



ST. BENEDICT'S MODEL

The Father Mark Payne Institute

St. Benedict's model gives students tremendous leadership opportunities and fosters a strong sense of community so that students become responsible citizens eager to contribute to the community and the world.

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OVERVIEW

St. Benedict's model supports students to fulfill their potential as emotionally mature, morally responsible, and well-educated citizens. To do this, they create meaningful student leadership opportunities, social-emotional support systems, and community-building structures. The success of the model hinges on the idea that students are responsible for their own development as well as that of their peers. While the model was developed explicitly to serve students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, it has the potential to support students from all racial, religious, and socioeconomic groups.

The St. Benedict's Prep model is implemented at the flagship site in Newark, NJ, serving 950 students, of which 85% identify as students of color and 80% receive financial aid. St. Benedict's students far outpace Newark in graduation rate and college enrollment and persistence. The Father Mark Payne Institute offers site visits, professional development, implementation workshops, and ongoing support for schools interested in implementing the model.



[▶60 Minutes: The Resurrection of St. Benedict's](#)

What Makes This Model Innovative?



Connection & Community

Community building and meaningful relationships are critical to St. Benedict's model. The model is grounded in the belief that all members of the school are responsible for and accountable to each other.



Whole-Child Focus

St. Benedict's understands that educating the heart is just as important as educating the mind. Therefore, their model includes a robust counseling program to support students' social and emotional health.



Active Self-Direction

Every aspect of the model supports students in developing leadership and ownership. Students are given tremendous responsibility and significant opportunity to serve as leaders in all aspects of school life.

DESIGN

Goals

St. Benedict's model prepares students to fulfill their potential as emotionally mature, morally responsible, well-educated, and confident citizens, eager to contribute their full range of gifts to their family, community, and an ever-changing world.

Community

Students build meaningful relationships with peers and adults and are grounded in the belief that all members of the school are responsible for and accountable to each other. Students know they belong to something much bigger than themselves.

Leadership

Students are given tremendous responsibility and significant opportunities to serve as leaders in all aspects of school life. Through these experiences, they learn to take ownership in every area of their life.

Experience

St. Benedict's model builds community, ensuring that all students feel a sense of belonging and connection in the school. Students feel a sense of responsibility for their community and their peers. Students learn to exercise leadership in all aspects of school life, often having voice and choice in more meaningful and significant ways than at most schools. Lastly, students are provided with the tools and skills necessary to combat the emotional noise and overcome personal obstacles to gain the strength and resilience needed to achieve their goals academically and personally.

Community Building

Convocation

Community building is key to the model. All students and adults gather every morning for Convocation—a 45-minute school-wide morning meeting. Most of the activities during this time are student-led, from prayer and song to attendance and dismissal. Student leaders are expected to know the whereabouts of everyone in their "Group" (learn more about Group System in Leadership Development, below). Students and adults may also share important announcements during this time. Convocation is a



critical component of the model; it enables students to build meaningful relationships, foster community, and be responsible for and accountable to each other. St. Benedict's Prep broadcasts all Convocations on its YouTube channel for alumni, family, and friends. ▶

[Convocation Livestream](#)

Traditions

St. Benedict's model emphasizes the importance of Traditions—rites of passages that allow students to grow within the community and recognize that growth. Within the model, Traditions are typically challenging team experiences intentionally designed to develop resilience, self-efficacy, and interdependence. At the flagship school in Newark, this includes the following:

- **Student-Led Orientation ("The Overnight"):** Orientation is an intensive, five-day experience for freshmen to learn and buy into St. Benedict's ethos. During this time freshmen learn about St. Benedict's history, logistics, school songs, and aspects of what it means to be a member of the community. Like many aspects of the model, orientation is student-led. The freshmen are split into sections of approximately eight students, each led by one student-counselor, who is responsible for helping the new students acclimate and be successful. The counselors are overseen by a senior student, who has the title of "Freshmen leader."

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- **Challenging Team Outdoor Experience (“The Trail”):** While students at St. Benedict’s have many outdoor learning opportunities, a seminal experience that all Freshmen are automatically enrolled in is the Backpacking Project, or “The Trail”—a 55-mile hike along the Appalachian Trail. The purpose of The Trail is to foster leadership and teamwork among students, who are expected to stay together throughout the entirety of The Trail.



