



History of Saint Brigid School as told by Laura Wilkowski Principal 2018-present

I started as principal in the fall of 2018. Previously I taught middle school science, sixth grade western hemisphere, and sixth grade religion. Prior to that year, I taught elementary science for kindergarten through fifth grade in the science lab as a once a week special supplement to their curriculum.

The year that I began my tenure as principal, we hired two elementary teachers. Within a week of that first year, one teacher resigned for personal reasons. To fill the void that was created, Maureen Becker, Saint Brigid's previous principal, took over. It was a substitution that ended up lasting for that entire school year.

That year, we hired Krina Young to take the position of reading specialist as Beth Whetmore retired. Krina was able to bring many new facets to our already strong reading program. Students were able to use Bookshare, an online program with audible books for students with reading difficulties. We began pre-and post-assessments of all new students and all students with reading needs. We also developed a flow chart for teachers to follow to help students with difficulties and determine the need for further evaluation.

Kim Scott was hired as the elementary science specialist. Mass schedules and routines, after school activities and athletics operated as they had done so for many years prior.

During the 2019-2020 School year, we hired a new Afterschool care lead teacher. Because we had a sudden opening for a teacher the day before school was to begin, our afterschool lead teacher, Katie Adam, agreed to move into the third-

grade teaching position. Krina Young began double duty as reading specialist and after school care lead teacher. Michelle Twigg was hired to teach fourth grade. During this year, a pandemic began as COVID-19 began circulating throughout countries around the world. By the spring of this year, then governor Gretchen Whitmer, issued an emergency stay-at-home order. The morning that this was issued, our staff held an emergency meeting to discuss how to help students. Packets of information were created for each grade level and all textbooks, chrome books, and items in desks and lockers were sent home. This proved to be fortuitous, as the two-week stay-at-home order turned into the remainder of the school year. Following the second week, staff pivoted to online learning using Zoom, Google Classroom, and any available online tools that they could find. To complicate these couple of months further, The Sanford and Edenville dams broke, flooding much of Midland. One of our Saint Brigid teachers lost the entire contents of her home and many Saint Brigid Families were affected. The day after the flood, we had a staff Zoom call to check on each other. After we determined staff needs, we called all school families to determine their needs. The needs of all were placed on a Google sheet which was accessible to the entire school and parish so that people could help each other.

Graduation that year was a virtual one. We provided yard signs for all of our graduates to celebrate them. Teachers often visited homes that year from six or more feet away outside to drop off additional materials, to check in on families, and tutor students. Mass was virtual, both during the school week and on weekends. Our pastor, Father Andy Booms, got COVID and spent months recovering and celebrating Mass to an empty church. It was a year that both kept as a part and brought us together.

The year of 2020-2021 was also a strange one. In order to start back in-person learning, we needed to develop a plan for three possible phases of COVID learning. One phase was a virtual plan, one was an in-person plan with many restrictions, and one was a plan with fewer restrictions. We wore masks, used desk shields, spaced students as far apart as classrooms would allow, used an infrared thermal camera to measure temperatures, completed daily health screenings, sanitized hands before touching any classroom supplies, and sprayed every surface daily. The salad bar, always in the lunchroom previously,

disappeared and fruits and vegetables became prepackaged to prevent contamination. Athletics and all afterschool activities were canceled. Mass was celebrated in-person for only one class at a time with the others watching virtually. Gradually, we moved to three classes but it was the end of the school year when we held an outdoor mass that the whole school could be together. Travel restrictions and travel quarantines were instituted. Masses were held with one group at a time while the other classes attended Mass virtually in their classrooms. Father Andy and Father Marc would bring communion around to students following the in-person mass. There simply was not enough data as to how COVID was transmitted when the school year began.

We were able to remain in person throughout that year. The only quarantine that we took was a two-week plan to quarantine after Christmas because of the fact that 80% of our families intended to travel over Christmas. While we had a couple of isolated cases, we never saw any school to school spread during that year.

