

FORMING MINDS AND HEARTS IN GRACE:

A PLAN FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

in the

DIOCESE OF CAMDEN





A Commitment to Excellence

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Camden provide an education that is Christ-centered and empowers students to reach their fullest potential in an intellectually challenging, academically excellent environment. While strong academic and extra-curricular programs and a safe and focused environment are what attract many parents to choose a Catholic school for their sons and daughters, Catholic Identity must be the defining characteristic of Catholic schools: Through religion curriculum and instruction, in practices of prayer and worship, and through the relationships within the school that extend to service to the community beyond the school.

Catholic schools are as important today as they ever have been. The need for the Gospel is apparent in every aspect of our world. In *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis reminds us that “Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture, even in those countries and cities where hostile situations challenge us to greater creativity in our search for suitable methods” (p. 134). The words of Pope Francis ring true in light of the cultural challenges to Catholic schools in the United States, including threats to religious liberty, and spur us to re-examine and recommit ourselves to our fundamental purpose: Forming disciples of Jesus Christ who recognize the responsibility to live in this world so as to realize their eternal destiny in Heaven (*Gravissimum Educationis*, Vatican II, 1965).

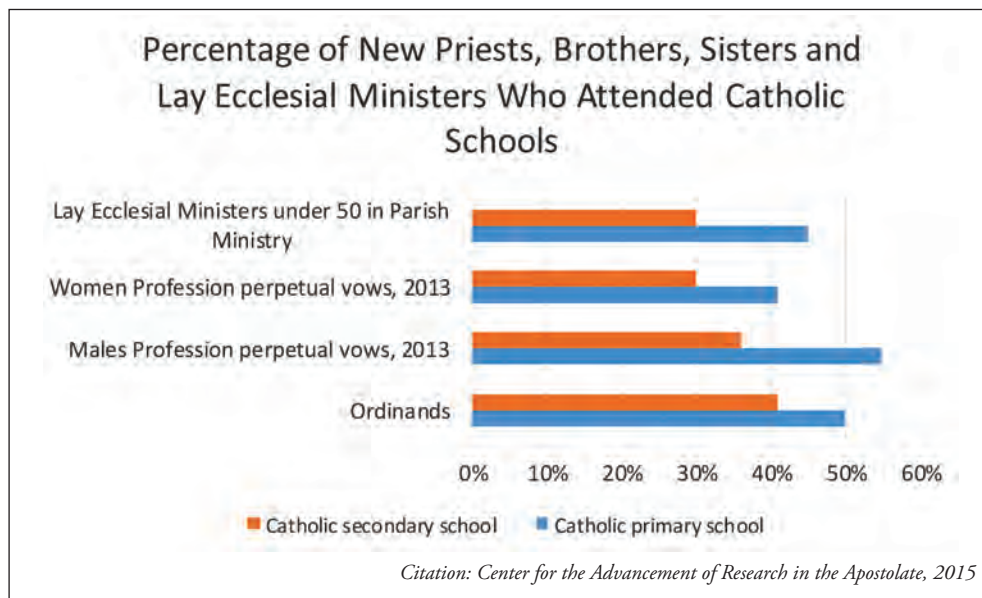
Benefits of Catholic Schools

Catholic schools afford a particularly favorable setting for nurturing students to become adult Catholic leaders, peacemakers, parents, and friends who bring people to Christ. It starts with an environment suited to evangelization and catechesis of children (USCCB, *National Directory for Catechesis*, 2005, 233; USCCB, *Renewing Christian Witness*), with daily opportunities for:

- proclaiming and living the Gospel Message;
- learning and appreciating the teachings of our Church;
- acquiring a deep understanding, reverence, and love of the Liturgy
- prayer for proper formation of conscience for the development of virtue; and
- participating in Christian service

These opportunities lead to tangible benefits for the students. Religious people are more likely to do good and avoid evil than their non-religious counterparts, starting in the teenage years. Religious teenagers avoid alcohol and drug use, demonstrate more pro-social behaviors, and are less self-centered (Baylor University, 2005). Weekly Mass attendance for those who attended a Catholic primary school is 34%, and it is 39% for those who attended a Catholic secondary school. For those who never attended a Catholic school it is only 9%. (Center for the Advancement of Research in the Apostolate, 2015).

Catholic school educated students also are more likely to discern a vocation to the priesthood, consecrated religious life, and other areas of Church leadership. We have seen a half-century of decline in religious vocations. The Diocese of Camden is blessed to have 5 young priests with full time assignments to our Catholic high schools. These Directors of Catholic Identity are part of the solution to the critical question of church leadership for the future, providing guidance and leadership to high school students as they discern their vocations.



Catholic school students also continue to excel academically. In the Diocese of Camden, elementary student scores on the 2015 administration of the Iowa Assessment, a nationally normed standardized assessment, scored on average 24 percentile points above national averages in Reading and Writing and 10 percentile points above national averages in Math. These successes translate to high school, with Diocese of Camden seniors scoring above the national and New Jersey averages in Reading, Writing, and Math. Our high schools also boast a 98% matriculation rate for continuing education. Nationally, the achievement gap between students of different racial and/or socioeconomic backgrounds is significantly smaller in Catholic schools than public schools (USCCB, *Our Greatest and Best Inheritance*).

