



**Report & Recommendation  
of the Principal Search  
Committee**

10 February 2019

## **Overview of the Process**

- April 2018: Principal Search Committee (PSC) formed; officers selected.
- Spring–Summer 2018: Survey results were analyzed, needs and priorities for position were assessed; position description was developed and finalized.
- Early Fall 2018: Recruitment strategy was developed; contacts with potential referral sources were initiated.
- October 2018: Position was posted using a local, regional, and national strategy.
- November 2018–January 2019: Applications were reviewed, interviews conducted; recommendations completed.

## **The Candidate being Sought**

- Prepared to lead an intentionally Catholic, nationally recognized school that proclaims the Truth, Goodness, and Beauty of our Faith.
- Capable of cultivating the Catholic Culture of the School, as well as its Academic Excellence.
- Ready to lead the school and its faculty.
- Equipped to communicate our vision and grow the school.

## **Position Requirements**

- Must be a practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church
- Minimum of 5 years classroom experience
- Master's degree or equivalent
- Successful experience in school administration

## **Candidate Pool**

- 15+ applicants
- Diverse pool of applications geographically, by level of experience and skill set

## **Selection Process**

- Review of Resume/Statement of Philosophy on Catholic Education
- Preliminary interview by three person sub-committee
- If recommended by the sub-committee, then a full interview with the whole committee.
- Committee makes final recommendations to Father Smith, who makes final decision.

## **Recommendation of Steve Cunningham**

- Exceptional leader with a proven track record, a truly Catholic vision of education, and outstanding communication skills.
- Successfully led a number of diocesan and independent Catholic Schools.
- Experienced in growing enrollment (350 to 650); but smart growth.
- His understanding of Catholic education is very similar to that of the school.
- “My most important job is making sure the students make it to heaven.”
- Dr. Ferdinandt, founder of the Catholic School Leadership Institute, said that Steve is in the “top 5% of Catholic educators” he has encountered, and they “are of the same mind in their educational philosophy.”

# Steven J. Cunningham

[REDACTED], Laguna Niguel, CA 92677

T: [REDACTED]

E: [REDACTED]

SJC



*“If we have no peace in the world, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”*

*- Saint Teresa of Calcutta*

## Summary

I am a dedicated, creative, experienced and proven leader in the world of private, Catholic education. Any leader in the dynamic world of Catholic education today serves as the medium to clarify, quantify and celebrate the values and principles that hold the fabric of their school together. In short, a Catholic school leader is charged with the call to guide and inspire through the lens of the mission of the community in which they serve.

## Experience

### **Head of School, St. Anne School** Laguna Niguel, CA — 2014-Present

A private, Catholic, independent, college prep school that emphasizes the development of the whole child in close partnership with parents. St. Anne serves over 700 students in pre-kindergarten through grade eight.

#### *Accomplishments*

- Successfully led the school through its initial CAIS accreditation, achieving full accreditation in the spring of 2017.
- Provided guidance and direction in the development of departmental strategic plans in advancement, marketing, finance, facilities, technology, enrollment and academics.
- Increased the culture of giving through the launch and development of the first annual fund in the history of the school.

- Established new leadership opportunities for faculty through the development of grade level team lead and academic department coordinator positions.
- Enhanced the Catholic identity of the school through the development of a formal campus ministry program along with the creation of a coordinator of campus ministry position.

**Director of the Lower and Middle Schools, Providence Academy  
Plymouth, MN — 2004-2014**

A private, independent, college prep school that emphasizes strong moral development in the Catholic faith. Providence serves over 900 students in pre-kindergarten through grade twelve.

*Accomplishments*

- Responsible for the daily operation and academic oversight of the programs and personnel of the Lower and Middle Schools.
- Worked in collaboration with the admissions office through a period of substantial enrollment growth and the need to create a stand alone Middle School division.
- Developed, and provided direction for, a Middle School administrative team- guidance counselor, dean of students, academic dean.
- Established an in-house character education program for all Middle School students linked to the core values of the school.
- Developed Middle School advisory, athletic and club experiences.
- Taught 6th and 7th grade history and 8th grade theology.

**Principal, Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic School  
Rogers, MN — 2001-2004**

A private, Catholic elementary school serving 150 students from pre-kindergarten through grade six.