The stress on teachers, students, and families was greatly elevated during the school year. As a result, we contracted with Catholic Family Services to provide on-site counseling for those that needed it.

While the year was difficult, we managed to finish the year with students scoring very close to those students who were tested at the end of the 2018 2019 school year. At the end of the year, as a staff, we celebrated our accomplishments and shed some tears of stress and also of relief.

In the fall of 2021, COVID numbers continued to rise and fall. We had our first couple of COVID cases that we think may have been examples of student to student spread. Based on recommendations from the Health Department, CDC, and The American Academy of Pediatrics, we continued to mask and use our thermal temperature camera to take temperatures regularly. We kept daily health screenings. Much of the research that came out showed that COVID-19 spread primarily through respiration. As a result, we were not sanitizing multiple times each day but still daily and we continued to keep students cohorted and distanced to the best of our ability. We also continued to use desk

shields during snack times when students are allowed to remove their masks. Students, staff and parents were quite good about it but the strain and fatigue of these routines showed.

Academically, we have made some changes as well. Sherri Nemeth moved from a teacher position to the reading specialist position as Krina Young and her family moved out of Midland. Sherri also has taken on the position of part-time assistant principal. We also initiated some changes to help improve our religious curriculum. LeAnne Osborn was hired as a theology teacher for the middle school. We realized that up until this point, a teacher needed to be certified to teach science, math, history, and English but no such certifications were required to teach religion. This has greatly strengthened our middle school religious curriculum. In addition, LeAnne Osborn is providing Catechesis of the Good Shepherd teaching for our youngest members, kindergarten through second grade. She has been instrumental in securing supplies for a Level Two and Level Three atrium, which would allow us to teach Catechesis of the Good Shepherd up through fourth or fifth grade. Perhaps most importantly, LeAnne has provided ongoing religious formation and support for our staff, especially our teaching staff. This has been more important than ever as the teachers feel more overwhelmed than ever.

Due to demands placed on schools from the coronavirus, the government issued emergency assistance to non-public schools also known as EANS funding. We qualified for two funding allowances of \$95,000 each.

Instructionally we continue to improve our reading program. Under Sherri Nemeth, we now have individualized reading improvement plans. Based on assessments, students either receive Heggarty phonics, Bridge the Gap lessons, or Barton lessons. The state is considering lowering requirements at third grade for literacy and mathematics for this year as they are recognizing that the events of the last two years have caused students to fall behind expected goals. We remain confident that, had the original goals been in place, we could have promoted students with our current remedial systems in place. We are now working on developing a similar math remediation program for students that need it.

In the 2021-2022 school year, our enrollment increased from 127 students to 136 students. This, despite the fact that we had no seventh-grade class and only four eighth grade students. We do anticipate that large numbers in our elementary school will lead to large numbers in our middle school in a couple of years.

Judyth Peterson continues to be a staple in our middle school band program. We've had a couple of different Spanish teachers in the last few years and last year could not offer middle school Spanish because of a shortage of shared time teachers. Midland Public Schools continue to supply shared time teachers for our kindergarten through fifth grade art, music, and physical education. Carrollton School District continues to provide teachers for our middle school band and K-8th technology.

Our staff salaries continue to lag behind our local public schools, especially as public schools offer signing bonuses to help with teacher shortages. Substitutes are in short supply also. Our substitute pay, though raised two years ago, is still about 70% of public school rates.

Added stress has come from a recent shooting at a high school in MI near Detroit. It serves as a reminder that the safety and well-being of staff and students is our top priority. I am continuously amazed at the strength and the grace that teachers have shown during all of this and know that truly, "All things are possible with God."

We finished last year with a return of many of our beloved activities- sports, class parties, Mass as a school, our sock hop, and in-person graduation.

We are very proud of our dedicated staff who work hard to differentiate to allow each student to be successful. If the last few years have proved anything, we have what it takes to be able to see another hundredth year anniversary!