



Executive Summary

Saint Mary's School

Archdiocese of Omaha

Mr. Walt Dupre, Principal
300 N 4th St
O'Neill, NE 68763

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary Introduction.....	1
Executive Summary.....	2
Section 1: Introduction.....	2
Section 2: Student Performance.....	5
Section 3: Challenges and Opportunities.....	7
Section 4: Conclusion.....	9

Executive Summary Introduction

Executive Summary

Every school has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and student learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way school leadership considers how to organize, maintain order, and stay faithful to the school's vision. A description of the level of stakeholder engagement, trends and issues affecting the school, and the kinds of programs and services that the school implements to support student learning also contributes to the overall narrative.

The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to give schools an opportunity to tell their story, to describe their context both strengths and challenges so that the public and members of the school community have a more complete picture of how the school perceives itself and what it is deliberating as it engages in the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement.

This report is structured into 4 sections that give context about what the school faces on a day-to-day basis in providing teaching and learning in its community:

Section 1: Introduction

- Describes the community in which the school is located. Identifies the unique features and special challenges of this school community. Provides brief demographic information with regards to both students and staff and the community at large.

Section 2: Student Performance

- Gives a brief description of the school's vision about students and their performance.
- Provides a brief summary of student performance in this school. Identifies the school's goals and how the school will know they have achieved them. Describes the variety of the school's student performance assessments. Identifies how the staff engages in meaningful analysis of student work in order to modify instruction.
- Describes the school's student support programs and services. Identifies the ways in which the school ensures community/parent involvement in the life of the school.

Section 3: Challenges and Opportunities

- Identifies the major challenges the school has faced in the last 3 years and how it has addressed those challenges.

Section 4: Conclusion

- Identifies what the school is most proud of and why.
- Relates other information the school would like to share with the public and the school community.

Executive Summary

Section 1: Introduction

Provide the school's mission statement. What process was used to create the mission statement?

Describe how the school engaged its stakeholders to parents and community members in the development and fulfillment of the mission statement. Describe the community in which your school is located. What are the unique features and special challenges of your school community?

Briefly provide demographic information with regards to both students and staff and the community at large.

Narrative:

The area that became O'Neill, Nebraska was settled in the 1870's by Irishman and former Union veteran of the American Civil War, John O'Neill. Knowing the agricultural heritage of his people, O'Neill founded the settlement "to encourage poor people in getting away from the overcrowded cities of the East." In 1879, O'Neill was designated as the county seat of Holt County.

Today O'Neill, Nebraska is centered at the crossroads of U.S. Highway 275 and U.S. Highway 281. As of 2009, the population of O'Neill was 3,249. This represents a decrease of 13% since the year 2000 and follows a general trend of population shift from rural Nebraska to urban areas. In addition the median age of O'Neill residents is increasing and is significantly greater than the state average, indicating that it is the younger generations that are leaving our community.

Although O'Neill was declared the "Irish Capital of Nebraska" by the governor of the state on 1969, people of Irish ancestry are only the second largest demographic in the city. People of German decent at 38.3%, make up the largest population demographic. The overwhelming majority of the residents are white (96%). Hispanics (2.3%) are the next largest group with no other group making up more than 1% of the population. Catholics (50%) represent the largest religious affiliation in the community, followed by Methodists (14.2%), Lutheran (12.9%), and Presbyterian (7.7%).

As the Irish Capital, O'Neill celebrates St. Patrick's Day each March. The first official St. Patrick's Day celebration sponsored by the O'Neill Jaycees was held on March 17, 1967. St. Patrick's Day in O'Neill is Nebraska's first outdoor celebration each year. This celebration has been known to draw as many as 20,000 people from all over the United States and has hosted many special guests from Ireland.