▶ [Stay Together Mini-Documentary](#)

Leadership Development

St Benedict’s model is built around the idea that students will step up when adults step back. The motto "Never do for students what they can do for themselves" is lived every day at their flagship school. Students are given tremendous responsibility and a significant opportunity to serve as leaders in all aspects of school life. ▶ [Student Leadership](#)

Group System

A key part of leadership development at St. Benedict’s is the Group System. All students are placed in a Group and remain in the same Group throughout their time at St. Benedict's, looking out for one another, helping each other with studies, and providing support. They learn to live up to the phrase, “Give up what you want for what we need,” building strong relationships, inclusiveness, and a mindset to put others before themselves. The Group System is student-led and is an important part of social life and student government at St. Benedict’s. Students compete in events and play an active role in running the school. ▶ [Group System](#)

Groups meet daily for “Group Period,” which is similar to an advisory but student-led. The official description of Group Period is "wasting time together," which stems from the belief that simply being together is important to community. Typically, during Group Period, students receive academic advising and personal counseling from student leaders, who can catch and follow up with those who need more professional attention (e.g., counseling). Because it is student-led, it provides peer motivation and positive peer pressure, for both academic and personal development. In addition to academics and counseling, students use the time as they see fit. This could include things like playing games, watching movies, having a pizza party, or holding discussions on current events.

Student Leadership Roles & Classes

In addition to the informal leadership opportunities available to all students, there are also formalized student leadership roles:

- Group Leader: Oversees the approximately 30 students in their Group and is responsible for planning activities for Group Period, accounting for and reporting the Group's attendance during Convocation, and representing their Group during Group Leader meetings, as well as other leadership gatherings.
- Assistant Group Leader: Support the Group Leader in realizing the goal(s) of the Group.
- Section Leader: Sections are clusters of three to five Groups. Each section is led by a Section Leader who facilitates Group Leaders by passing on information, supporting the Group Leaders' decisions, and ensuring that Group Leaders have the necessary tools to complete their jobs.
- Senior Group Leader: Responsible for the daily operations of the school. This includes setting direction for the Group Leaders and other students, addressing behavioral or community issues that arise, making decisions about schedule changes, and working directly with the Head of School.



All student leaders are automatically enrolled in leadership courses to prepare them for their roles. Leadership classes are designed to be both instructive (e.g., seminars) and interactive (e.g., workshops), as many student leaders will have the ability to simulate situations that they will expect to encounter as leaders during the course.

Emotional Wellbeing

St. Benedict's recognizes that educating the heart is just as important as educating the mind. Therefore, they developed a robust counseling program to support students' social-emotional health.

Social-Emotional Screening

All new students complete a social-emotional checklist, which provides a snapshot of each student's social-emotional state. The counseling center staff review the checklists and, based on received answers, place students into three tiers:

- Tier 1: Low probability of requiring counseling services in the future;
- Tier 2: Moderate probability of requiring counseling services in the future;
- Tier 3: High probability of requiring counseling services in the future.

They then conduct follow-up interviews with students based on their tier, typically prioritizing students in Tiers 2 and 3. In addition to the interview, which has been standardized, supplemental questions are asked of students based on their answers to the checklist.

Counseling Services

Based on the outcome of the follow-up interview, counseling staff may recommend that a student undergo one—or multiple—of the following services:

- **Group Counseling:** Group counseling, facilitated by a counselor, enables students to address specific social-emotional concerns in an open forum.
 - **Individual Counseling:** During individual sessions, students meet with a counselor regularly to address mental health challenges.
 - **Family Counseling:** Family counseling sessions are designed to help students' immediate family members facilitate pro-social behaviors and outcomes both in and out of the classroom. The counselor's main role is to foster a safe environment where either the student or parent(s) can discuss salient issues with one another.
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Supporting Structures

The model can be integrated into a school's existing overall design but will require shifts in beliefs and practices across various structures like culture, adult roles, schedule, and operations.



CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

The model does not entail a specific curriculum or instructional framework, so it can be integrated into what a school already has in place.

St. Benedict's model does not utilize a specific curriculum or instructional framework. As a result, it can work alongside what a school may already use. However, it is important that the curriculum and instruction used by a school integrate well with the practices involved in the model. For example, opportunities for students to practice agency and ownership should be integrated into all parts of the school day, including core content classes, to support student leadership development.

In addition to leadership opportunities embedded throughout all aspects of the school day, St. Benedict's also explicitly teaches leadership in a dedicated student leadership course. The course is based on the Principles of the Rule of St. Benedict—a guiding document for how the Benedictine monks live their lives. During this class, students read passages and translate them for themselves, and discuss how the lessons apply to themselves and their community.