Catholic schools also serve important civic functions and the common good. Across the United States, Catholic schools save taxpayers more than \$20 billion annually. Catholic school graduates enjoy higher earning potential than public school graduates. Finally, Catholic school graduates are less likely to be incarcerated, more civically engaged, more likely to vote, more tolerant of diverse views, and more committed to service as adults than their public school peers (USCCB, *Our Greatest and Best Inheritance*).

Challenges Facing Catholic Schools

The challenges we face are about building capacity. Capacity in enrollment is correlated with financial capacity, building a renewed value proposition, and finding creative ways to secure the resources to renew and sustain the vision of Catholic schools. The question is: How do we find the funds to administer quality Catholic schools without jeopardizing the life of some parishes and overtaxing the financial resources of parents seeking Catholic school for their children?

Enrollment and Finances

In 2005, there were 54 Catholic elementary schools in the Diocese of Camden, with enrollment of 13,831. In school year 2014-2015, the number of Catholic elementary schools was 28, and enrollment was 8,034, a 42% drop in elementary school enrollment. For high schools, the Diocese of Camden and affiliated parishes operated 7 high schools in 2005 with enrollment of 5,028 students, which declined by 36% to 6 high schools, with enrollment of 3,216 for the 2014-2015 school year.

Decreased enrollment can be attributed to many factors, with the financial realities of operating, and therefore attending, Catholic school near the top of the list. Increased costs of operations continue to strain school and parish viability, even as sources of funding decrease. For elementary schools, parish support of schools in 2005 totaled 30% of parish ordinary income. In 2009 parish support decreased to 22%, and in 2015, parish support to schools was averaged at 11.2% of parish ordinary income. Excluding Camden city parishes, the current range of parish support is from 3.7% to 30% of ordinary income. Some of the decline in parish support can be attributed to the closure of schools, especially those that were the least financially stable, allowing parishes to maximize their limited funds to meet the needs of a range of programs. However, the decline in parish support reflects the realities of Church funding more broadly, including declining income due to declining Mass attendance. Many parishes struggle to meet the needs of their many ministries. The range of parish support for elementary schools underscores a concern that our schools do not have equitable support from parishes. The entire community of Catholic faithful is not equally invested in Catholic schools.

Despite the financial realities facing parishes, the people of the Diocese of Camden have been generous in their support of Catholic schools, enabling the diocese to provide nearly \$22 million to Catholic schools, much of this in diocesan and school-based scholarships and other financial assistance to students over the last decade. The dedicated teachers who staff our schools also give their time and talents generously. Catholic schools across the country have struggled to keep teaching salaries consistent with salaries in other kinds of schools. The academic excellence and sustainability of our schools thus far and in the future would not be possible without their commitment to their vocations as Catholic school teachers.

The support of the people of the diocese has allowed the Church to continue its education mission and has allowed many schools to remain open. Schools have also established more intentional development and fundraising efforts – some more productive than others – that have helped sustain them. However, concerns about financial sustainability remain. In addition to straining financial resources of some parishes, the commitment to keeping schools available and accessible sometimes has come at the expense of their being affordable for some families. Tuition has increased, and current development efforts are insufficient to cover the gap between what many parents can afford and the tuition, even when making substantial sacrifices for Catholic school. This concern extends to the six diocesan high schools, which do not receive direct parish support, with most funding coming from tuition, fees, and development and fundraising efforts.

The issue of affordability includes continuing concerns about economic recession, parish financial support for elementary schools, and the impact of rising tuition costs on parental decisions. In some areas of the diocese concern about geographic and/or transportation accessibility also exist. A decrease in students and in funding also means cuts in programming, resources, and professional development, which potentially compromise the quality of programs and even Catholic Identity at our schools.

Public Education Landscape

Some solutions may come from changes in the education landscape in New Jersey and our relationship with public schools. The State of New Jersey spends on average \$18,891 in per pupil costs. Based on our enrollment numbers, this means that parents of Catholic school students and donors to parishes and schools in the Diocese of Camden save NJ taxpayers nearly \$250 million per year in expenses not incurred to educate students in public schools. Many states are beginning to recognize the cost savings and educational advantages that nonpublic schools offer, as well as the unfair burden on parents who pay both the taxes that support public education and tuition to attend Catholic School. Twenty-nine states at the time of this report provide vouchers, scholarships, or other programs to parents which allow them to exercise their baptismal and constitutional rights to choose the best educational setting for their children. In New Jersey, attempts to secure student vouchers, even for children in poorly performing public schools, have not been successful, and the landscape for reform appears steep and filled with rough terrain.

