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ALERT

St. Sebastian School | Siena Catholic Schools of Racine.

St. Sebastian school set to reopen in fall 2023

Ryan Patterson

Dec 24, 2022



St. Sebastian school, 3126 95th St., Sturtevant, has been closed since 2012 after it merged with St. Edward school to become Our Lady of Grace Academy. It is set to reopen in fall 2023.

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TURTEVANT — A Catholic school should open next year in a familiar location.

S After being closed for over a decade, St. Sebastian is expected to reopen in fall 2023 as an elementary STEM building. It will be part of Siena Catholic Schools of Racine.

St. Sebastian, 3126 95th St., Sturtevant, has been closed since 2012 after it merged with St. Edward school to become Our Lady of Grace Academy. Its reopening is intended to grow Siena's reach by attracting younger families, especially those in western Racine County.



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The building will not expand, but Siena plans to modernize the school with new technology, floors, windows and carpeting, among other aspects. Kurt Kayser, Siena operations director, said renovating the building will cost between \$500,000 and \$1 million.

Some work, like clearing out classrooms, already began. Kayser said asbestos abatement will hopefully begin this upcoming week, and more work will occur in January when a construction manager is hired.

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“It’s finding that balance, and what can we realistically and fiscally get done within the budget constraints that we have?” Kayser said. “We’re still making decisions about exactly what resourcing and projects need to be done, but we’re far along in that process.”

St. Sebastian will be Siena’s seventh school and its first science, technology, engineering and mathematics academy. Its official name is St. Sebastian STEM Academy.

“We know that parents today are looking for high-quality early childhood options for their children,” Siena President Brenda White said. “Offering a STEM academy and a really hands-on, innovative approach, beginning with those early childhood grades, we think, is something that’s going to appeal to a lot of young families. I think it fits with the type of economic growth that’s happening out here in Sturtevant.”

School plans



White



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St. Sebastian school was built in 1957. It was a kindergarten through eighth-grade school when it closed in 2012 but will serve elementary schoolers when it reopens.

St. Sebastian will start next fall with 3-year-old preschool through second-grade classrooms. One grade will be added each of the following three years until it is a 3K through fifth-grade building.

There is space to expand the building if Siena wants to add middle school classrooms in a few years, but that has not yet been decided.

White said preschool classes will have 18 children at most, while first- and second-grade classrooms will be limited to 24 students.

“We’re starting out with a manageable chunk and then growing that steadily in subsequent years,” White said.

The Siena **admissions office** is open for inquiries from families interested in their children attending St. Sebastian. There will also be several chances for prospective parents and students to see the school likely starting in February with a model classroom available for public view.

Impact on parish

St. Sebastian school sits next to St. Sebastian church and parish office. Fr. Thomas Vathappallil, St. Sebastian parish pastor, said parishioners applauded when he announced the school’s reopening at church on Dec. 11. After mass, Vathappallil said two families told him they plan to enroll their children at the school next fall.

“That was really exciting to hear,” Vathappallil said.

St. Sebastian students will attend weekly mass, and the **seven sacraments** of the Catholic church will be available to students.

“The parish will be so involved with school life,” Vathappallil said. “(Students) will get all the spiritual nourishment they need.”

The most common complaint Vathappallil has heard in his two years as pastor is that the school is closed, so he is excited to see it reopen.

“The school was the life of St. Sebastian,” Vathappallil said. “The closure of the school was a big blow to St. Sebastian parish.”

According to Vathappallil, there are more than 300 families who belong to St. Sebastian parish, the only Catholic parish in Sturtevant. He hopes more people will join the parish when the school reopens.



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Continuing the legacy

The process to reopen St. Sebastian has been in the works for about three years, according to White. Many people were involved in the plan, including school district officials, parish leaders and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Officials looked at area

population trends, birth rates and income levels before choosing to reopen St. Sebastian.

“It’s been a collaborative planning process,” White said.

Officials are excited to reopen the Catholic school, a rare occasion in recent years.

“It’s very exciting to be part of the rebirth of a school that has a very proud history, a parish that’s really delighted to have their school coming back to life,” White said.

“It’s not something that happens every day in Catholic education.”

There will likely be challenges, particularly in the first few years as the school gets up and running, but White believes it will be a “joyful” occasion when new staff and students enter the building next year.

Vathappallil agreed: “That’s the excitement we are waiting for. That’s the life that the parish is looking for. We all want to see the children enjoying the big space that we have in a beautiful environment for their studies.”

Earl Wirtz, St. Sebastian parish council chairman, said he looks forward to providing opportunities for future students and carrying on the work of parishioners who founded St. Sebastian church in 1905.

“The legacy continues,” Wirtz said. “It’s for the kids. When we focus on that, we won’t make a mistake.”

There is no guarantee that the school reopening will go as successfully as hoped, but officials believe it is a chance worth taking.

“It’s a substantial investment on our part in this new endeavor,” Kayser said. “There’s been a lot of making sure that we’ve covered all the bases in terms of our research to make sure that this is going to be a success. Some of it is a little bit of a gamble ... but we’re very confident that reopening the school is going to be a big success.”