*Accomplishments*

- Responsible for the daily operation and academic oversight of the programs and personnel of the school.
- Developed, and provided direction for, an administrative team for the school- assistant principal, academic dean.
- Developed and implemented the first physical education program at the school.
- Served as liaison for the school and the various committees that serve the school and parish- Parish Advisory Board, Parish Finance Council.
- Developed and carried out marketing and recruitment initiatives to increase school enrollment- eventually leading to the largest enrollment in the history of the school.

### **Assistant Principal, John Ireland School** Hopkins, MN — 1999-2001

A private, Catholic elementary and middle school serving 450 students from pre-kindergarten through 8th grade.

#### *Accomplishments*

- Responsible for the daily operation and academic oversight of the Middle School programs and personnel of the school.
- Served as liaison for the school and administrative representative for the John Ireland School Parent Association
- Researched, developed and led the first overnight field studies experience for the school- 8th grade trip to Washington DC.

### **Middle School Teacher, John Ireland School** Hopkins, MN — 1994-1999

#### *Accomplishments*

- Taught 7th and 8th grade religion, history and literature.
- Served as Director of Athletics 1995-1997.
- Served as Soccer and Softball Coach 1994-1995.
- Served as Student Council Advisor 1994-1995.
- Served as Technology Integration Specialist 1996-1999.
- Served as Yearbook Advisor 2000-2001.

### **Harbor Shelter and Counseling Center** Burnsville, MN — 1992-1994

A shelter and counseling center serving troubled youth ages 12-17 in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area.

#### *Accomplishments*

- Counseling youth in the program by teaching practical life skills and positive decision making.
- Management of the shelter facility including household budget, meals and scheduling recreational activities.
- Coordinating placement and programing through local law enforcement and social services.

## **Education**

### **University of St. Thomas- St. Paul, MN** Master of Arts: Curriculum and Instruction — July, 2000

A comprehensive graduate program through the Murray Institute, a collaboration between the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis and the University of St. Thomas, with a special focus on Catholic education and leadership.

Minnesota State University- Mankato, MN  
Bachelor of Science- Cum Laude

Secondary Education Licensure — June, 1992

Primary area of focus: social studies with an emphasis in history.

## Professional Development

- Served as a Hansen Fellow to Acton University- 2012, 2018
- ISM New Head of School Workshop- 2017
- CAIS Annual Conference- 2016, 2017
- Diocese of Orange- Strategic Planning for Catholic Schools- 2017
- National Association of Secondary School Principals Annual Conference- 2013
- Minnesota Association of Independent Schools Conference 2006
- Annual ISACS Division Head Conferences- 2004-2013
- Annual Core Knowledge National Conference- 2004-2009
- Core Knowledge Leadership Institute- October 2004

## References

**Dr. Todd Flanders-** Head of School, Providence Academy

Phone: [REDACTED]

email: [REDACTED]

**Dr. Kevin Ferdinandt-** Head of School, St. Agnes School

Phone: [REDACTED]

email: [REDACTED]

**Mr. Randall Adams-** President, Servite High School

Phone: [REDACTED]

email: [REDACTED]

**Mrs. Jamie Harding-** Former Assistant Head of School, St. Anne School

Phone: [REDACTED]

email: [REDACTED]

**Mr. Michael Tiffany-** Dean of Academics, Providence Academy

Phone: [REDACTED]

email: [REDACTED]

# Statement of Educational Philosophy

Steven J. Cunningham

Integrity, humility, conviction and purpose are the most important attributes that come into play when I think of what it means to lead with success in the world of private Catholic education. The beauty of education is the seemingly limitless possibilities, and the eternal hope of leading those in your charge toward that higher calling of what is possible. That being said, those noble possibilities only become real if the mission of a given school is both known and lived. Too many schools attempt to be everything to all potential clientele for the sake of putting students in seats. In the short term, that can pay bills and meet “bottom lines”, but doesn’t ensure long term viability. Long term success in Catholic education is only achieved through a mission that serves as a clear reflection of the values embraced by the stakeholders of a community, and the actions undertaken by that community to carry forward that mission.

To that end, any leader in the dynamic world of Catholic education today serves as a catalyst to clarify, quantify and celebrate the values and principles that hold the fabric of their school together. In short, a Catholic school leader is charged with the call to guide and inspire through the lens of the mission of the community in which they serve.