The financial realities of a lack of parental choice are exacerbated by constant challenges from the public sector to decrease the already limited financial resources provided by state and federal funds for other education-related needs. These include funding provided for nursing services, transportation, technology, and instructional materials to serve children in non-public schools. Students who qualify by NJ Department of Education regulations on distance receive either bus transportation or an \$884 per pupil allotment in lieu of busing. Per pupil allotments for students attending Catholic schools are: \$85 for nursing services; \$32 for educational technology; and \$59.63 for textbooks and instructional materials. Each school also receives between \$2,000 and \$10,000 in support for professional development, depending on the resources and priorities of its local school district. This limited pool of taxpayer support has not kept up with inflation, which adds an additional potential resource drain for school budgets.

Leadership

Strong leadership is key to the success of Catholic schools, and many Catholic schools fail because of ineffective leadership. Leadership at the Catholic school must include skills in Managerial, Instructional and Spiritual Leadership (Ciriello, 1993, 1994). In previous generations, leadership development and supervisory assistance were provided by religious congregations who ran Catholic schools. The transition to lay leadership has enabled many lay leaders with passion and gifts for school leadership to serve the Church in this capacity. However, the realities of Catholic school leadership in the 21st Century are such that it is becoming increasingly difficult for any one person to embody all the necessary skills and to devote the necessary time to meet the demands of the position (Nuzzi, 2012). Dioceses in general, including the Diocese of Camden, have not developed comprehensive leadership development plans to support principals and to identify a pipeline of future leaders. Our priests provide pastoral direction and currently have oversight for the operations of each school. However, many lack experience in instruction, in pedagogy, and school management critical to supporting a principal. Priest shortages also make the necessary oversight of the Catholic schools burdensome for some pastors. Forming current and prospective leaders is critical for continued sustainability and growth. Both the individual schools and the diocese must work at supporting current leaders and identifying and cultivating future leaders of Catholic education.

The Bishop's Commission for Catholic Schools

In September 2014, Bishop Dennis J. Sullivan convened a Bishop's Commission on Catholic Schools to develop Recommendations for Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Camden. The work of the Commission was to leverage historical and current successes to meet the challenges of making Catholic schools available, accessible, and affordable today and the future. The decision to create the commission came as a result of Bishop Sullivan's concern that the essential ministry of Catholic School education is facing significant challenges.

The 16 member committee, consisting of pastors and leaders in business, education, and philanthropy researched and analyzed current statistics and trends in Catholic schools nationally and in the Diocese of Camden. They reviewed strategic models already in place in the Diocese of Camden and those embraced in dioceses facing similar challenges. This report represents their recommendations to Bishop Sullivan to sustain and grow the essential ministry of all Catholic schools in the Diocese of Camden. The report articulates recommendations in the areas of Catholic Identity, Programmatic Excellence, Governance, Communication, and Operational Vitality.

Scope of Recommendations

The report and its recommendations address all Catholic schools under the Bishop's jurisdiction. The schools can be organized into four clusters: Elementary schools outside of the cities of Camden and Pennsauken (23); Elementary schools in the cities of Camden and Pennsauken (5); diocesan high schools (6); and high schools run by religious congregations (3). The highest immediate priority is the sustainability and growth of the 23 Catholic elementary schools outside of the cities of Camden and Pennsauken, to which all recommendations of this report immediately apply.

The sustainability of the 5 schools in the cities of Camden and Pennsauken is being addressed by a pilot program that began in the 2010 – 2011 school year. These schools operate under the banner of the Catholic Partnership Schools, a member corporation under the authority of the Bishop of Camden. The corporation was formed specifically to meet the needs of Catholic schools facing additional challenges to sustainability present in the Camden educational landscape. The Catholic Partnership Schools Operating Board, appointed by the Bishop, selects an Executive Director who works in collaboration with the Superintendent to ensure sustained Catholic Identity, academic excellence, and operational vitality that meet rigorous expectations. Specific applications of this report to the Catholic Partnership Schools will be established through dialogue between the Superintendent and CPS Executive Director.

Each of the diocesan high schools is likewise operated by a Board of Limited Jurisdiction, which is appointed by the Bishop. The Board hires and oversees the work of the school administration, in collaboration with the Superintendent, who acts as the Bishop's delegate. High schools face many challenges distinct from those that face elementary schools, but there are also many principles that apply equally to elementary and secondary schools. The recommendations of this report in the areas of Catholic Identity and Academic Excellence apply fully to secondary schools, and the recommendations in Communication apply in spirit, as well. Although each secondary school has its own structures for Governance and Operational Vitality, key components of these recommendations, as identified in the report, apply to high schools, as well.

Strategic Direction: Key Investments

“The education of children and young people is such an important task in forming them as free and responsible human beings...And because education truly forms human beings, it is especially the duty and responsibility of the Church, who is called to serve mankind from the heart of God and in such a way that no other institution can.”

—Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio (Pope Francis)

“Catholic elementary and secondary schools...fill a critical role in the future life of our Church, our country, and our world.” (*Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, USCCB, 2005)

Our most important investment is in our children – the present and future of the Catholic Church. We believe Catholic schools are our most effective strategy for the formation of an increasing number of children and families as disciples of Jesus Christ (USCCB, *Renewing Our Commitment, Our Greatest and Best Inheritance*; CARA, 2015).

