



# **A MATTER OF THE HEART**

**Standards and Benchmarks  
for Salesian Secondary Schools**



**"Remember, education is a matter of the heart,  
of which God is the sole master,  
and we will be unable to achieve anything  
unless God teaches us, and puts the key in our hands.**

**Let us strive to make ourselves loved,  
and we will see the doors of the many hearts open with great ease,  
and join with us in singing praises and blessing of Him  
who wished to make himself our model, our way,  
our example in everything,  
but especially in the education of the young."**

**— St. John Bosco**

# Introduction



St. John Bosco, who commonly was known as Don Bosco, sensed that the school was an essential tool for education<sup>1</sup> and was the setting that provided young people with opportunities to develop a sense of God, Church, family and citizenship. For this reason, Don Bosco chose the school as one of his primary settings where the needs of the young were addressed and integrated them within an overall project of education and evangelization.

To put his system into practice, Don Bosco adopted the concept of the “educative community” as a pattern and model used to build an environment used to attain the objectives of his apostolic action; namely, Don Bosco’s schools would build an environment of participation and constructive relationships, in which educators, parents and students worked together to achieve a dynamic experience of Salesian family and Church. The method the educative community utilizes to meet the needs of the young is the oratory experience, which was evident at Don Bosco’s first educational work in Valdocco, Italy where it is a home that welcomes, a school that educates, a church that evangelizes, and a playground where joy is found and friends are made.

Don Bosco’s educational process integrates faith and life. It includes the discovery of one’s life project and a commitment to transforming the world in accordance with God’s plan for each young person. The originality and boldness of the call to youthful holiness is an intrinsic part of Don Bosco’s educative approach. It is a holiness that meets the profound aspirations of young people (their need for life, expansion, joy, freedom, a future, etc.). Similarly today, Pope Francis passionately believes that “education cannot be reduced to just the transmission of ideas. We must find new ways to help young people develop their capacity to think, to create, and to love.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Youth Ministry, Salesian Congregation. *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Address of Pope Francis at the World Congress on Catholic Education, Rome. November 18-22, 2015.

A century later, the bishops of the United States shared the same sense. In their seminal document, *To Teach as Jesus Did* (1972) the bishops stated, “education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News.” With the publishing of this document, the threefold mission of our Catholic schools in the United States was defined: “Catholic schools exist to proclaim the Gospel, to build community, and to serve our brothers and sisters.”<sup>3</sup>

From the beginning of Don Bosco’s apostolic activity, he incorporated in his mission many lay people who would share in animating his ministry to the young. Our province has long valued the presence and the active role the laity play in animating our mission. As part of its preparation and reflection for General Chapter 24: Salesians and Laity, in 1995 the province under the leadership of Fr. Joe Boenzi, who served as Province Delegate for Youth Ministry, in collaboration with SDB and key lay people, developed a process of articulating standards for each type of our works: schools, parishes, youth club, and retreat center.



Along with the leadership of Mr. Bill Goodman, Province Coordinator of Education, the *Province Standards for Salesian Schools* developed in 1995 would be what guided the animation of our high schools for over twenty years.

During the Salesian Education Seminar (SES) in June 2017, school administrators expressed the need to create a new and viable formation program that would meet the needs of this generation of new Salesian educators<sup>4</sup>. This year-long discussion led the group to recognize that not only a revised program was needed, but a systematic process was called for beginning with an update of the *Province Standards for Salesian Schools (1995)*. It was decided that the schools needed to meet the new requirements for accreditation by the Western Catholic Education Association (WCEA), design a new curriculum for the initial formation that would be relevant and engage new Salesian educators, and create an assessment instrument that would help standardize the language of our Salesian ethos, the various practices and programs that define what is meant to be a Salesian school.

<sup>3</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *To Teach as Jesus Did*, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> The term **Salesian educator** is understood to refer to both SDB and lay faculty, staff, and administrators.

