

Good morning. My name is Sarah Neubecker and I am a proud alumna of St. Mary's School and Our Lady of Mercy high school. I am a 2022 graduate of Colgate University and recently got back from a nine month Fulbright grant in Brazil. I currently teach 4th-6th grade math and religion at St. Mary's School and I'm here to talk about how wonderful a Catholic Education is.

Recently, I was commenting to one of my sixth grade students that the new high-tech smart boards frustrated me (i.e I don't know how to fully work them). "When I was a student here, the smart boards were super simple and easy to use. You just oriented them and were ready to go." He turned to me and without missing a beat replied, "Well we weren't students in the 1990's like you" "Oh I wasn't a student in the 1990's" I said. "Sorry, I mean the 1980s." I actually graduated from SMS in 2014 but in the 10 years since then, this school has become high tech. All of my students have access to online learning tools and top rated curriculum programs, individual chromebooks, and when I finally figure it out, the smartboard. St. Mary's gives our students the tools for academic success but also builds character with the values our faith teaches us.

As a St. Mary's student, my personal and spiritual well-being was always a priority. Schoolwork and academic excellence are certainly a hallmark of our school but cultivating compassion, empathy, kindness, and a deep faith were essential values that were practiced every day, in every class. My teachers cared about how I was doing-really doing-and made it a point to let me know I was loved as a child of God. We bring our faith into the classroom and start and end each day with prayer. My formative years at St. Mary's were instrumental in establishing a faith foundation and solid character for the future. While some things have certainly changed at SMS, one thing hasn't: St. Mary's kids are just different and in a good way.

The power of a Catholic education makes all the difference once your children leave this school and move on to high school, college, and the real world. The values instilled in them here will stay with them for life and I thank all of you who have made the decision and financial sacrifice to entrust your children to our care. For anyone who hasn't had the privilege to join the SMS community, I hope I can stand in front of you as proof of the difference it makes. This week we will have several opportunities to come in and see our school and get to know more about who we are. Come and see how there is faith in every student. Come and see the SMS difference.