This report outlines our strategic direction to ensure the continued responsible stewardship of Catholic schools: We will improve upon our historic strengths as Catholic communities of faith formation and academic excellence by developing and supporting visionary leaders and teachers; communicating consistently and clearly about the successes, opportunities, and advantages of Catholic schools; and diversifying creative funding sources to sustain and grow our schools.

This strategic direction requires that we continue to make and increase investments in five key areas essential to the sustainability and success of Catholic schools.

1. **Invest in Leadership:** Support the Catholic Identity and Programmatic Excellence of all schools by providing strong formation and accountability for principals, and teachers and developing a pipeline for future leadership.
2. **Invest in the Office of Catholic Schools:** Build the capacity and articulate the authority of the Office of Catholic Schools and related diocesan offices to serve Catholic schools through centralization of some programmatic, business, development, and marketing efforts and to hold schools accountable for results.
3. **Invest in Pastors:** Help pastors to develop the tools to integrate support for Catholic schools into parish life so that they can engage and involve the faithful in supporting the mission of Catholic schools.
4. **Invest in Development:** Expand funding sources through professional advancement efforts, stabilizing and incentivizing parish contributions, prudent tuition increases, and public advocacy for parental choice.
5. **Invest in Communication:** Brand Catholic schools in language rooted in tradition and accessible to today’s parents and other stakeholders, and aggressively communicate and advertise the brand.

A commitment to these investments led to recommendations for specific goals and actions for 5 Pillars of Catholic School Success: Catholic Identity; Programmatic Excellence; Governance and Leadership; Communication, Marketing, and Enrollment; and Operational Vitality. Goals and actions in each of these pillars are described in this report.

Catholic Identity

Catholic Identity is the heart of who we are and the source of our excellence. As our most important foundation, it is essential that we always keep Catholic Identity at the core of all our efforts and constantly seek to further our identity through deeper formation of students' relationships with Christ. A strong Catholic Identity supports the realization of our vision by ensuring that our schools are transparently Catholic, as evidenced by a clear emphasis on relationship with Jesus Christ in all endeavors.

Progress and Next Steps

Many of our elementary schools are transparent in their Catholic Identity, from mission statements posted at the door and links to daily scripture on their websites to weekly Mass and school-wide service projects. Each school in its own way demonstrates its charism, character, or the faith traditions that are most meaningful for the communities it serves. All of the principals and 95% of the teachers in our schools are Catholic, providing a strong opportunity for the personal witness that speaks so loudly and clearly to students in their own formation. Our schools use curriculum and instructional materials consistent with USCCB expectations, and all schools have a consistent diocesan curriculum for Religious Studies available to guide their programs.



The successes realized by some of our schools pave the way for consistency in Catholic Identity for all of our schools. While each faith community manifests its relationship with Christ in different ways, there are some goals around which strengthened collaborative efforts and benchmarks will lead to strengthened Catholic Identity for all schools.

We recognize a need to set shared foundational expectations for the language of mission statements, reception of the sacraments, and participation in service for all students. We also recognize that our system of catechetical certification needs review and probably reform. While 95% are Catholic, not all teachers share the same formational background, and we need a better system to ensure a baseline understanding of catechesis and evangelization for the teachers who are the “front line” catechists and evangelizers in our schools. We also need to set expectations for the renewal of curriculum and other resources used by teachers so that students always have the most up-to-date resources for learning about their faith.

Many of our pastors are supportive of Catholic schools, and almost all are increasingly pressed for time and need new strategies to leverage their support in the most effective ways. Together with our proposals for Governance (see below), we recognize that we also need to find new ways to free pastors to spend less time on the administrative details of our schools and more time on their pastoral elements, such as religious education, faith formation of students, and supporting existing and new mutually beneficial relationships between parishes and schools. Such relationships could yield new avenues for supporting schools as well as increased participation in parish life for school students and their families.

Strategic Goals and Actions

- 1) **Establish and assess Catholic Identity expectations.** Minimum expectations for sacraments, school culture, service, prayer, Religious Studies curriculum, and curriculum integration will be clearly defined. Each school will perform a periodic self-assessment using a systematic method to identify areas of strength and those in need of improvement.
- 2) **Strengthen the Catechetical Certification program.** Review the Catechetical Certification program and identify areas in which the curriculum can be strengthened and the process streamlined. All administrators and faculty will be held accountable to meet requirements for catechetical preparation and certification in a timely way, with all staff reaching Level 1 certification within 4 years.
- 3) **Integrate Catholic Identity in all curriculum areas.** Review Religious Studies programs and ensure consistent expectations for curriculum and instructional materials. Develop all teachers' skills to use Scripture, tradition, and Catholic social teaching to help students think critically in all subjects. Guidelines for extra-curricular programs will ensure that formation continues after the instructional day is over.
- 4) **Support priests in their Catholic school ministry.** Work with pastors to identify and communicate existing and new ways to interact with and support Catholic schools. Ensure participation of all pastors in an in-depth professional development and support program, such as the University of Notre Dame Pastors Institute, within 4 years.