Realizing the monumental project ahead of them, this group of Salesian educators employed the same collaborative process that was undertaken in 1995 and enlisted other key members of local school leadership in the province (i.e. , SDB directors, Coordinators of Youth Ministry, and Assistant Principals). In the summer of 2018, this expanded school leadership group gathered to reflect and assess the *Province Standards for Salesian Schools (1995)* in light of the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Elementary and Secondary Schools* by the National Catholic Educational Association NCEA (2012) and the *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference* by the Salesian Congregation (2014). Additionally, the group reviewed the committee work of the SDBs outline for a National System of Salesian Schools and other documents from both SDB and FMA resources. The group took into consideration the WCEA E-3 protocol<sup>5</sup> on authentic Catholic identity that was already required.



This school leadership group would then spend the following year engaged in a process of redefining, drafting, and editing the *Standards and Benchmarks* presented here. In addition, the group developed a framework for initial formation, a tool for accompaniment of new Salesian educators, and devised an assessment instrument to be used for local site visits. This collaborative effort is an on-going commitment to give greater clarity to how the province could accompany the schools to be more effective in our Salesian mission.

The first part of these standards and benchmarks focus on the Salesian and Catholic identity of the schools. Eventually the areas of governance and animation, academic and spiritual formation, and sustainability will be reflected upon and added on in the future.

These standards and benchmarks have been designed to be a tool to help guide the schools ensure that our Salesian charismatic and spiritual identity, educational practice, and mission are achieved and preserved.

These first set of standards and benchmarks were presented to the Provincial Chapter and approved on June 21, 2019.

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<sup>5</sup> The E-3 protocol (Ensuring Educational Excellence) is a self study that Catholic high schools use as part of their WCEA accreditation process. Annually, schools are required to submit a report outlining the progress made from the last accreditation visit.

This document contains three types of statements grounded in Church teachings, Salesian best practices, and proven success of those dedicated to the future of Salesian secondary education in the United States, in particular here in California.

The **Defining Characteristics** flow directly from the *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference* (2014). The characteristics define the deep Salesian identity of our schools and serve as the platform on which the standards and benchmarks rest. The defining characteristics authenticate the standards and benchmarks, justifying their existence and providing their meaning.

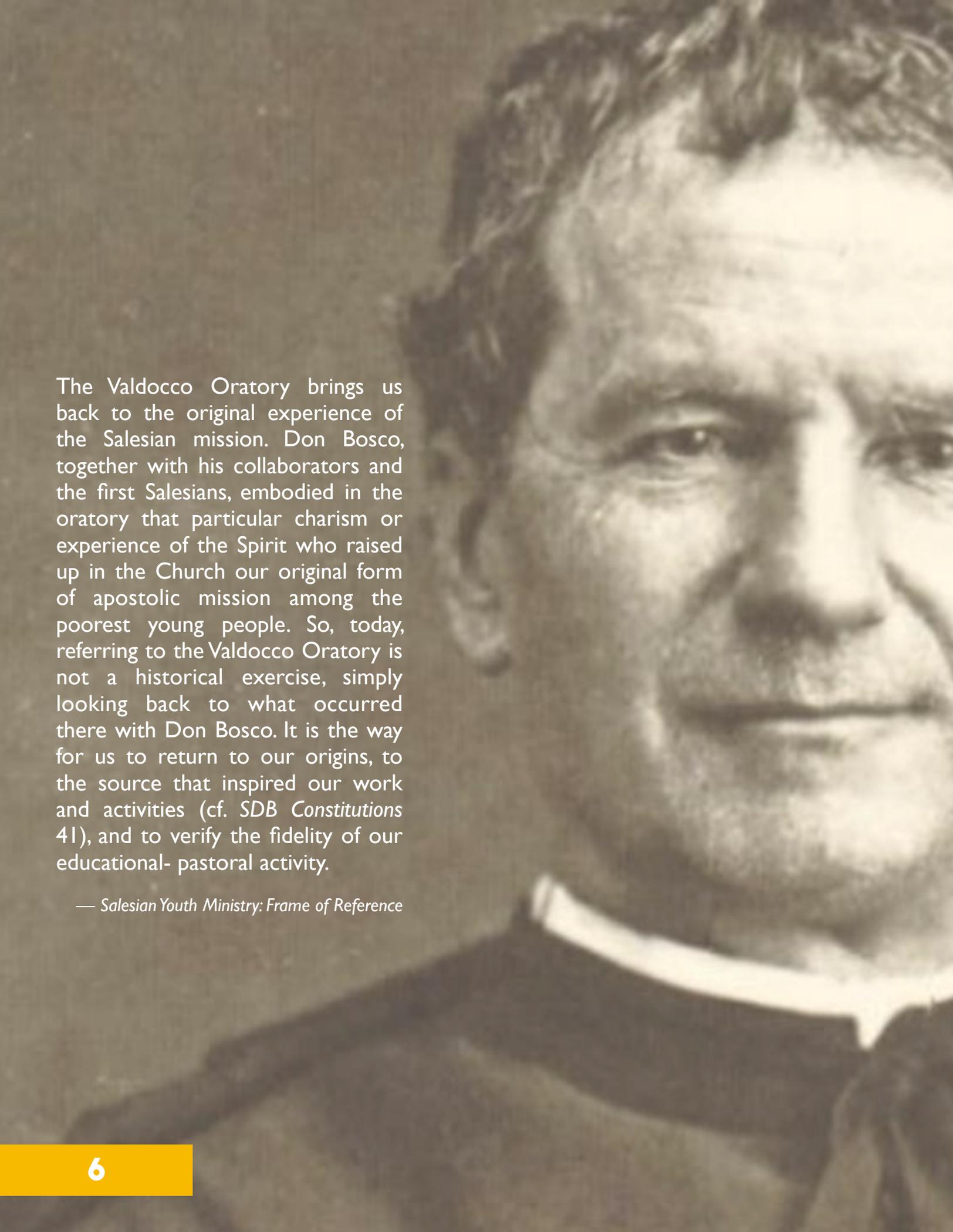
The **Standards** describe policies, programs, structures, and processes that should be present in mission-driven, program effective, well-managed, and responsibly governed Salesian schools that operate in concert with the defining characteristics.

