the students admitted live in the local neighborhood. School hours are 8:30 A.M. - 3:00 P. M., with after-school programming beginning at 3:20 P. M for an additional 2 hours.

Students. One hundred and fifty students attend Holy Family for the current school year, about the same number that has attended for the past several years. All students are members of minority groups, and about 85% are eligible for free/reduced price lunch programs. The school currently enrolls four special education students with Individual Education Plans, and these children receive their special education services from Chicago Public School personnel. For the past three years (SY 2002-2005) about 12% of the students have left Holy Family and enrolled at another school prior to their graduation. When students graduate from 8th grade they tend to attend parochial high school, with Holy Trinity being the school that attracts the largest number of graduates.

Providence- St. Mel also attracts a number of graduates. Additional information about the students appears in Table 5.

Table 5
Demographics for Holy Family Lutheran School

Students enrolled	150
Pre K	15
Lower school (K-5)	96
Middle school (6-8)	39
Percent Caucasian	0
Percent African American	99+
Percent Hispanic	1
Percent Asian	0
Percent eligible for free/reduced price lunch	85
Percent mobility rate	12
Percent special education	3
Attendance rate	98%

Teachers. There are currently nine teachers employed at Holy Family, one per grade level, which translates into a student-teacher ratio of 17:1. Of the nine teachers, seven are certified.

Parent satisfaction. Survey responses were scored from 53 parents to the questionnaire described earlier in the narrative. Tabulation of parent responses to the question, *“Overall, this school provides a sound education for its students,”* appears in Table 6. 96% of parents agree or strongly agree with the statement that their children are receiving a sound education.

**Table 6
Parental Satisfaction (in Percent)**

Overall, this school provides a sound education for its students

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
68	28	4	0	0

Curriculum. Holy Family Lutheran School offers traditional curriculum opportunities in basic core subjects. The school uses the Open Court Reading series for literacy instruction, Houghton Mifflin math curriculum, and the McGraw Hill program in science. For social studies the school stresses individual investigation projects. There is a state of the art computer lab and music and art programs at all class levels. Once a week, Chapel service centers the spiritual life of Holy family School. Biblical insight, faith-building, self-esteem, and a call to ethical living are addressed. The Chapel service brings the whole school together –students, teachers and staff in the experience of one-ness. In addition to the weekly Chapel service there is a brief prayer period each morning. The result of the educational program on student performance is displayed in Table 7, with the Iowa test of Basic Skills (ITBS) assessment. Independent schools do not participate in the Illinois State assessment program.

**Table 7
Holy Family (2004-2005 School Year) (Iowa Test of Basic Skills):
National Percentile Rank**

Grade	Reading	Language M	ath	Core Total
1	57	57	46	53
2	46	47	38	42
3	33	55	52	45
4	46	47	38	42
5	42	52	49	47
6	33	32	37	32
7	48	56	61	53
8	53	59	70	56

An overall examination of the data appearing in Table 7 indicates that students perform slightly below the 50thile until the seventh grade, when their performance improves so that it is at or slightly above “grade level” performance.

Of equal importance to the absolute academic performance of students at Holy Family is a comparative analysis of scores at neighboring public schools. How does a similar population of students perform who attend local schools? Table 8 presents such data, comparing Holy Family School to three neighboring public schools.

Table 8
Comparison of ITBS Scores of Holy Family and Chicago Public Schools: Percent At or Above Grade Level

<u>Subject & Grade</u>	<u>Holy Family</u>	<u>Piccolo</u>	<u>Nash</u>	<u>Young</u>
Reading Comprehension Grade 3	39	20	26	31
Reading Comprehension Grade 8	79	32	29	43
Math Total Grade 3	50	24	24	35
Math Total Grade 8	93	39	20	52

Inspection of the data in Table 8 indicates the superior performance of students at Holy Family over peers attending neighboring public schools. Note especially, the that the magnitude of difference between Holy Family and the other schools increases as students progress from third through eighth grades. Eighth grade performance is crucial because it is the school year immediately prior to students’ entry into high school, and the academic literature indicates clearly that students are far less likely to pass high school State exams that are required for graduation if they begin high school with poor reading and math skills.

Recommendation

The school employs a school-wide behavior management program, CHAMPS, similar to the one used by Providence-St. Mel, from where the principal was recruited. That program is not only effective in minimizing disruptive behavior it is also effective in reinforcing students to remain on-task during academic instruction. I observed a few instances where students were not attending to the lesson and the teachers ignored it. Teachers should be instructed to use CHAMPS to maintain attention to academic lessons. Perhaps with additional stability in the teaching staff, and the cross pollination of ideas that invariably occurs when teachers know each other and feel comfortable working together, they will be able to share ideas for maintaining students on-task.

APPENDIX A

CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP

SCHOOLS THAT CAN member schools provide families and students from economically disadvantaged urban areas with an education based on the following criteria:

- 1. Located in the inner-city and primarily serving an economically disadvantaged population of students that are representative of its community, with at least 50% eligible for free lunch**
- 2. Striving to achieve superior levels of academic performance as measured by objective assessments and outcomes**
- 3. Emphasizing character based education**
- 4. Providing a safe, disruption-free, non discriminatory environment, where teachers can teach and children can learn**
- 5. Valued by parents and actively engaged within their communities**
- 6. Characterized by dedicated and effective leadership**
- 7. Attaining a high level of sustainability**
- 8. Willing to share “best practices” and assist other STC network schools.**

APPENDIX B

Biography

Jay Gottlieb is a professor of educational psychology in the Department of Teaching and Learning at New York University. He received his doctorate in 1972 from Yeshiva University in New York City and has spent the past thirty years conducting teaching and conducting research and evaluations in urban schools. His research focuses on the education of at-risk students and students with disabilities. Dr. Gottlieb has served as a special education expert for federal and state court cases involving special education, studied special education in the Oslo, Norway public schools, and participated in the drafting of reports to re-organize special and remedial education in the New York City schools. He has published 90 articles in various professional sources and has been the principal investigator of about two dozen research grants and contracts as well as director of several training grants, including one to train doctoral level researchers in applied research. Dr. Gottlieb was a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, a member of numerous other professional organizations, and at various points in his career, served on the editorial boards of half dozen professional journals. Dr. Gottlieb also served two terms as and elected public school trustee in his community.