Basic economic activities of O'Neill include farming, ranching, cattle feeding, retail, and medical services. Cattle, potatoes, tomatoes, soybeans, and corn are the major products produced in the area. As of March 2011, unemployment was very low at 3.5%. The area's top employers are Avera St. Anthony's Hospital, O'Neill Public Schools, Non-Pareil Potato Processing Plant, Golden Living Nursing Home, Garden Fresh Vegetables, and Saint Patrick's Church/Saint Mary's School.

In terms of educational attainment 82% of the adult residents are high school graduates, while only 18% have earned at least a bachelor's degree, and only 5% have earned a graduate degree or higher. There three colleges within ninety miles of the city of O'Neill, Northeast Community College in Norfolk, NE, Wayne State College in Wayne, NE, Mount Marty Catholic College, Yankton SD and the University of South Dakota in Vermillion, SD. Northeast Community College operates a regional satellite campus in O'Neill providing easier access to the residents of rural north central Nebraska. In addition to St. Mary's Pre-K through twelfth parochial school with an enrollment of 272 students, O'Neill has one public school district with an enrollment of nearly 800 students, consisting of one junior/senior high school and one elementary school and there is one Christian elementary school with an enrollment of approximately 20 students.

St. Mary's School, in operation since 1900, is a co-educational, Catholic parochial school in the Omaha Archdiocesan school system which serves as a center for Catholic, Christian education within St. Patrick's Parish, the O'Neill community and surrounding area.

St. Mary's School was the vision of Monsignor Michael Francis Cassidy, Pastor of St. Patrick's Church from 1886 until 1933. In the

1890's he laid the cornerstone for the new academy which was to be staffed by the Dominican Nuns. Before it was ever occupied, on February 19, 1891 it was destroyed fire. Undeterred, Monsignor Cassidy persisted in his dream. He implored the Sisters of St. Francis from Stella Niagara, New York (presently, the sisters of St. Francis from Marycrest, Denver, Colorado) to come and build a Catholic school for the residents of O'Neill and the surrounding country-side. St. Mary's Academy began operation in the fall of 1900, under the patronage of Saint Mary, Mother of Perpetual Help, with an enrollment of 106 students. Monsignor Cassidy proclaimed, "St. Mary's has but fairly begun as the great educational institution for which Almighty God has designed it." Inspired by faith and commitment, a tradition of excellence in education was established. Recognition of quality education came as early as 1908 from the Nebraska State Department of Education and in 1950 the North Central Association accredits Saint Mary's with 'exceptional standards'. In 1988, Saint Mary's School received National recognition for "Excellence in Education" awarded by the United States Department of Education for meeting the highest standards in National Secondary School's Recognition Program.

Throughout its history, the Pastor of St. Patrick's Church has served as the President of St. Mary's School. The president appoints a principal to run the day-to-day operations of the school. From its inception in 1900 until 1992 the principal was always a Religious Sister. During this period the community of religious Sisters predominantly staffed the school.

With the Sisters at the helm, the salaries and costs to run the school remained frugal in keeping with religious poverty and the material needs and upkeep of the institution was at its best with the full support of the parish and largely Catholic population. It endured and thrived through two world wars, the Great Depression of the thirties and severe drought. In 1961, Saint Mary's no longer took boarders and so needed to downsize. The sisters moved to a newly built convent and in 1962 the current Saint Mary's High School was erected north of the church, rectory, and old academy. On February 16, 1965 the grand academy was destroyed by fire. After the tragic 1965 fire the current grade school building was erected where the academy used to stand. The current high school is comprised of 10 classrooms, a lecture hall, art room, a computer lab, a library, gymnasium, boys' and girls' locker rooms, weight room, cafeteria, guidance office, and administrative offices. The current grade school building includes 8 classrooms, art room, Title I/resource room, music room, library, industrial arts shop, conference room, gymnasium, and administrative offices.