The **Benchmarks** provide observable, measurable descriptors for each standard. Benchmarks provide a solid basis for development of a detailed Salesian schools assessment and diagnostic instruments, data collection and reporting structures, and accreditation tools, as appropriate at the local, diocesan, province, and worldwide levels.





# Salesian and Catholic Identity and Mission



The Valdocco Oratory brings us back to the original experience of the Salesian mission. Don Bosco, together with his collaborators and the first Salesians, embodied in the oratory that particular charism or experience of the Spirit who raised up in the Church our original form of apostolic mission among the poorest young people. So, today, referring to the Valdocco Oratory is not a historical exercise, simply looking back to what occurred there with Don Bosco. It is the way for us to return to our origins, to the source that inspired our work and activities (cf. *SDB Constitutions* 41), and to verify the fidelity of our educational- pastoral activity.

— *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*



# Characteristics



The Oratory experience of Valdocco serves as the basic pattern and model for educating and evangelizing young people today. This unique educational model embraces the concept of creating a caring, loving and nurturing environment where the young can learn (school), grow in faith (church), feel comfortable (home), and ultimately be happy (playground). This type of school environment will enable any young person to thrive academically, spiritually, and personally. At the heart of this Oratorian environment is our Salesian spirit, embodied in "the Preventive System," defined as educative love, common sense, and Christian humanism (Reason, Religion and Loving Kindness). Inspired by the style of the Good Shepherd as lived out by St. John Bosco, it is the hallmark of our spirituality and our educational and pastoral way of accompanying the young.

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In our way of being a **eucharistic community**, we recognize that at the heart of the educative and pastoral community is God's love in the person of Jesus Christ. We experience His presence through loving the young and one another, and through the celebration of the sacraments. In this way, we ourselves become Christ's compassionate Good News in the world.

In the way we place the good of **the young at the center**, especially in all of our plans and actions. We recognize God's gift found in each young person. They are encouraged and empowered to become protagonists and participate actively in their own education; therefore, grow in personal and social responsibility as "good Christians and honest citizens".

In the way we embody a **family spirit** by building a culture of trust and mutual respect. We see value in partnering with one another in sharing the mission of educating the young and leading them to encounter Christ.