Programmatic Excellence

The academic and extra-curricular excellence of our Catholic schools rests on our Catholic Identity and our call to prepare students for their interactions with a complex world from the perspective of a Catholic worldview. Programmatic excellence is a “both/and” proposition: We are academically excellent *because* we are Catholic.

The overarching strategy for academic and extracurricular excellence is to ensure high quality leadership through recruitment and professional development of principals, and high quality teaching through the recruitment, professional development, and retention of well-qualified, passionate teachers.



Progress and Next Steps

Diocese of Camden Catholic Schools have a tradition of academic excellence. Our academic hallmarks are individualized attention and high curriculum and instructional standards in a disciplined environment. We continue to be mindful of state and national standards, adapting them to meet the needs of our communities while allowing individual schools and teachers the flexibility to implement highly effective curricula for the specific students they teach. The combination of these factors has led, for example, to a third of our schools’ fourth grade classes scoring at or above the 90th percentile for English Language Arts on the Iowa Assessment, a nationally normed standardized test, and all scoring at or above the 67th percentile, well above average. For seventh grade, the number rises to two-thirds at or above the 90th percentile, and all at or above the 74th percentile. In math, students score, on average, at or above the 60th percentile in both fourth and seventh grade, which is also well above the national average.

The Office of Catholic Schools has taken steps to continually improve its curriculum in collaboration with all the Catholic schools in the diocese. In the last three years, it has expanded its K-8 curriculum in math and science to include grades 9-12 and implemented a more rigorous approach to instructional planning. More focused and higher quality professional development that supports teachers in their implementation of new approaches in math and science has been enabled by collaboration between the Office of Catholic Schools and each elementary school.

Equity of opportunity to experience a minimum baseline of high quality curriculum across all schools is a high priority. As the rigor of curriculum continues to be enhanced, it will become increasingly important for the Office of Catholic Schools and principals to collaborate to identify the highest quality teaching resources (e.g., textbooks, websites) and professional development approaches and to leverage existing federal, state, and local resources to ensure equitable access and support for all students to achieve high standards.

Up-to-date technology and computer-based solutions that support student learning are not equally distributed across schools. In some cases, this is due to financial constraints, and in others, it can be attributed to a lack of time or know-

how among leaders and teachers. We will need to explore the best solutions to ensure that students have the resources they need to meet the demanding standards of our curriculum and that teachers have what they need to teach it. We also need to identify and implement the best solutions for using technology to support assessment and real-time, data-driven instruction to ensure that we continue to meet the needs of all students as nimbly as we can.

Finally, all academic programs rest upon our ability to attract, develop, and retain well-qualified teachers in whose hands we trust that curriculum, instruction, and assessment will be effectively balanced to ensure student learning and growth in all areas. Likewise, the success of extra-curricular activities, ranging from after school clubs and performing arts to student government and competitive sports, depends upon identifying and retaining coaches and staff who are competent in their areas of specialty and effective witnesses to Christ for our students.

Strategic Goals and Actions

- 5) **Ensure access to consistent high quality curriculum and instruction.** Re-develop curriculum standards for all subjects and integrate with Catholic Identity and values across the curriculum within 5 years. Establish a set of exemplar resources and recommendations for instruction and assessment resources easily accessible for teachers within 2 years. Standardize instructional time across schools. Integrate well-planned programmatic solutions that integrate appropriate technology to support student learning.
- 6) **Elevate professional requirements for all teachers.** Professional credentials in pedagogy and content will be established and used as a foundation for hiring and professional development. New models of professional development integration within the school calendar and school day will be explored to create a culture of professional learning communities. New approaches to digital and technology-enhanced professional development will be explored and implemented.
- 7) **Increase the use of real-time data to guide instruction.** Establish benchmarks for student growth and track performance according to benchmarks, using appropriate technology where appropriate. Engage principals and teachers in in-depth use of assessment data to adapt teaching strategies. Develop a database of student achievement, growth, and performance to scale-up positive approaches and identify and help students who need additional support to achieve standards. Maintain an online portal for teachers to share data-supported resources and approaches.



Governance and Leadership

A new Diocesan Collaborative Schools Model will be the preferred model of governance for elementary schools. This hybrid structure combines the benefits of local community involvement, ownership, and decision making with efficiencies gained from centralized support and accountability. This direction encompasses two distinct but reinforcing approaches: Clear, canonically appropriate, and effective school governance, and high quality, creative, and passionate spiritual, instructional, and management leadership. Good governance allows well-formed leaders to excel.

Progress and Next Steps: Governance

Most Diocese of Camden Catholic Schools have transitioned over the last decade from single parish schools to multi-parish schools with a host pastor and a board of limited jurisdiction. Some schools have thrived under this model, but most have struggled to clarify roles and responsibilities and to adequately recruit and support boards of limited jurisdiction in their duties. The current governance model is also linked to school funding, with multiple parishes supporting one school. In some cases, this partnership is fruitful, while in others, pastors find themselves with parishioners attending one school while the parish support goes to another.