By the late 1980's the tides changed dramatically. With the loss of religious vocations the school's religious staff is replaced by lay staff. Today there is only one religious sister, the pastor, and the associate pastor that are part of the school staff. The last religious principal concluded her term in 1992; thereafter a Catholic lay principal took the helm. With this change came a huge increase in teachers and staff salaries and an uprooting of the spiritual vision, tradition and formation that the sisters maintained by their religious charism for decades. The parish scrambled to make ends meet with its donations and fund raisers and with increased tuition to be able to pay the staff and overheads. The facilities were neglected for lack of funds. During this trying time, the O'Neill Public school facilities were upgraded and a new Elementary school built. With the loss of its basic spirituality and deteriorating, outdated facilities and the burden of tuition, Saint Mary's saw over 50% of its population migrate to O'Neill Public School and a further loss of revenue.

In 1990 alumni from O'Neill and Saint Patrick's successfully rallied the school by launching the S.O.S. (Save Our School) Capital Campaign to service the substantial debt, to supplement operating costs, and to build a Foundation for the future of the school. This was followed by Vision for the Future (1995) and Vision 2000 Capital Campaigns that built up funding and made many improvements to the school's facilities. In 2006 Building Up Our Legacy Capital Campaign was successfully launched once again and the prayers and the blessings of God reflected in the generous support by local parishioners, community members, local businesses and alumni beyond the O'Neill borders, to revitalize the school. The \$1.2 million raised was first used to bring the teachers' base salary from 70% of the O'Neill Public school base to a current 95% of the Public School base salary and to make a boost in insurance coverage assistance. Next attention was turned to renovate and bring the school facilities up to speed with the needs of the twenty-first century. These included the addition of the high school commons and cafeteria; renovated library/media center, updated computer labs for grade school and high school, new fire and security system and phone-intercom system for both school buildings, updating and expanding the high school chemistry/ science lab, new energy efficient boilers in the high school, renovating the High school gym floor and adding new seating, a new elevator to all three levels of the high school, new administrative offices in the high school, a new lecture hall, renovating classrooms, putting in Smart boards, and many smaller projects.

Parallel and in the midst of these physical plant changes, was the revival of the spiritual traditions, mandatory 7-12 grade annual spiritual retreat experiences, weekly mass, regular reconciliation and enhanced standards of discipline to regain and accentuate Saint Mary's primary mission and raison d'etre as a Catholic Christian Institution.

During this period of time, 2004-2011, we also determined the need for an overhaul of the academic curriculum and our art and athletic

vision. Subsequently a change of principals was deemed necessary to meet and address these challenges. Our last and current principals have made great strides in rising up to take on the daunting task head-on. The school today is accredited by the Nebraska Department of Education and Advanc-Ed. The grade school program offers eight years of education in religion, language arts, math, science, social studies, and enrichment programs in art, music, physical education, Spanish, library, and technology. The high school offers a comprehensive program that is primarily college-prep in focus; however more career/vocational courses have been added to the curriculum. High school students who attend St. Mary's currently need 240 credit hours for graduation. The school advisory council has approved increasing the requirement to 280 credit hours including 45 hours of language arts, 40 hours of mathematics, 40 hours of theology, 30 hours of science, and 30 hours of social studies beginning with the 2012-2013 school year. St. Mary's includes in its program a combination of Catholic doctrine, moral motivation and spiritual experiences that allow the youth the opportunity to develop strong faith and Christian principle. Our students are very involved in school life, nearly every high school student participates in at least one of the wide variety of co-curricular activities the school offers and many students participate in multiple activities. Our average class size is eighteen.

The majority of the students attending St. Mary's are members of St. Patrick Parish; however, additional students from O'Neill and the surrounding areas have elected to enroll at the school. Our students come from all parts of the socio-economic spectrum including 18.5% which are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Although the majority of students, 85%, are Roman Catholic many faiths are represented in the student body, including Lutheran, Russian Orthodox, Muslim, etc. The racial make-up of the school mirrors that of the greater O'Neill community. The enrollment is 96.5% white, but there has been an increase in Hispanic enrollment over the last two school years. Despite the decreasing population of O'Neill and Holt County in recent years, the enrollment of St. Mary's has increased by 9% over the past three year to our current total of 272 students.

