Sacred Heart School Identity

In the *Goals and Criteria*, the Society of the Sacred Heart defines the mission of the school as part of the Society’s educational mission in the Catholic Church.

(Foundational Principle 1)

Sacred Heart Schools are an essential expression of the Society of the Sacred Heart’s Catholic mission in the world. Sacred Heart Schools root educational practice in the love of Jesus Christ and seek to form our students in the attitudes of Christ’s Heart. Thus, the Schools extend through education the Society’s mission to reveal the love of God in the world. The foundation of Sacred Heart education is rooted in Catholic theology and philosophy. Sacred Heart Schools are Catholic independent learning communities. Our independence means that each school is governed by a board of trustees that serves each school community in light of the *Goals and Criteria*. Schools receive accreditation through organizations serving independent schools. Our institutions therefore are Catholic – independent – Sacred Heart. This three-dimensional nature of our identity creates a framework for our schools in our work on behalf of children and young people of all faiths.

What does it mean to be a Catholic independent school sponsored by the Society of the Sacred Heart?

The Catholic Dimension of Our Identity:

As learning environments serving children and young people, Sacred Heart Schools are focused on the development of each child in the context of community. Anchored in the mission of the Society of the Sacred Heart, this education is inherently Catholic. Sacred Heart educators are inspired by an understanding of Jesus Christ, His Gospel and the Holy Spirit. In and through the visible world in which we live, we come to know and experience the invisible God in all of creation. The Catholic vision perceives God not only present in but working through persons, events, and physical things. Through invoking our spirit, mind and imagination, we discover the intelligibility and coherence of all reality. As participants in God’s grace, we experience the love of Jesus Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God’s grace initiates our actions and assists us in becoming people of service grounded in love, mirroring the attitudes of Christ’s Heart such as respect, compassion, forgiveness and generosity. God’s way comes to us as communion, through the communities in which we live. This community includes liturgies, prayer, service and the spiritual and theological practices that mark the life of the Church. The emphasis on community in Catholicism is the source of Sacred Heart’s commitment to relationships and the building of community as an essential value.

A Catholic School draws its inspiration from Jesus Christ as the source of all wisdom and from the conviction that in Him all things can be brought to their full-potential. For us Sacred Heart education is never the end; rather education serves as the means by which students come to know and experience God’s love so that they can become agents of transformation. When we live as Christ-centered institutions, we are Catholic.
The Independent Dimension of Our Identity:

By generally agreed upon definition, an independent school is independent in two critical ways:

- Independent in governance meaning that the school is organized as not-for-profit and is governed by a self-perpetuating board of directors, as opposed to being “owned” and run by the government (public schools), by a diocese (parochial schools), or by for-profit entities (proprietary schools).
- Independent in finance meaning that the school charges tuition and raises money to operate, as opposed to being supported primarily by public monies or religious subsidies.

Typically, independent schools are free to define their own mission; free to regulate admissions; free to define teacher credentials; free to design curriculum in light of the school’s mission. Independent schools are accredited typically by a local association of independent schools. In all cases, the accreditation process involves demonstrating that in light of the particular school’s mission, it meets the level of excellence as defined in the standards established by the accrediting body.

In Sacred Heart Schools, as in all independent schools, mission is paramount. As the stewards of the Goals and Criteria, Sacred Heart boards of trustees ensure mission integrity and financial viability. Sacred Heart Schools do not rely on the Church or the Society of the Sacred Heart for financial support. Our boards work in concert with the Society of the Sacred Heart in its role as sponsor. Through sponsorship which is both a process and a relationship of mutual trust and respect, the essential mission of Sacred Heart education is deepened. *

Within Sacred Heart Schools, the Goals and Criteria serve as the essential framework for education. This framework informs our independence as educators who define Catholic education in light of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat’s charism and the spirit of the Society of the Sacred Heart.