In the way we **educate for transformation**. We commit to forming the whole person to grow spiritually, intellectually, physically, emotionally, socially, morally, and religiously. We accompany the young and their families to become missionary-disciples. We create opportunities to practice social justice through service and love in action.

# Standard 1

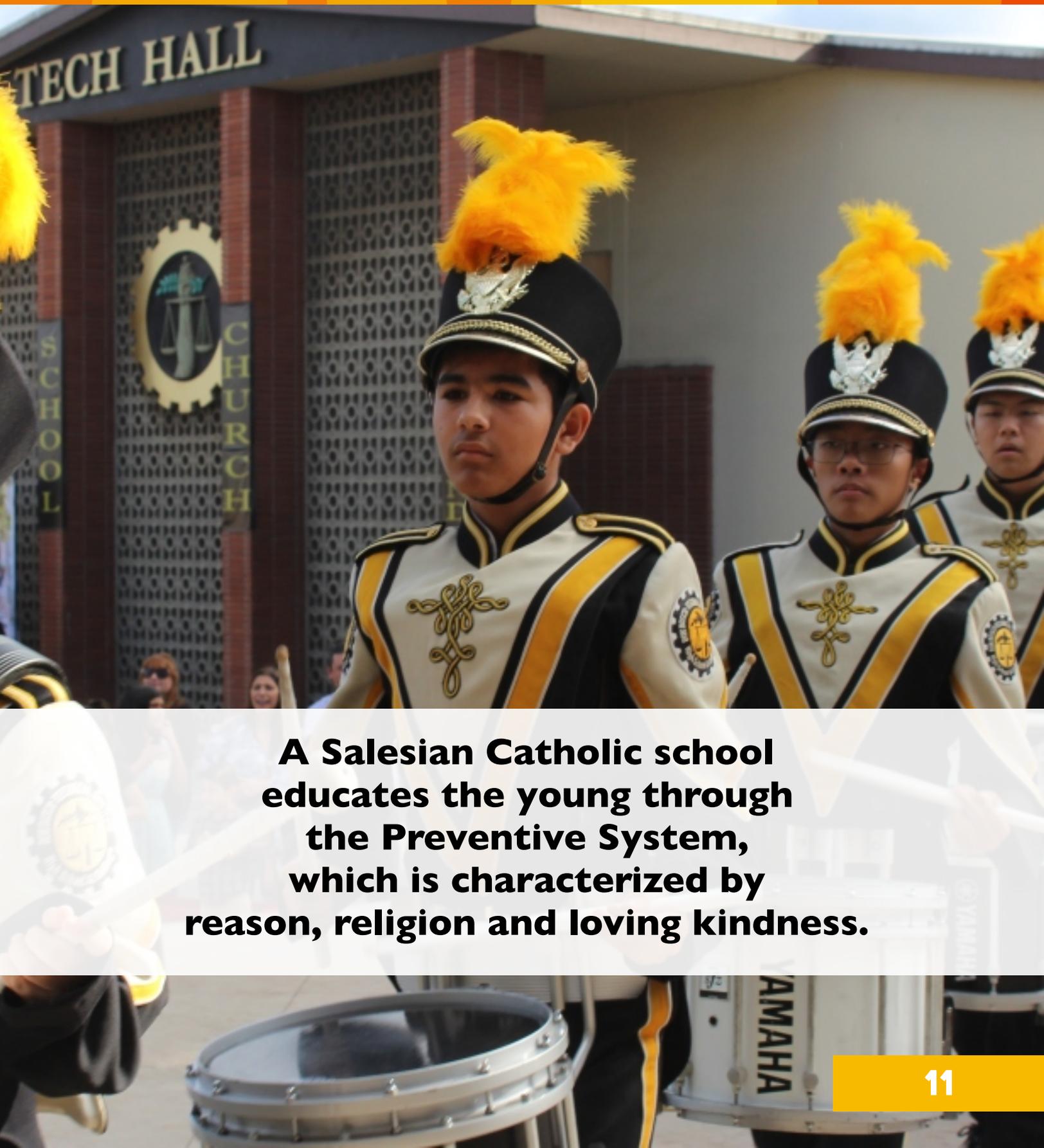


**A Salesian Catholic school is guided by St. John Bosco's mission based on the oratory experience of home, church, school and playground.**