The new direction will be to separate governance from funding, with almost every school operating as a single parish school. The new model will break with tradition in three important ways. First, pastors and priests from parishes without a school will support Catholic schools by partnering with pastors who have schools to promote priestly and lay involvement with the academic and spiritual life of students. Where possible and fruitful, existing partnerships among parishes will be maintained so that each school has a group of pastors active in the life of the school, and so that pastors continue to be pastorally connected to the schools their parishioners attend. In some cases it will be necessary to realign these partnerships so that pastors and priests are freed to participate in the life of the schools their parishioners attend. Second, each school may receive financial support from a central pool of funds (see Operational Vitality).



Third, the Bishop will appoint a Diocesan Catholic School Oversight Committee to review and advise on governance structures and operations at each school, including the type and roles of any lay board associated with the school. The Committee will be comprised of pastors and leaders in business, education, philanthropy, and other areas of expertise essential to the governance of Catholic schools, and it will serve in an advisory capacity. The Committee will include exemplary leaders from parishes across the diocese and establish regular communication with the Presbyteral Council, Finance Council,

Elementary School Principals Association, and other relevant diocese-level governing bodies to ensure consistency of messaging and approach.

The Office of Catholic Schools currently serves a mostly advisory role with elementary schools, providing policy direction and limited support in finance, human resources, programming, and enrollment. The Collaborative Schools Model will require a change in the role of the Office of Catholic Schools so that school principals are accountable to the diocese for school culture, instructional leadership, and operational and financial management. The increased level of authority for the Office of Catholic Schools will likewise require a Catholic Schools Action Team. The Catholic Schools Action Team, unlike the Catholic School Oversight Committee, will be made up of diocesan employees who will work directly with schools, providing “hands on” support in implementing changes articulated in this report, meeting performance benchmarks, and addressing problems as they arise.

Progress and Next Steps: Leadership

The Superintendent, Office of Catholic Schools staff, and Diocesan Catholic School Oversight Committee will provide increased leadership and accountability at the diocesan level. A change in leadership accountability will also be necessary in order to ensure the ongoing viability and effectiveness of our schools. Each elementary school and high school community will be required, in collaboration with the Office of Catholic Schools and Catholic School Oversight Committee, to articulate the leadership tasks necessary to operate its school; the individuals, offices, or entities accountable for them; and clear roles and responsibilities. The pastor will remain the canonical head of the elementary school, but authority for hiring and evaluating principals will be officially delegated to the Superintendent. Collaboration with the pastor and local community of each elementary school will be essential to identifying the most appropriate staffing and leadership for a specific school and community.

The authority for hiring and evaluating secondary principals will also be officially delegated to the Superintendent, who will similarly work in collaboration with the Board of each high school to ensure that strong leadership to meet the specific needs of each high school is in place. The Superintendent will also collaborate with each Board, as the representative of the Bishop, to hire and evaluate high school Presidents.

Strategic Goals and Actions

- 8) ***Increase authority and accountability of the Office of Catholic Schools.*** Establish a Diocesan Catholic Schools Oversight Committee to advise on matters of policy, finance, strategy, and governance. Establish the Superintendent of Catholic Schools as the hiring and accountable authority for elementary and high school principals and high school presidents. Develop an inter-departmental Catholic Schools Action Team. Hire 7 people to meet the needs articulated in this report. Establish a list of Catholic Identity, academic, management, and performance benchmarks and hold the leadership team at every school accountable to meet them.
- 9) ***Ensure strong leadership structure at all schools.*** Ensure that each school has an excellent principal and a qualified, competent, and accountable individual to manage business operations and finances. Review board structure at each school to determine its viability and, if necessary, replace with pastoral and finance advisory boards – and/or other advisory boards as appropriate – comprised of 3-5 members each.
- 10) ***Support collaboration among schools.*** Encourage innovation by coordinating shared resources, best practices, and approaches to finance, curriculum, marketing, and Catholic Identity through meetings of appropriate leadership across schools, as convened by the Office of Catholic Schools.

Communication, Marketing, and Enrollment

Strong Catholic identity and faith formation, excellent academic and extracurricular programs, and high quality leaders and teachers will ensure that Catholic schools are true to their mission and provide exceptional value to parents. The overall strategy for Communication, Marketing, and Enrollment is to leverage those investments to drive enrollment growth through communication of a consistent brand for Catholic schools in the diocese. The brand identity will serve as a jumping off point for schools to communicate our collective successes and value as well as their unique value proposition to current and prospective parents.

Progress and Next Steps

It can no longer be taken for granted that the Catholic community and the broader community at large know about our many successes and understand the value proposition of Catholic schools. We need to be more proactive in celebrating the opportunities available through our Catholic schools. We have not yet established a track record of leveraging high level communication about the value of Catholic schools to establish and enhance local communication and relationships with families at each school. Both of these efforts are essential to increasing enrollment.

