**Sunbury Christian Academy
Step 1: Culture & Community**
Sunbury Christian Academy Star Activity 1C School Culture and Community Overview

Sunbury Christian Academy is located in Northumberland County, one of 67 counties in Pennsylvania. It is a ministry of the Sunbury Bible Church. Due to its geographical location and the size of central Pennsylvania counties, the school services four counties: Northumberland, Union, Montour, and Snyder counties. These counties actually comprise an area of Pennsylvania called the Greater Susquehanna Valley.

When the school was founded, the church was located in Sunbury, but moved to the neighboring township called Point Township when the church built a new building in 1992. Point Township’s mail comes through Northumberland Borough, so our mailing address is Northumberland.

The Susquehanna Valley’s central feature is the Susquehanna River, the nation’s longest non-navigable waterway. The area offers a still-thriving manufacturing economy, a bustling tourism industry and medical and business opportunities. The meandering river has given rise to people whose values and strong work ethic provide the foundation for a hearty spirit that never gives up. It is surrounded by New York City, Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and Washington D.C. The rare combination of a rural quality of life with quick access to major urban areas affords a lifestyle that many find desirable.

The area is defined by a conservative outlook in the political, moral, and church climate. The population of the Susquehanna Valley numbers around 130,000, with small towns and villages through-out the rural area. Sunbury is the county seat for Northumberland County and was incorporated in 1772. It covers 2.33 square miles. Northumberland Borough is a small area next to Sunbury that is comprised of around 3,700 people, Point Township, where the school is actually located, is a neighbor to Sunbury and Northumberland Borough. It is also populated by about 3,700 people.

The area that Northumberland County covers is approximately 460 square miles. The area’s largest employers are light industry, health care, and educational institutions. The largest single employer in Northumberland County is Weis Markets, a grocery store chain. This business hires many students, too, so that is an advantage to our student body. The farming sector is still a major factor of employment, particularly in the area of poultry and dairy.

Northumberland County is the most populated of the four counties in the Susquehanna Valley with approximately 94,600 people, but it experienced a population decline during the years 2000-2006, as it lost 2.1% of its people. That declining population is 49% male and 51% female, with 19% being 65 or older. The median age is 40.8. Of the total population, approximately 97% are Caucasian, 1.5% are African American, and 1.5% are Hispanic or other races. The unemployment rate is approximately 5.4% and the median income is $48,400. The median income for Pennsylvania is $49,952.

Snyder County’s population is about 38,200 with a population growth of 1.8% during the years 2000-2005. Approximately 51% of those are female and 49% male. Approximately 14.5% of the population are 65 years or older. The population is about 98.1% Caucasian. African-Americans make up 1.1% and Hispanics and Asians make up the other percentage. Snyder County’s median income is $37,608. The unemployment rate is 4.3%

Union County’s population is approximately 43,100 with a population growth of 3.6% from 2000-2005. Approximately 44% are female and 56% are male. Approximately 13.9% of the population are 65 years or older. The population is about 90.2% Caucasian, 7.7% African-American, and Hispanics and Asians make up the other percentage. Their median income is 39,434 and the unemployment rate is 5.21%.

Montour County’s population is about 18,032 with a population decline of 1.1% during the years 2000-2005. Approximately 52% are female and 48% male. Approximately 18% of the population are 65 years or older. The population is about 96.3% Caucasian, 1.8% African-American, and Hispanics and Asians make up the rest. The median income is $41,314.

The quad-country area has a wide variety of established congregations and the families of Sunbury Christian Academy attend a number of these including Baptist, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Bible and other independent churches.

 The immediate community surrounding Sunbury Christian Academy offers a variety of educational opportunities. At the elementary and high school levels, there are numerous private schools to choose from, as well as the traditional, local public schools. Within a twenty mile radius, there are several other Christian schools. Two of the larger schools are also ministries of specific churches. There are also several schools that are much smaller than Sunbury Christian Academy. Some are designated as “college-prep schools” and some are not. Most are discipleship schools. We are unique in the sense that we are a solid Christian school but are both an evangelistic and a discipleship school. This is both a blessing and a challenge!

Our central Pennsylvania region is well regarded for the quality of our post-secondary educational opportunities. Within a 50 mile radius of SCA are very well-known universities. These include Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, Bloomsburg University in Bloomsburg and many others that affect our area, like Penn State University, Messiah College, and Elizabethtown College. Sunbury Christian Academy Profile

The state of Pennsylvania requires school districts to bus student if our school is ten miles or less from the nearest border using a highway. This means that our students are bussed from 7 different districts: Shikellamy, Line Mountain, Shamokin, Lewisburg, Danville, Selinsgrove, and Milton.

The largest percentage of our students comes from Northumberland (30%) and Sunbury (23%). The other percentages are Danville 13%, Selinsgrove 12%, Milton 5% and the other 17% come from fourteen other small towns in the area.

About 30% of the student body attends the church that operates our school, Sunbury Bible Church. The rest of the students attend the other churches that we mentioned in the community demographics. There is not any one group that constitutes a larger percentage that those that attend Sunbury Bible Church.

Most of our students have been here for the majority of their school years. More students in the upper grades have been here fewer years but several have been here since they started school. In recent years, we have not replaced the number of our graduates with the same number of newer students, so our enrollment has declined in recent years. Some of that has been a positive thing since we went through a phase when we had too many students that were not here for a Christian education and that impacted what we were as a school. The Lord, however, does continue to send us lovely families that want a Christian education for their children, rather than just an alternative education. In addition, we have had the privilege of having some older students enroll that were not necessarily committed to Christian education, but have been saved and are now bringing family members to the Lord, and are growing in the grace and knowledge our lord Jesus Christ.