Together the president and principal form the administrative team that establishes, communicates, and oversees local policies with the assistance of the St. Mary's Advisory Council, a nine member panel elected by the parishioners of St. Patrick's Church. The administration is supported by a school staff of thirty-five (35). There are 18 teachers serving in a full-time capacity, 6 part-time teachers, and 3 Religious. In addition, there are nine support staff employees including a development director, campus minister, business manager, two cafeteria workers, two maintenance workers, and two administrative assistants. Although not a criterion for employment, staff members are typically Catholic (83%). In addition, the racial composition of the staff is white, except for our Pastor, who is a Eurasian from India. The continuity of our staff is a tremendous asset for our school. Our staff averages 22 years of experience overall and 13.5 years of experience at St. Mary's. Approximately 30% of our faculty has an advanced degree and others are working towards that goal.

Today, 111 years later, St. Mary's continues to thrive and grow. This is due to the deep commitment to Catholic education upheld by the parents who choose to send their children to Saint Mary's as well as the generosity of many benefactors and supporters from St. Patrick's Parish and the community of O'Neill. St. Mary's has demonstrated over a century of Catholic tradition, academic and athletic excellence, and has produced hundreds of graduates, many of whom go on to send their own children and grandchildren to Saint Mary's. Perhaps this is the greatest testament that a Catholic school and an excellent Catholic education will continue to be prized by future generations of the people of O'Neill and the surrounding areas.

Section 2: Student Performance

Give a brief description of your school's vision about students and their performance. Provide a brief summary of student performance in your school. What are your goals and how will you know you have achieved them?

Describe the variety of your school's student performance assessments. How does your staff engage in meaningful analysis of student work in order to modify instruction?

Describe the school's student support programs and services. In what ways does your school ensure community/parent involvement in the life of the school?

Narrative:

As part of the Archdiocese of Omaha, the school's mission and vision are shaped by the mission and vision of the diocese. From its inception, Saint Mary's has been concerned with the development of the whole child. Every aspect of the program is designed to promote the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, moral, and physical development of each student. As a community rooted in Catholic values and the teachings of Jesus Christ, we at St. Mary's are committed to a life of faith and love and service, to continue His mission in the world. We will strive to respond to the needs of students with justice and compassion.

Our Mission:

St. Mary's School is committed to forming students in the image of Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary. We strive for excellence in education by emphasizing the formation of the whole person, blending learning with Catholic faith and Catholic faith with daily life.

Our Vision:

St. Mary's School is committed to developing our students into proficient, responsible, community-minded adults faithful to the mission of Jesus Christ, who came among us to teach, to lead, and to serve. This vision will be realized by creating a school environment that is academically challenging, athletically competitive, appreciative of the arts, and passionately Catholic.

Our Motto:

Magnificet Anima Mea Dominum (Let My Soul Magnify the Lord)

Student performance data is collected from a variety of sources in addition to assessment data including attendance data, co-curricular participation, graduation rates, and post-secondary education data. Our school-wide attendance rate is 97.05%. For the past three years our graduation rate is 97.6%; we have had one students drop-out in the past three years. In addition 92.6% of St. Mary's graduates have enrolled in some form of post secondary education program, including 61% enrolling in 4 year colleges and universities. Each year more than 90% of our junior/senior high school students participate in co-curricular activities with many students participating in multiple activities.

Our assessment data includes national norm-referenced tests such as the Terra Nova (grades 3, 5, and 7), Explore (grades 8 and 9), Plan (grade 10), ACT Grades 11 and 12), and STAR reading assessments (grades 1-6), criterion-referenced assessments developed by the Archdiocese of Omaha Catholic Schools Office, and traditional classroom assessments. Over the past three years our students have average 10.25 points of growth per year on the STAR reading assessment as measured by comparing the students' national percentile scores at the beginning of the school year to their scores at the end of the school year. On the Terra Nova test our scores are very good nationally. We have performed on par with the diocesan averages in grades 3 and 5, while we have performed significantly better than the diocesan averages in grade 7. Our weakest scores were in 3rd grade language arts where we scored in 53rd percentile nationally. Our Explore, Plan, and ACT scores rank consistently above the state and national averages. Although our scores are good overall, we have identified reading and science as potential areas of concern. In recent years our reading scores have tended to be the lowest scores on the Explore, Plan, and ACT assessments and our science scores indicate that only one third of our students are