Increased enrollment is critical to sustaining and growing our schools so that we can continue to realize our mission. It is imperative that we set realistic yet challenging goals for enrollment at all schools individually, and that we provide supports

for families to advocate for and champion their school and all Catholic schools. Our Latino enrollment initiative is in its early stages and should be prioritized to continue to advance our mission and increase enrollment where it is applicable.

Communication with current and prospective families, especially those in parish religious education programs, will be made more systematic, through the use of a consistent brand, including an adaptable codebook and style guide for communication, as well as consistent web and social media design and use. The goal will be to provide a framework to ensure consistent messaging about our Catholic schools while honoring the distinct character of each school and the unique advantages each offers to parents and their children.

Communication needs to include both the benefits and value proposition of Catholic schools and the total cost to educate at Catholic schools. Informing parents, prospective parents, the Catholic community, and the community at large about the total cost to educate our students will have two effects. First, it will enhance their understanding of themselves as partners in ministry, not customers paying for a service. Second, it will help them to more fully understand the value proposition of our Catholic schools. An important component of our communication and marketing strategy will be to use data-based market segmentation to ensure that different potential families receive different communication, tailored to their perspectives. Likewise, principals, advancement personnel, teachers, and parents at each school will need communication strategies and talking points specific to their roles so that we can communicate consistent, positive messages.

Strategic Goals and Actions

- 11) **Develop a consistent brand and collateral.** Invest in the development of a brand strategy and a Catholic Schools Action Team member to lead communication initiatives. Develop and hold schools accountable for using an adaptable codebook and style guide for communications that keeps communication consistent while honoring local distinction and tradition. Scale-up best practice in web design and social media strategy. Investigate creative, aggressive, low-cost engagement strategies to consistently brand Catholic schools.
- 12) **Use data to communicate with specific audiences.** Conduct baseline research on enrollment and retention patterns using all available data specific to our diocese (e.g., family demographics and income, family size, zip code, Mass attendance) to identify as-yet-unknown patterns in enrollment and retention. Implement focused marketing to market segments identified through baseline research.
- 13) **Increase total enrollment across all elementary schools by 3% per year by 2018-2019 school year.** Set realistic yet challenging goals for enrollment and retention at all schools, beginning with the 2016-2017 school year. Identify target audiences (e.g., religious education students, Catholic, non-Catholic; and/or Latino, Asian, and other communities underserved by our schools) for enrollment increases. Set specific milestones for enrollment increases at each school. Leverage investments in this report holistically in the service of increasing perceived value and enrollment at each school.

Operational Vitality

Strategic Direction

The overarching strategic direction for operational vitality is to establish a sustainable system through which the entire community shares in the spiritual, academic, and financial support and growth of the Catholic schools. Our approach is to re-imagine the traditional model of parish support of schools and traditional and recent approaches to fundraising and advancement efforts. The operational vitality of the schools rests on establishing systems of collaborative support, financial accountability, and transparency.

Diversifying funding sources and more equitably distributing the costs of and contributions to Catholic education are essential to the sustainability and growth of Catholic schools. The overall school budget is expected to increase by approximately 5% per year, accounting for changes in the cost of personnel and benefits, updates to buildings, and changes consistent with the recommendations in this report. The operational vitality of our Catholic schools therefore is closely related to all its other aspects: Strong Catholic Identity and Academic Excellence provide the baseline of our competitive advantage. Clear Governance structures and strong Leadership ensure continued excellence in these areas as well as consistent communication and focus on important goals. Our proposition is that these investments will attract new families and students, leading to more predictable tuition revenue, which will also help to stabilize school finances.

Progress and Next Steps

The 23 elementary schools in the Diocese of Camden that are not part of the Catholic Partnership Schools had a combined budget of approximately \$34 million for the 2014-2015 school year, including \$2.5 million in local tuition assistance. To meet this budget, \$24.2 million was collected in tuition and fees. The \$9.8 million difference is being funded by \$3.2 million secured through school-based advancement and fundraising efforts, gifts, donations, grants, and Bingo; \$1.4 million earned through various revenue earning programs (e.g., athletics, pre-K, latch key); and \$5 million contributed by parishes. Parish support was a combined 13.7% of the overall budget of the Catholic schools, representing a significant overall investment of the Catholic community in Catholic schools. Each school has also significantly invested in supporting its ministry by hiring an Advancement Director, establishing an Annual Fund, and exercising even stronger stewardship of its resources than it has in the past. The diocese also makes significant contributions to the operations of Catholic schools, providing \$1 million in operational and tuition assistance to elementary and secondary schools, and \$1.1 million in central infrastructure, including the Office of Catholic Schools; human resources, finance, and legal services; and debt relief.