To serve in such a capacity, Catholic leaders must endeavor to:

1. Maintain consistency and ensure accountability in curriculum and pedagogy, policy and protocol expectations, fiscal prudence and to hold firm to the unfurling of the mission as it provides both vision and direction for the future of the school.
2. Promote, encourage and facilitate collegial and professional trust, as well as an ongoing dialogue- between the administration and faculty; within departments and divisions; and in concert with the stakeholders who entrust their children to the school.

## Statement of Educational Philosophy

Steven J. Cunningham

3. Promote, encourage and facilitate the ongoing strategic development of the school- To aspire to becoming a community vested in efficiency in practice and innovation, versatility in responsiveness and deed, expertise in planning and action, and the embodiment of the values that perpetuate the traditions and tenets of the school.

4. Assess and enhance the experience of students and families in keeping with the strategic vision of the school (the what, how and why of that experience...in addition to the ways).

5. Encourage an ongoing passion and enthusiasm for teaching, learning, prayer, fellowship, and personal growth and development - to uplift, celebrate, and showcase as well as setting goals to improve.

These set of coherent belief statements serves as a foundation for my planning and practice as a leader in Catholic education.

It is my hope that I am blessed with the opportunity to lead students, families, faculty and staff in the tenets of a mission that embodies deep truths that are close to my own heart. I aspire to create a Catholic school experience that graduates young men and women with character and virtue, as well as the intellect and will to succeed in the world. That success can be measured through a true love of learning, an inherent want to serve others, and a growing love for God and truth.





Greetings:

Steve Cunningham is among the finest educational professionals I've been associated with. For a decade before heading to top leadership roles at St. Anne's School in Orange County, Steve served as middle school director at Providence Academy, where I am founding headmaster.

Steve took a division that lacked an identity and gave it a strong one. Begun in 2001 with grades Pre-K through 9, Providence Academy experienced explosive growth in early years. A 6-9 secondary school model grew to 6-12 in short order, with a single faculty, administrator, and many policies covering all those grades. Steve was an essential hire, a Godsend. By the time he left for leadership at St. Anne's, our Middle School stood on its own in academics, discipline, culture, pedagogy, faculty development, and overall identity. Steve's winsome, sensitive, and firm leadership were the key.

With Steve, I personally also learned much about operating a top independent and Catholic school in a fiercely competitive educational market (Providence is situated among the best public school districts in a state known for educational outcomes). Wonderfully collaborative, Steve helped us achieve an overall institutional identity as a place of challenge and excellence while at the same time being student sensitive.

Steve has rare abilities to be both boss and colleague, and both subordinate and intimate adviser and friend. He communicates an infectious joy to those around him, while not shying away from the "tough stuff." Students, parents, and colleagues all look to Steve for wisdom—and our favorite way to get that wisdom is when he gives a talk with a PowerPoint; he is a master. Nobody has a more intuitive sense of students and a more creative sense of how to speak of teaching and learning with them. His talks are TED-worthy.

I recommend Steve Cunningham to you with enthusiasm and without reservation. Please do feel free to call me. A single page letter can't suffice to extoll this candidate.

Godspeed,

Todd R. Flanders, Ph.D.  
Headmaster

15100 Schmidt Lake Road • Plymouth, Minnesota 55446 • Phone: (763) 258-2500 • Fax: (763) 258-2501  
E-mail: [info@providenceacademy.org](mailto:info@providenceacademy.org) • Web: [www.providenceacademy.org](http://www.providenceacademy.org)



621 South Third Street  
Stillwater MN 55082  
651 439-5581  
www.stcroixcatholic.com

To whom it may concern:

Humility and self-assuredness—these are the core attributes Mr. Steve Cunningham offers to an administrative team—and the perfect combination for dynamic leadership. I first began teaching as a direct report to Mr. Cunningham in the fall of 2006 at Providence Academy Middle School, and remained on his team for five academic years until my departure for further education in the spring of 2011. Additionally, I taught the same seventh grade history class with Steve for four years; throughout our time teaching together, everything I have come to value as an educator, and everything I hope to achieve, has been modeled by Steve. He was not merely a boss, but a mentor *par excellence*, and has remained a valuable resource to share and exchange ideas with today. Steve is a first rate professional, and I can only hope to convey a fraction of his talent in this letter of support.