Lastly, to build student ownership and work ethic, all students are given "a grade that they earn," which reflects the amount of effort that they contribute to their classwork. This "effort grade" is added to all report cards, alongside their grade for academic performance, to showcase that teachers value effort as much as the actual grade. St. Benedict's recognizes both grades when celebrating students for their academic success.

The school culture must have a strong sense of community built on trust and relationships.



SCHOOL COMMUNITY & CULTURE

While the experiences in the model foster a sense of community, they also require it. It is critical for students to feel safe and have a sense of belonging at school. To foster this, schools should provide students with 24-hour access. At St. Benedict's, the school is open to students at all hours of the day, even in the middle of the night. They encourage students to always go to school if they find themselves in a bad situation. There is a security guard there to welcome any student and connect the student with appropriate administrators who can make arrangements for the child's safety. Of course, if the campus cannot be accessible 24/7, schools can provide access in other ways, such as providing a phone number students can call for support. The essential part is that students can rely on, and always have access to, support from the school community.

Adults must be comfortable sharing responsibility and power with students.



ADULT ROLES, HIRING, & LEARNING

Because student leadership is essential to the model, adults must step back to allow students to step up. While faculty members are responsible for their Group, this responsibility is exercised through the Group Leader. The faculty member's role is to give advice, counsel, or direction to the Group Leader to help him or her lead the Group. This requires significant flexibility and patience. Faculty must be patient in allowing students to resolve issues on their own, while also making themselves available for guidance. To support this, all new faculty attend an orientation, are assigned a faculty mentor, and are paired with a more experienced teacher in Group to learn more about both the Group System and St. Benedict's.

Teaching is just one part of the role of adults at St. Benedict's. For example, because many staff and students live on the grounds at their flagship school, students have around-the-clock access to guidance from caring adults. Students learn and grow side by side, working through challenges together and celebrating each other's accomplishments. All faculty are expected to moderate or coach at least one extracurricular activity throughout the year. This allows faculty to interact with students in a non-academic setting, and therefore allows for another point of connection and belonging for the students.

Students are so essential to the running of the school that the first individuals candidates for faculty positions meet are students. Students provide the prospective hire with a tour and then a sit-down interview, with no other adults present. Following the student interview, members of the

SBP faculty and administration conduct their own interviews. Once hired, part of the orientation process for new teachers is led completely by the student leaders. New faculty are assigned to a Group as a moderator and are expected to support the student Group Leaders.

Time must be set aside for daily activities such as Convocation and Group Period, as well as Traditions and experiential learning activities.



SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME

Convocation and Group Period are critical parts of the model that foster community and develop student leadership. Convocation takes place first thing every morning for 45 minutes, and Group Period occurs daily for 35 minutes. [Sample Schedule](#) In addition to the daily time for Convocation and Group Period, schools must be willing to dedicate time for Traditions such as The Trail and The Overnight. At St. Benedict's Prep, all final exams are administered in April so that the month of May is dedicated to experiential learning opportunities. For five weeks there are no core content classes and students are deeply immersed in a topic of interest. It is also during this time that freshmen prepare for, and go on, The Trail—the culminating experience of the year.

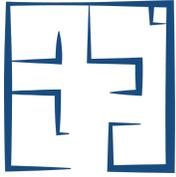


FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community partnerships are critical to building a robust counseling center that can meet the social-emotional needs of all students.

The counseling program is staffed by a PsyD, school psychologists, counselors, and psychology interns from local universities. The partnership with a local university allows St. Benedict's to add capacity to their counseling center, which does not have enough hired staff to respond to the large number of students that visit the center. It also provides psychology interns from the local universities the opportunity to work in counseling:

- Undergraduate school counselors: Local universities provide their undergraduate students pursuing school counseling degrees with the opportunity to have clinical experience by working at SBP's counseling center. While at St. Benedict's, undergraduate counseling interns gain experience by writing psychological reports, sitting through crisis interventions, and engaging in other clinical activities.
 - Graduate (Masters/PsyD)-level interns: Graduate-level interns have the opportunity to conduct therapy sessions—individual and peer—on campus.
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SPACE & FACILITIES

Schools must have a space large enough for all students and staff to come together for Convocation.

To build a sense of community across the entire student body and staff, it is critical that Convocation brings everyone together in the same physical space. Convocation can be held in any large space both indoors (e.g., gym) or outdoors (e.g., a field).



BUDGET & OPERATIONS

While the model was developed by a faith-based school, it can be implemented in all contexts.