Although the administration has chosen not to survey the income of school families, it seems that the community income figures would be quite similar to those of the school families. The majority of our students come from middle class families. Those with more than one student in the school make the sacrifices necessary to keep them at SCA. Tuition assistance is available on a limited basis, especially for those families with several children. However, even though tuition is reasonable for this area, we do have families leave because of the financial strain. This grieves us and we are taking steps to make it possible to provide assistance for more families.

The cultural flux that concerns marriages and divorces has affected the Susquehanna Valley, like the rest of the United States. Of the 90 families in our school, 17% are single parent homes. Others are included in blended families that bring with them the opportunity to help unify the different parts that make up that blend. Actually, some of our families come specifically due to situations like that. They want the nurturing and stability that they can find here. A lot of healing takes place as students experience the love of the faculty and the Lord.

The teachers at SCA are not required to attend the school’s sponsoring church but are required to be “born again” having experienced new birth in Jesus Christ. The administration also requires that teachers and staff be faithful to a local Bible teaching church.

The school advisory committee is comprised of members of Sunbury Bible Church and the administrator is a member of Sunbury Bible Church. At least two members of the school committee serve as liaisons between the church and school by serving on the elder and deacon boards. Several of the members are either parents or grandparents of children attending SCA.

The gender of our student body is broken down as follows: 51.6% are female and 49.4% are male. The younger classes are slightly larger, with K4 through 5th grades totaling 82 students, 6th through 8th grades totaling 32 students, and 6th through 12th grades totaling 41 students.

 As mentioned before, we do permit students from non-Christian families to attend SCA. This is always done after much prayer. The students and parents must agree to uphold our “standards of conduct”. This requires a careful admission’s policy, a probationary period of acceptance, performance requirements, an openness to spiritual things, and close monitoring. A proper balance is crucial to keeping the atmosphere at SCA what it should be.

Sunbury Christian Academy students participate in activities sponsored by ACSI, such as Math Olympics, Spelling Bee, Art Festivals, and Leadership Conferences. Our sports programs include soccer, basketball, and track for both boys and girls. We have not declared ourselves to be a college-preparatory school but typically about 85% of our students pursue a college or trade school education.

SCA teachers are encouraged to integrate biblical truth into every subject on a regular basis, and to be open to the opportunities the Holy Spirit gives. We do a school-wide Christian character development program geared specifically to our students with input from the faculty. It is promoted in all classrooms, chapels, in the hallways, newsletters, discipline situations, etc.

We are currently working through the ACSI Star program with the ultimate goal of accreditation through ACSI. Currently, all core teachers are accredited through the state or through ACSI. There are 22 teachers on the faculty, including 5 that are part-time. About a third of the faculty has been here over 10 years. All have been here at least two years.

School Family Survey Results:

The Star school survey was completed by over 75% of our school families and the entire faculty. We asked the parents to mark what level their children were in, at school, on the form. We felt that would help us to get a better understanding of the results due to different situations at the various levels. It was helpful and the only big surprise we had was how positive the results were. We put them on a spreadsheet according to teachers, elementary parents, middle school parents, and high school parents. We also asked them to note if they had students at more than one level. Then, we did an overall rating.

The 3.5 was the lowest rating at any level. God was gracious with the results but we definitely have room for improvement. Our lowest overall rating was a 3.56 concerning quality before and after school care. We do have two faculty members that supervise a few children after school for a small fee but, at this time, we are unable to do more due to available personnel. We will continue to try and meet this need. The only other overall score below a 4 was a 3.94 in effective process for conflict resolution. This was primarily due to a rating of 3.5 from the faculty. The administrator and board will continue to work on this but believe it is not the lack of an effective process, but has occurred because of a couple incidents in the past when teachers didn’t know all that was involved in a situation involving another teacher (and couldn’t for privacy reasons), and did not agree with the resolution. This is something we trust the Lord to work out. We think if we surveyed them today, the results would be different.

As far as the student body, we have very few problems since we have held to our standards, put students on contracts if necessary, and always follow punitive measures with training in righteousness. We work hard at instilling biblical character qualities in our students and are seeing the fruit of that more and more each year.

The areas in which we have been especially pro-active indicate progress is being made. We had a 4.5 in providing ‘a spiritually nurturing environment,’ a 4.7 in ‘moral values of families reinforced at school,’ a 4.6 in curriculum that clearly teaches an integrated biblical worldview. We realize this is a continuing process and we give the Lord the credit for what is happening. We will continue to make these areas a priority since there was a time then this was not the case at SCA. The Lord has been good and has honored our efforts as we have sought His wisdom and guidance.

The teachers also rated us with a 3.7 on financial stability. I think this has to do with the fact that we rely on fundraisers to meet our shortfalls. If enrollment goes down, we are unable to meet our budget without these. We are working to see that tuition actually covers the cost of educating our students. (actually, Part1D) We don’t want to raise tuition any more than is necessary, especially with the economic situation in our area. However, that means yearly raises are often small. Our teachers deserve better. To address this situation, we have started a community sponsorship program this year. We have just begun to see some fruit from that. The administration also continues to encourage “planned giving” to the school as one would do with other missions organizations. That is beginning to happen as well. We are grateful to have our sponsoring church step in when necessary, but our desire is that we will be as self-sustaining as possible. We will address this further in section 1D. If we need to raise tuition, then we will trust the Lord to provide for our families.