identify as “college ready” for science according ACT criteria. Students at every grade level are administered at least one of the criterion referenced assessments developed by the Archdiocese of Omaha Catholic Schools Office each school year. Our students have consistently performed at higher levels than the diocese on the religion, math, science, and social studies assessments and below the diocesan scores in language arts.

St. Mary's School provides several ways in which teachers measure student achievement. Specific measures of academic assessments vary from classroom to classroom but include the following: homework assignments, written tests with various types of questions, essay assignments graded with rubrics, hands-on projects that are graded by rubric, and class participation. Students' academic progress is discussed frequently among the staff, and parents and administrators are notified of student achievement or lack of progress via Sycamore and quarterly reports. Throughout the school year teachers are available both before and after school to give students the opportunity to work one on one with teachers.

A Student Assistance Team consisting of the student's teachers, the school counselor, the principal, and the student's parents may be convened by any of the above mentioned individuals if there are concerns regarding the progress of a student. If the team deems it necessary, an individual student plan is developed for those students who can benefit from simple classroom accommodations and modifications. Students who require educational or psychological testing are referred to the special education department of the appropriate public school district. Once outside testing is complete, an MDT meeting is held to review and discuss results. If the student qualifies for services an IEP meeting is scheduled by the special education department to determine a plan of action for the student moving forward. A speech/language pathologist provided by the local public school district is available four days a week to assist St. Mary's students with verified speech/language disorders.

We have identified three school-wide goals. First, all students will improve their communication skills. This includes an increase in reading comprehension scores as measures in a wide variety of assessments including Terra Nova, Explore, Plan, ACT, STARS, and Accelerated Reader; an improvement in writing skills as measured by performance indicators on diocesan assessments and various formative and summative classroom assessments; and an increase in the number and quality of oral presentations given by students as measured by staff developed criteria. Our second goal is see a measurable increase in science scores on national norm referenced assessments by improving the thinking and reasoning skills of our students. In addition to norm referenced test scores, improvement will be gauged by students demonstrating effective problem solving skills in both traditional and authentic classroom assessments across the curriculum. Our third goal will be to provide our staff with more training to better utilize data from assessments and classroom evaluations to improve instruction and student learning. Achievement of this third goal will be determined by a general increase in student performance on all national, diocesan, and school-level assessments.

Parents are as much a part of the St. Mary's school community as students, staff, and alumnae. The school welcomes the input and support of parents in creating the best school environment for students. We have a multitude of family events beginning with the “Back to School” Potluck in August and ending in May with the “Grandparents' Breakfast” celebrating the Academic and Activity achievements of our students and the Athletic Dinner Banquet celebrating the laurels achieved in sports. Two organizations, the Activities Booster Club and the Home and School Association provide parents with additional opportunities to get involved. It is through these and similar efforts that we know our school is truly blessed.

St. Mary's School is engaged in ongoing efforts to maintain and improve effective communication with parents to keep parents involved and aware of the life of the school. At the beginning of each school year, the administration hosts a “Back to School Night” and a holds an orientation meeting for all the families of St. Mary's. These meetings are intended as meet and greet events, but also as a means for the school to communicate its mission to parents and to invite parents to ask questions and provide input. In addition parent-teacher conferences are scheduled once during each semester for parents to receive one on one feedback concerning the progress of their child. Throughout the year, technology is used to maintain parent communication through Sycamore, our school information system, and our school website (<http://www.stmarysoneill.org/>). The principal also is featured every Tuesday morning during the school year on local radio station KBRX to provide school news and information to the listening audience.

