



Parents,

Our Schools' mission – what drives our decision-making -- is to help students reach their fullest spiritual and academic potential. A number of factors work in concert to make this happen: Continuous feedback through assessment data, a quality learning environment, and a rigorous and viable curriculum. Still, when it comes to doing what's best for students, nothing trumps great teachers and great teaching.

Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools puts tremendous effort into hiring the best possible teachers, and then helping them improve their craft through yearly book studies, collaboration through professional learning communities (PLCs) and professional development opportunities. The results are evident by the ever-increasing levels on assessments and standardized tests.

Recently, we decided to pay even greater attention to another strategy for ever-increasing teaching, “classroom walk-throughs.”

Historically, administrators visited classrooms to observe an entire lesson in an evaluative mode; that is, it was done to make judgments on the teachers' abilities, but lacked the process for constructive feedback and continuous improvement. While evaluation still has a role, we also recognize the need for frequent “snapshot” observations called classroom walk-throughs. Walk-throughs can have tremendous impact on the quality of instruction, provided they are done correctly. A valuable walk-through is done in a coaching style, with specific “look fors” and allows for teacher feedback.

Each week, principals will spend 4-7 minutes in each classroom, collecting data regarding classroom instruction. Walk-throughs will often lead to brief conversations with the teacher, but will ultimately lead to a formal meeting every nine weeks in which principal and teacher will examine the data, extract emerging trends, and discuss paths for improvement.

The observation template will be the same for each building and for every observation. That's because good teaching looks similar at all grade levels and in all subjects. While content may change, effective strategies remain consistent. In developing our template, we relied on trusted resources and sound research\*, yet modified the recommendations to align with our Catholic faith. In fact, a good deal of time and due diligence was spent on the “Catholic look-fors,” for which we drew upon the rich resources provided by the Holy See<sup>^</sup>.

We recognize what a commitment it takes to send your children to Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools, and as always, we thank you for the sacrifices you make on behalf of your student(s). Our attention to instruction methodology is just one way that we can honor our partnership with you.

If you have questions regarding the walk-through process, please don't hesitate to call me or your child's principal.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mr. Bauman', written in a cursive style.

Mr. Matthew Bauman  
Director of Curriculum and Instruction

*\*Nine Effective Instructional Strategies*, Robert Marzano; *Seven Assessment Strategies for Learning*, Rick Stiggins; *Taxonomy of Learning Domains*, Benjamin Bloom; *Five Areas of Differentiation*, Carol Tomlinson

<sup>^</sup> *The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools*