



Saint Stanislaus School December Update

I'm pleased to announce that St. Stanislaus School has been awarded another grant from the Carney Family Charitable Foundation School Solutions Seed Fund. We will be using this grant for the development of an outdoor multi-disciplinary learning atelier. Based on the traditional artist's atelier, a learning atelier is a space filled with tools and materials that fosters collaborative learning under the guidance of an expert. Our atelier would contain areas for science, math, writing, dramatic performance, music, and art, as well as a tinkering table. We are deeply grateful to the Carney Family Charitable Foundation for the opportunity to bring this to life,

Why an outdoor atelier?

As a school community, we are in the midst of a transition to a full Catholic liberal arts curriculum. This Thomistic approach to study requires the students to analyze subject matter in detail from multiple angles, while also understanding the matter in context. Students need to be taught how to think analytically and how to relate what they are studying to the larger world. In the past, such deep thinking was nurtured through daily experience in the formative years and schools could build on this. However, we find that children today, as digital natives, are used to instant answers. Time spent in family or multi-generational interaction and conversation is often limited. While children connect socially online, those conversations tend to be shallow.

We are involved in a school-wide study of the Medieval period this year. Our reason for choosing this period is best expressed in Dr. Andrew Jones' description of the time in his book [Before Church and State](#) as "a world in which the material and the spiritual were totally dependent on each other and penetrated one another at every level." This is and has always been the Catholic world-view: everything in the material world has the potential to be used by God as a channel for his presence and grace. Our responsibility to hand on this heritage to our children has never been more urgent. They are growing up in a divided world and are encouraged by society to live shallowly and to compartmentalize their lives. We believe that there can be no unity in society without an internal personal unity that allows us to live in the presence of God even as we go about the business of our daily lives. The use of an outdoor atelier will give us a unique setting in which to foster this integration through a study of the natural world.

The majority of our students do not spend unstructured time outdoors due to safety concerns in their neighborhoods. There is little exposure to nature, and thus another disconnect with the world around them. At the same time, we find ourselves on a large school campus with underused outside space.

Our development of a multidisciplinary atelier is unique in this area. In our research, we have found only one outdoor classroom that exists as part of an elementary school in Southeastern Massachusetts. It is focused on gardening. There are outdoor classrooms run by private entities, such as museums; these tend to focus on specific science areas. There appear to be none dedicated to an interdisciplinary learning approach.

Where will the atelier be located?

Last spring, a group of parents took on the project of clearing the space behind the rectory storage garages of vegetation and dead or damaged trees. They uncovered an enclosure measuring 2,432 square feet, which is in good condition. It has large paved areas as well as areas suitable for planting. The parents reset a few of the pavers and did some minor repair work on a cement wall. The lighting in the area is in working condition, although updated fixtures are needed. The area is handicapped accessible and there is a bathroom in the rectory basement that can be used by students. Second grade has already done plantings and had science classes in the area.

How will the atelier be used?

We envision a multi-disciplinary space with areas for STEM, writing, dramatic performance, music, and art. As an example of how it would be used, students might read a classic such as Old Mother West Wind, monitor the weather outside, conduct experiments with types of bird seed that different local species prefer, construct a squirrel-proof bird feeder, write and present a play or series of poems based on the characters in the book, learn a folk song such as *And the Green Grass Grows All Around* while accompanying it on rhythm instruments, learn to draw using the techniques in Thornton Burgess' work, and study the geography of Massachusetts.

The outdoor classroom could be used most of the year, except when there is a major snowfall or extremely cold weather. In the winter months, use would most likely be limited to science experiments and observations. We also plan to use the space for family nights in the spring and summer.

How will the grant funds be used?

We have been awarded \$6300.00 and have budgeted it as follows:

- \$ 820.00 - 4 outdoor tables with benches
- \$1000.00 - 2 exterior doors (the current doors leading from the storage area to the enclosure are weather-damaged and not secure and need to be replaced)
- \$ 75.00 - 1 gate lock
- \$ 300.00 - replacement of light fixtures
- \$ 600.00 - materials to build display cases and chalkboard and a hinged cover for tinkering table
- \$ 210.00 - 1 potting bench
- \$ 376.00 - 2 cold frame greenhouses
- \$1000.00 - 1 RainWise Weather Station Direct to Weather Underground
- \$ 75.00 - 1 sundial
- \$ 300.00 - 6 field easels
- \$ 400.00 - 12 table easels
- \$ 200.00 - 1 instrument set for music tree
- \$ 210.00 - 2 waterproof storage lockers
- \$ 150.00 - furniture covers for winter
- \$ 120.00 - totes to store individual STEM kits
- \$ 300.00 - tinkering table tools
- \$ 400.00 - 20 binocular sets



You're invited!

We will make our purchases during the winter months and begin installing things in the enclosure as soon as the weather breaks in the early spring. The work will include building the chalkboard and display cases, assembling furniture, setting up the digital weather station, replacing light fixtures, and assembling STEM kits. If you'd like to be part of our volunteer team to help make the atelier a reality, just email me at jwillis@saintstanislaus.com.

Watch for more news in our January update! As always, we thank each of you for your prayerful support of St. Stanislaus School. We wish you a blessed Advent season.

Miss Willis