While Schools of the Sacred Heart share the same mission and fundamental aspects of culture derived from a shared Catholic identity and mission, each Sacred Heart school has its own size, structure, history, culture challenges and vision for its future. It is the responsibility of the individual board of trustees working in partnership with school leadership to ensure continuity of vision and mission, the best educational climate for today’s students and the sustainability of the school for future generations.

* The responsibility to ensure Catholic identity belongs to the leadership of the Society USC Province as Sponsor, the boards of trustees as Stewards of Mission, and to the diocesan bishop as the Pastoral Leader of the diocese/archdiocese. Boards and heads of schools need to understand both the bishop’s authority to exercise his teaching and pastoral ministry and the Society’s obligation to oversee the mission according to the charism of the Society. Each school is accountable to the provincial for carrying out all of the Goals and Criteria including the Foundational Principles and to the diocesan bishop for maintaining communion with the Church. Both roles are essential to the mission and Catholic identity of Sacred Heart Schools.
The Sacred Heart Dimension of Our Identity:

Sacred Heart Schools are Catholic independent learning communities animated from their origins in the Society of the Sacred Heart. Our philosophy of education finds its inspiration in the vision of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat who saw education as the primary means to communicate and reveal the love of the Heart of Jesus. Sacred Heart Schools educate through the lens of Christ’s Heart by creating cultures defined by a commitment to form relationships that provide the means to experience the love of God. Within this communion, all encounter Christ. Whether in the classroom, on the athletic field, or in chapel, our students learn to think and act according to the mind and attitudes of Christ’s Heart. It is within this grace-filled atmosphere that our students are challenged to achieve their full potential as human beings impelled to act on behalf of others.

Sacred Heart Schools form young people on a path towards transformation and hope by providing an excellent education and the formation of character. For Sacred Heart Educators this cultivation of virtues is informed by the charism of the Society and the values articulated in the Goals and Criteria. Nothing short of excellence will ensure the members of learning communities develop an informed, active faith, critical thinking and service to others.

Rooted in Catholic theology and philosophy, Sacred Heart Schools are called to be communities in which students are respected as integral persons. Students are helped to develop a multiplicity of skills that enrich the human person, such as creativity, reflection, imagination, and interiority. Their education cultivates the aptitudes to take on responsibilities such as loving the world, cherishing justice and acting with compassion. Faithful to the inspiration of Sophie, the Society, and Catholic theology and philosophy, Sacred Heart learning communities share the desire to help children and young people become ever more aware of the truth, of love and of freedom as they discover the significance of their lives, and devote themselves to others. Ours is a sacred imperative to educate the whole child and through the dynamic of this education, the students and we come to experience being loved and loving God.

Our Three-Dimensional Identity is Our Framework:

Sacred Heart Schools then enjoy three dimensions of our identity as educational institutions. In being Catholic - independent - Sacred Heart, our schools are responding from the depths of Sophie’s vision to the emerging future. At the center of our response remain the students and their education. These dimensions to our identity create our framework as institutions. The nature of being Catholic - independent - Sacred Heart creates a synergy for the Sacred Heart Schools in our work on behalf of children and young people of all faiths.

From the very start, those who came before us realized that values taken for granted or left unarticulated can become inoperative. Patterns of leadership in governance, the make-up of faculties and student bodies have changed rapidly. We continue as schools to feel the characteristic pressures and strains connected to change and complexity. It is more and more important for us to recognize that while we are independent, we are never isolated. Sacred Heart Schools no matter our geography enjoy a strong unity rooted in a shared mission. Every Sacred Heart school finds the strength of belonging to the larger whole, of sharing principles and values, broad purposes, hopes and ambitions.
In the midst of today’s complexity, the *Goals and Criteria* provide Sacred Heart Schools with a prophetic orientation that leads us to hope, a hope that believes in the goodness of each individual, a hope that believes in the goodness of humanity, a hope that believes in and trusts the love of the Heart of God.