A note on his teaching style is necessary as his leadership among faculty is an extension of his classroom philosophy. Mr. Cunningham embraces the notion that students succeed when they have choices, take part in the planning process, and take ownership of their successes and shortcomings. During my time at Providence I watched Steve implement these practices in a variety of ways, including many moments in the classroom where the students opted to work as a large group, small group, or individually given the unit, lesson, and class. I learned very early that by giving the students some of the share in the planning process, they worked to their optimal results while discussing and comprehending content. Additionally, Mr. Cunningham often permits students to choose several different format options for a unit project, such as essay, presentation, or display. Again, his flexibility allows the students to flourish by relying on their personal strengths. Regarding his desire for students to take ownership of their successes, Mr. Cunningham has implemented many opportunities to highlight student achievement in academic and character development—from virtue awards to monthly ‘Medals of Honor.’ Apropos shortcomings, an Academic Support Study Hall was created where students falling behind on their work would attend to get caught up under more guided supervision before they could return to their regularly assigned study hall—students were not allowed to opt out of work and they were given the support and motivation that they *would* succeed.

Such commentary on Mr. Cunningham’s teaching ability is essential to understanding the management of his faculty. Students thrive in his classroom as they feel both support and autonomy, in a word, trust. His teams of faculty are always loyal, ambitious, and motivated, because, they too, are given trust in developing their own ideas. I speak of this first hand having been given much liberty in taking Steve’s idea for an Academic Support Study Hall and implementing the program in a way that matched my personal strengths. The program succeeded, I felt valued as a member of his team, and most importantly, the students were given what they needed to thrive. Such a moment demonstrates Mr. Cunningham’s desire to rely on the strengths of each faculty member—the organized with the implementation of new programs, the energetic with the research of new methods and instructional techniques, the unruffled with student behavior. Ultimately, the result is, then and now, a team operating in synergy—motivating and encouraging each other—under the skillful eye of a talented leader. As for faculty weaknesses, Steve is exceptional in finding the timely and needed professional development speaker, conference, or seminar to hone the skills of his faculty. Such a practice never deflates the ambition of the faculty, but only rejuvenates the teachers in meeting the joyful challenge of the classroom anew.

It was only over time that I came to fully understand that it was and is Steve’s personal humility which permits such a sharing in the planning process, and thus allows for the students and faculty to enthusiastically give their best—not because it is demanded or expected, but because it is allowed to blossom in its own way. Only a self-assured leader rests confidently in the talent of his students and faculty and waits in expectation for the fruit of their efforts, and in that Mr. Cunningham accomplishes what he offers everyone he works with, the reliance on his personal strengths.

I welcome any further questions regarding Mr. Steve Cunningham’s attributes as a teacher and an administrator, and extend the invitation for a discussion that highlights his many talents beyond the scope of this letter.

Faithfully yours,

*Christine E. Malovrh*

Christine E. Malovrh

██████████ c



### Letter of Recommendation for Steve Cunningham

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Mike Boone and I am the Director of Engineering at Shattuck-St. Mary's School in Faribault, MN. From 2005 to 2012, I was a science, math, and industrial arts teacher working under Steve Cunningham at Providence Academy in Plymouth, MN. During that time, I came to know Steve as a confident and trusted leader.

I came to Providence Academy from the corporate world with only 2 months of classroom experience. Steve, with years of experience in the classroom, was able to observe and give me teaching recommendations that I could apply the very next day. Steve was able to point out my strengths and work with my weaknesses to mold me into the teacher I am today.

At Providence, Steve teaches a middle school history class. Every year, the students assigned to his class are excited they get "Mr. C" as a teacher. His class is fun and engaging, but at the same time, challenging for the students. Having this background gives Steve credibility when he speaks about classroom issues and management with teachers and parents.

As an administrator, Steve makes the Middle School a very positive experience for everyone involved. He has the trust of the students, teachers, and parents to make the difficult decisions. Many times, parents have commented about the positive and nurturing culture maintained at the Middle School. This is a direct result of Steve's leadership.

Steve is not only a great leader, but he is a very accomplished public speaker. Whether he is speaking to a group of students, teachers, or parents, Steve can deliver a message that is engaging and humorous, but at the same time has a very clear message. One of Steve's many strengths is his ability to focus presentations to age-appropriate audiences.

Steve's genuine character, his classroom experience, his ability to lead, and his communication skills make him an excellent candidate for a director's position. I highly recommend Steve, and am confident that he will be a great leader for his new school, the teachers he will be leading, and the students he will be guiding.

Sincerely,

Mr. Michael D. Boone  
Director of Engineering  
Shattuck-St. Mary's School  
1000 Shumway Ave.  
Faribault, MN 55021