## **Benchmarks:**

1. All constituents live the oratory experience that reflects a home that welcomes, a school that educates, a church that evangelizes, and a playground where life is joyful.
2. The school's mission statement is informed by the mission statement of the Salesian province and is reviewed on an on-going basis.
3. The school's mission statement is clearly visible and community members know of its location in public places, official documents and in all student, parent, faculty and staff handbooks.
4. All school community members know, understand, live, and model the school's mission statement.
5. All planning, decision-making, and operations done by governing bodies and school leaders are guided by the school's mission statement.
6. There is an on-going Salesian vocational formation and educational program for faculty and staff, administration and governing bodies, students and families that cultivates an understanding of Don Bosco's mission.

# Standard 2



**A Salesian Catholic school educates the young through the Preventive System, which is characterized by reason, religion and loving kindness.**

## **Benchmarks:**

1. Salesian educators are visibly present and actively engaged in the classroom and wherever students are gathered in any place and for any activity.
2. The school's academic curriculum and instruction is based on the needs of the young and integrates faith and culture.
3. The school community's student support services promote the use of the Preventive System through counseling, academic support/intervention, and social/emotional outreach or concern that creates effective opportunities for growth, learning, and collaboration.
4. The school's disciplinary system promotes fairness, due process, and self-discipline based on Don Bosco's principles of treating the young with reason, religion and kindness.

# Standard 3



**A Salesian Catholic school  
is a community of faith  
that is modeled after Don Bosco's spirituality.**

## **Benchmarks:**

1. The spiritual formation of the young is integrated into the academic and co-curricular programs.
2. The school community provides regular opportunities to celebrate the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation.
3. The school community maintains a visible spiritual environment reflective of Don Bosco's educational system.
4. The school community engages students in timely, regular, and age-appropriate opportunities to reflect on their life experiences and faith through retreats, service learning, and other activities.
5. The school community begins each school day and each class with prayer.
6. The school's religious education curriculum and instruction is based on the needs of the young and meets the standards of the (arch)diocese as delineated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
7. The school implements a four year curriculum on the life, mission and spirituality of Don Bosco.

# Standard 4

**A Salesian Catholic school  
animates the young  
to be honest and upright citizens  
for our local and global communities.**



## **Benchmarks:**

1. The school community reflects the gospel values of openness, trust, service, courtesy, thoughtfulness, and the dignity of each person.
2. The school community promotes and celebrates respect for diversity through an environment of support, respect, care, and acceptance.
3. Students experience role models of faith and service for social justice among the administrators, faculty and staff, families, and their peers.
4. Aligned with Catholic Social Teaching, students develop an understanding of their vocation through participation in and reflection on service-learning.
5. The students actively participate in their own education and formation to care for the environment; moreover, they are engaged in creating a more just society and building a better future.

# Standard 5



**A Salesian Catholic school cultivates a family spirit celebrated through the oratory experience.**

## Benchmarks:

1. Salesian educators are formed together to visibly support the faith life of the school community.
2. A Council of the Educative-Pastoral Community (CEPC) gathers on a regular basis to assess the needs of the young in order to create and implement an annual pastoral plan to address those needs.
3. The school community nurtures a relationship and partnership with parents<sup>6</sup>, who are the primary educators of their children.
4. The school community provides regular opportunities to build life-long relationships in an atmosphere of shared joy.
5. The school community fosters a sense of belonging by helping all discover, develop, and celebrate their unique culture, gifts, and abilities.

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<sup>6</sup> The term **parent** is used in a broad and inclusive way to mean any caregiver responsible for caring for, and supporting, a young person, which can be defined as: (a) The biological or adoptive parent or legal guardian of a young person; (b) The person legally entitled to custody of a young person; (c) The person who undertakes to fulfil the obligations of a person referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) towards the young person's education at school.



From the early days of the Oratory Don Bosco formed around him a community – a family in which the young people themselves were the key players. He created a youthful environment in which the values of the Preventive System were embodied.

— *Salesian Youth Ministry:  
Frame of Reference*

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## System of Salesian Secondary Schools

Province of Saint Andrew, San Francisco  
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