



# ST BENEDICT ELEMENTARY

*Classical education illuminated by the Catholic Faith.*

## **SBE ACADEMIC VISION**

Our mission at St. Benedict Elementary is an ambitious one. We strive to cultivate intellectual and moral virtue in our students in the pursuit of academic excellence. *Virtue*. It is not a word used much these days, but is something we take very seriously at SBE, that we teach intentionally and then seek to integrate into both academic study and into the life of the school. Why? Because academic success, really any kind of worldly success, on its own without more, without virtue (or synonymously, *human excellence*), doesn't make for a flourishing community or a flourishing individual. Students can truly only excel—become their best selves, the people God intends them to be—if they strive to learn and put into practice the human virtues that enable them to develop strong moral character, an internal compass that guides them to use their gifts not for themselves, but in service of others, for the common good.

This formation in the virtues is not something that can wait for middle school or high school, when passions are flaring, and the mind is ripe for argumentation. Every good parent knows that children must be formed in these habits of heart, mind and spirit when they are still young...

But children can only think about—and do—what is excellent when they have first witnessed excellence in those around them, their parents, relatives and teachers, but also in captivating stories and characters in literature, history, art and poetry. This is one of the key reasons we founded SBE: we believe young children ought to be steeped in, surrounded by, beauty and truth in the faith, first and foremost, but also in literature, poetry, art and music.

This is what makes classical education quite distinctive from trends in education these days: classical educators understand that some things are more excellent than others, and also more beautiful, and more worthy of our time. As St. Paul's tells the Philippians: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

So that is what we do at St Benedict Elementary. We take seriously beautiful writing and great and enduring books, and through the study of grammar and classical literature, and through copywork and dictation, our young students grow in imitation of great writing themselves.

We take seriously the study of history and geography, surrounding children with epic characters and leaders, stories and poems, so they can ponder together topics such as friendship, courage, community, family, and government through the prism of the great stories and historical events of Western civilization, rather than as stand-alone themes with little context or content.

The schooling of young children should be permeated by this greatness, this excellence and beauty, because it attracts them when they are still young to all that is good in the world, it ignites their wonder, creates in them a desire to know more, read more, discover more. And it grounds them firmly in that quest for truth and goodness that is the most noble of human paths.

At St. Benedict Elementary, students' wonder is ignited especially through intentional integration of subjects throughout the curriculum. Third graders, for instance, identify parts of speech while reading a time-tested fable, discovering the passages' nouns—and also the moral of the story. To practice their penmanship, first graders copy the Psalms, fifth graders, notable and edifying Latin phrases.

During our ancient civilization course of studies, students travel in time with Joseph to Egypt in religion class and follow his journey by map in geography; they learn of the Egyptian culture and explore the virtues needed to build the pyramids in history, while in art, they imitate Egyptian hieroglyphics. As our Acting Head of School has noted, “students guided in this integrated framework learn fast the beauty, grandeur, glory, order, connectedness, and symmetry of the world around them.” And this is but one example. We see this integration again and again as we travel through Greece and Rome, and then through Massachusetts state history and US history, and finally in sixth grade, world cultures and geography. It is a journey through time and space that makes their studies come alive.

Children in the elementary school years are like sponges. Their environment, their examples, what they learn and from whom they learn it, all of this becomes part of them in a truly profound way. To us, it is a profound responsibility, a profound trust their parents place in us. From the hiring of our teachers to the careful selection of our texts, we have sought goodness and faithfulness and wisdom. And we see the children blossom as a result: one fifth grader noted to his mother that at St. Benedict Elementary, he can just sit, free of distraction, and just *learn*. We want our students to really learn, to develop a genuine hunger for learning.

To this end, we also take seriously the maturing capacity of the child's mind, emphasizing especially the use of memory in the formative years, when the faculty of memory is keen. Thus, we expect much of them. We care about math facts and spelling rules, states and capitals, vocabulary roots, and grammar. We care about science. We ask that they commit much to memory. Upon a solid foundation in grammar, vocabulary and literature, they can *then* learn to express themselves in beautiful writing. Upon a solid foundation of geography and history, they can *then* begin to evaluate and analyze historical events and leaders. But first they must be given lots and lots of content.

In expecting much of our students, we have elected to teach the very best of math and science, making use of well-reputed Saxon and Singapore Math programs, *and* employing a scientist who has designed an outstanding hands-on science curriculum.

All this requires—and so inculcates—good habits of the intellect and of the will. These habits are sure to bode well later in life. But it is hard work. This is why it is an educational philosophy that, we believe, is best integrated with the Catholic view of the person: created good—and *capable of greatness*—but in need of guidance, encouragement and wisdom of loving and joyful teachers for proper formation.

So, what might children educated in the Catholic classical tradition look like?

1. They are able to discern beauty—in writing, in art, in music.
2. They are captivated by great books and the engaging characters and stories therein, rather than feel the need always to be entertained by electronic stimuli.
3. They can engage and take interest in ideas and principles, and the lifelong search for truth, rather than being consumed only by the acquisition of things.
4. They have an understanding of the historical context in which they live, instead of a bias toward the present and a false idea that moral progress is inevitable.
5. They can stand up and articulate the bedrock principles of Western civilization and of the American experiment in ordered liberty, rather than believing that assertion of feeling constitutes authentic argument.
6. They understand how characters are formed and good leaders borne, rather than being pulled by cultural trends and what's popular.
7. They can disagree with others without being disagreeable.

In a word, classical (or “liberal”) education helps one become free to pursue the truth and so become the person God intends them to be.

*These are the ideals that have caused each of the founding families to come together at SBE—for our children, for our future. Join us!*