While St. Benedict's Preparatory School is a faith-based independent school, the model can be implemented in all contexts, so long as the school shares power with students to make decisions. Many aspects of the model serve as guiding principles that can be customized and adapted to each unique school community.



CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Schools must constantly evaluate and adjust the model to best serve students.

It is critical that schools are flexible and willing to make adjustments, not just during the initial implementation of the model but also on an ongoing basis. Putting responsibility and power in the hands of students requires systemic changes and will bring about challenges. Successful implementation requires the flexibility of leaders, faculty, and parents. Schools should constantly evaluate and adjust. What worked for one cohort of students may not work for another the next year. This willingness to evaluate and adjust is especially critical since, as students are empowered to raise their voice and provide suggestions and feedback, schools must listen and act.

| IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

[St. Benedict's Preparatory School](#) and The Father Mark Payne Institute offer the following supports to help you implement their model.

The Father Mark Network of Schools

Cost Associated



The Institute shares the best practices and learnings of St. Benedict's Prep with others interested in adopting or adapting the model in their own communities. This includes visits to St. Benedict's to see the model in action, visits to your school to introduce the model to the community and assess the readiness for implementation, professional development for students and faculty, and ongoing support.

In addition, the network is a collaborative of schools that are implementing the model which allows schools to share their experiences and challenges with one another.

[Get in Touch](#)

Professional Development

Cost Associated



The Institute offers professional development for faculty and mental health professionals interested in learning more about the St. Benedict's model and bringing it to their own school community.

- PD for faculty: Designed to assist faculty in understanding how to step back and allow students to step up. Faculty will hear directly from students about the importance of the agency that they are given.
- PD for mental health professionals: Learn about the strengths and importance of the St. Benedict's Counseling program.

[Get in Touch](#)

Student Workshops & Retreat

Cost Associated



As an organization that deeply believes in giving students meaningful responsibility and leadership opportunities, The Institute offers workshops and retreats for students.

- Student Workshops: short, topic-specific sessions on leadership and anti-bullying
- Student Leadership Retreat: multi-day intensive experiences for students to grow and practice leadership

[Get in Touch](#)

Introductory Tours

Free



An in-person visit is the best way to experience the model. During your visit to St. Benedict's Preparatory School in Newark, New Jersey, you will have the opportunity to observe Convocation, listen to a brief presentation on the model, talk with students and faculty, and have Q&A time with a member of the leadership team.

[Get in Touch](#)

Reach

970

Students at
St. Benedict's

57%

Eligible for FRL

5

Partner Schools

Impact

Students at St. Benedict's show strong postsecondary success, especially in comparison to the city.

- 98% of St. Benedict's students graduate from high school, despite the fact that nearly all students endure some combination of poverty, racism, parentless homes, and neighborhood violence. In comparison, the graduation rate in Newark is 81% ([Newark Board of Education, 2021](#)).
- 80% of St. Benedict graduates either graduated from college or remain enrolled and on track to graduate. This is in stark contrast to Newark, where 16% of the adult population has a bachelor's degree ([US Census, 2020](#)).

In addition, those who have visited St. Benedict's and participated in sessions with The Institute have shared positive feedback about the model.

“ Students are very willing to embrace the greater responsibility that comes with student leadership. Very impressive!

“ Love oozes out of this place and it is transmitted through the students.

“ It was helpful to see how stepping back and letting the students step up can work at our school as well.

Contact

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RESOURCES



[60 Minutes: The Resurrection of St. Benedict's](#)

60 Minutes did a powerful story of St. Benedict's Preparatory School in Newark, N.J.'s inner city.



[Convocation Livestream](#)

St. Benedict's broadcasts a live stream of their daily Convocation on their YouTube page.



[Stay Together \(mini-documentary\)](#)

"Stay Together" is a mini-documentary about The Trail—the culminating experience where St. Benedict's freshmen hike the Appalachian Trail to better learn how to work together.



[Student Leadership @ SBP](#)

Hear directly from the student leaders at St. Benedict's on what leadership looks like and requires of them.



[SBP's Group System](#)

St. Benedict's students, faculty, and staff share about the Group System and how it has impacted them and what it means to the community.



St. Benedict's Preparatory School
Sample Schedule

8:00-8:30	Convocation
8:35-9:50	1st Block
9:55-11:10	2nd Block

[Sample Schedule](#)

A sample schedule from St. Benedict's that shows how Convocation and Group Period are incorporated daily.