Section 3: Challenges and Opportunities

What are the major challenges your school has faced in the last 3 years and how have you addressed those challenges?

Narrative:

The past three years have seen many challenges at St. Mary's, including a new principal and some new teaching positions, initiatives in technology, implementation of building improvements, curriculum changes, fiscal stability and enrollment. Thankfully the entire school community has played a part in addressing these challenges and improving our school.

In keeping with the history of the school, with the transition from a school run consistently by sisters for decades with a Franciscan/Marian spirituality, the challenge for the new lay leadership, which seemed to be in constant flux, was precisely consistent leadership and common vision. Throughout the last two and a half decades the average tenure of the school principal has ranged from seven to three years. When a new person comes with his or her own ideas and philosophies about schooling and education and receives little or no data to build upon from previous principals and is not familiar with the school's spirituality, traditions, or programs, they are forced to start from 'square one'. This dilutes the overall mission, tradition and stability of the institute and makes it extremely difficult to sustain growth and make systematic improvements or adjustments along a continuum of merits or lacunae. The new principal is dedicated to bringing stability to the position and developing a sustainable, continuous school improvement process.

For several years technology has been an issue – computers not working properly, lack of availability, lack of age-appropriate software, etc. St. Mary's has undertaken several initiatives to continually upgrade all types of technology and make it available to teachers and students. Beginning in 2010 we have begun the process of upgrading all equipment in both the grade school and high school computer lab to the latest operating system and software versions. In addition, we have created a new Mac lab for our journalism and digital media students and have purchased a Mobile NEO2 cart for our elementary students through the efforts of our faculty, administration, development office, and alumni. Interactive white boards or interactive projectors are now in the majority of classrooms from grades 1-12. Through our enrollment in the Erate program and by contracting with an outside I.T. consultant on an as-needed basis instead of using ESU 8's I.T. services, we have been able to utilize a greater portion of the technology budget for the purchase of additional equipment, software, and training. New technology including Sycamore, our school information system, will make record keeping and data collection more efficient and will allow for improved availability of data in the future.

As a private institution, competing for enrollment, it is important that our facilities are modern, clean, and safe. Our current financial situation makes it difficult to update our facilities without outside resources. Fortunately, our Saint Patrick's parishioners and O'Neill community's faith in St. Mary's and commitment to the school have helped us begin to meet this challenge. School staff, parents, alumni, and community members have given of their time, talent, and treasure to undertake several renovation projects over the last three years, including a new high school gym roof, a new grade school gym floor, new lighting in both gyms, renovations to the entry of the grade school and the grade school offices, renovations to several high school classrooms, completion of the high school lecture hall, a new women's restroom on the main floor of the high school, and many smaller projects. A facilities committee has been formed and more renovation projects are planned for the future.

There have also been many challenges in the area of curriculum. When the new principal arrived three years ago the school's graduation requirements were just above the state's minimum requirement of 200 credit hours. Many of our high school students were not taking math classes beyond geometry or any science classes beyond Biology I. In addition, the school was on probation from the state for failing to offer a minimum of 400 credit hours in its high school curriculum. If Saint Mary's is to be considered a college preparatory school, it would be necessary to implement several changes. After studying curriculum offerings from other diocesan schools, new course offerings with new graduation requirements were instituted. Beginning with the 2013 graduating class, 280 credit hours will be required for graduation; only five of Nebraska's public school districts require as many or more hours for graduation. In addition, we have increased our course offerings in mathematics and now require that all students be enrolled in a math course during every year of high school. We also provide the opportunity for our advanced students to enroll in Algebra I in eighth grade, thereby making it more feasible for these students to enroll in calculus as seniors. We have also increased our science offerings to include physics, Chemistry II, Biology II, animal science, and environmental science. We have made Biology I a required freshman course and expect all students, except those with learning difficulties; to complete Chemistry I. St. Mary's has also expanded offerings in careers/technology, the fine arts, and journalism. We are now in the process of determining what curricular changes in the grade school are needed to compliment our new high school curriculum.

As is the case with many schools in our region, our greatest challenges are in the area of finances and enrollment, which are forever intertwined. We are a faith-based institution and depend on the goodwill of all of our stakeholders to keep tuition affordable so that St. Mary's remains a viable option to all families wanting a Catholic education for their children. Our current tuition and fees is \$1900 in the high school and \$800 in the grade school, with additional substantial financial breaks offered to families with two or more children in the school, making St. Mary's the most affordable Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Omaha. This is possible because the majority of the school's operational budget is subsidized by St. Patrick's Church and by interest generated from the St. Mary's foundation. Our community has, since 1990, generously supported a series of capital campaigns to fund necessary projects, and we are in the process of beginning a new, four-year-long, \$850,000 capital campaign. The 'Semper Fidelis' (always faithful) Capital Campaign being launched this winter will address additional needs of the physical plant, including a new grade school roof, redesigned grade school entry, replacing the current grade school boilers with energy efficient boilers and a connecting hallway between the two buildings. If funding and gifts become available, by the blessing of the Lord, we are hoping to include an expansion of our weight room to include more cardiovascular equipment and an expansion of our boys and girls locker room facilities.

As with any school, our largest expense is human resources. Although we continue to make slight gains in faculty and staff salaries, competitive pay and benefits remain an issue for the school. We are committed to ensuring the continued growth of salaries and benefits for faculty and staff and we hope to soon develop a long-range plan for accomplishing this goal. We realize that increasing tuition may not be a viable solution because it may cause enrollment numbers to decrease, thereby offsetting any gains made from increased tuition.

It is a goal of our school to continually increase our enrollment to capacity. Although we have had gradual increases in enrollment over the past few years, many factors make reaching this goal difficult. First and foremost, the population of rural Nebraska is steadily decreasing. As an example, the city of O'Neill's population has decreased by 13% since the 2000 census. Many of the public schools in our region are now consolidating or must "co-op" in various activities because of declining enrollments. The pastors of nearby communities without a Catholic school are reluctant to endorse St. Mary's to their parishioners because they do not want to create the perception that they are adding to the decline of their own local community and its public school. Another reason that makes increasing enrollment challenging is the positive reputation of O'Neill Public Schools. Some families are not willing to make the sacrifice to send their children to St. Mary's because they believe O'Neill Public offers a free viable alternative. To meet this enrollment challenge, we must continue to not merely improve as a school, but to be a distinct, cutting edge, college preparatory school that towers in stature in the formation of its students and their success in the world. We would also need to develop a marketing strategy that sends a clear message to families, here in O'Neill and in the towns around us, which they cannot afford not to send their children to St. Mary's School!

Section 4: Conclusion

What is your school most proud of and why?

Is there any other information you would like to share with the public and the school community?

Narrative:

St. Mary's School is most proud of being able to provide its students with an educational experience that is passionately Catholic, academically challenging and athletically competitive. The unique blend of faith, rich traditions, academics, and extracurricular activities fosters lifelong learning with emphasis on the education of the whole person. Indeed, St. Mary's School is already widely known for its excellent academic, athletic, social, moral, and spiritual preparation of young men and young women. The tremendous support from the community and stakeholders has enabled St. Mary's to operate for 111 years according to its mission forming students in the image of Jesus Christ imbued with Catholic-Christian values and teachings within a thriving center of college-preparatory academic excellence. St. Mary's past graduates report that in addition to experiencing a caring environment that provides challenge, discipline, and character development, they were well prepared to meet college demands and the moral and faith challenges of our times. Our current students feel safe and accepted in a family-like atmosphere with caring teachers and staff. Despite the obstacles St. Mary's faces, it remains an essential element in the lives of many families, dedicated faculty, parents, and alumni. We are proud that we are able to make a difference in the lives of our students and connect with their families over many generations while continuing the traditions that have made St. Mary's a source of life preparation for over a century.