The successes of individual schools are laudable and in some cases heroic, but we recognize that they are not necessarily evenly distributed across schools and across the Catholic community. Support of schools ranges from 3.7% of ordinary income to 30% across parishes, representing inequities in how deeply support of schools is shared. Local advancement and fundraising efforts are also not equally successful, with total contribution to school budgets ranging from 2% to 14%. It will therefore be necessary to examine the effectiveness of the advancement function at each school to determine the most efficient use of advancement staffing funds, enhance support to schools for their advancement efforts, and provide incentives for schools to increase the funds that they earn and raise.

New Funding Sources

The diocese currently has limited centralized support for school fundraising and advancement efforts beyond the South Jersey Scholarship event fundraising effort. It will be important to include on the Catholic Schools Action Team Development personnel who can support school-based efforts. Development personnel can shepherd a professional and coordinated Annual Fund drive, prospect potential donors, and work toward securing major gifts from individuals, businesses, and foundations. Current and traditional fundraising efforts can be leveraged to underscore the need for support from existing donors and the Catholic community (e.g., Bishop's Annual Appeal, School Annual Funds, Sunday Collections).

In addition, it will be essential to incentivize creative fundraising and advancement efforts at each school and set benchmarks for fundraising and advancement as part of school leadership accountability. A specific fundraising goal will be set for each school, and leadership at the school will be held accountable to meet it. Efforts to prospect new individuals, as well as businesses and foundations, at the local and diocesan level should be a part of these efforts. It will also be important to investigate ways to recapture funds from the sale of vacant school buildings in the form of a diocesan assessment to support the ongoing mission of Catholic schools.

Centralized support will also extend to increased efficiencies in purchasing and other business practices, including finance, human resources, development, and programming in collaboration with local elementary school management. The goal of centralized support will be to decrease costs and make business management of schools more efficient. Additional enhanced services from the diocese may be supported by a fee-for-service model, based on budget projections that incorporate the recommendations made in this report.

The continued diversification of funding sources is ultimately in the service of our historical, present, and future calling to make affordable Catholic school education available and accessible to all children. It will be critical to explore and implement entrepreneurial approaches to establishing a just and sustainable tuition rate at each school, dependent upon the characteristics of the community it supports. An important component of tuition sustainability will be continued and increased efforts to engage the entire Catholic community in efforts to secure additional state and federal funding for Catholic schools, including advocating for parental choice opportunities in New Jersey, such as scholarships, tax credits, and vouchers.

Stewardship of Existing Resources

The responsible stewardship of existing resources will be just as critical to the long-term sustainability of our Catholic schools as identifying new income sources. Specifically, it will be necessary to change the way parish support is offered to elementary schools. An important step will be to establish an Interparochial Catholic School Fund (ICSF) to manage parish support to elementary schools. The ICSF will be a centrally managed pool of funding to which each parish will contribute the same amount of its ordinary income in support of Catholic schools as every other parish. Parishes therefore will contribute to the ICSF instead of to one school, decoupling governance and pastoral direction from financial support.

Schools will request funds from the ICSF, which will be granted according to clear and transparent criteria established by the Office of Catholic Schools, the Catholic School Action Team, and the Diocesan Catholic School Oversight Committee. Decisions about funding to schools from the ICSF will be made fairly and collaboratively by a carefully selected committee separate from the Diocesan Catholic School Oversight Committee and the Catholic School Action Team. Schools will be

accountable for proper stewardship of funds granted from the ICSF as part of the oversight and accountability structures recommended in this report.

The ICSF is anticipated to go into effect for the 2016-2017 school year. At first, the ICSF will serve as an income replacement mechanism, with schools receiving funding for the 2016-2017 school year at the level they received parish support in the previous year. Over time, as school finances strengthen, the ICSF can transition into a mechanism for income enhancement, with funds being granted to schools to initiate new programs in response to local needs.

Strategic Goals and Actions

- 14) **Establish an Interparochial Catholic School Fund (ICSF).** Establish a uniform percentage of ordinary income to be contributed by each parish, gradually over 3 years. Establish clear and transparent criteria for granting funds requests. Establish a working committee to consider and recommend grant requests to schools. Establish appropriate tracking and accountability infrastructure for the ICSF.
- 15) **Expand funding efforts through existing channels.** Grow the income from the annual South Jersey Scholarship event to a substantial and sustainable level within 5 years. Broaden the House of Charity by adding Catholic schools as an annual case component, generating consistent funding within 5 years. Implement a highly visible second collection in conjunction with Catholic Schools Week to additional funds each year. Create a unified annual fund appeal for all Catholic schools through the Catholic Schools Action Team. Establish a yearly annual fund/fundraising amount for each school individually to which it will be held accountable.
- 16) **Pursue a centralized effort to secure sustainable funding sources.** Explore the feasibility of additional fundraising strategies to generate gifts from foundations, corporations, organizations, local businesses, and other non-parish-based entities to generate sufficient income to begin to reduce parish support contributions within 5 years.
- 17) **Establish economies of scale and systems of accountability.** Clearly articulate the services offered by the diocese in the areas of finance, human resources, development, and programming and the processes for delivering them. Re-establish budget processes and a set of metrics for tracking budgets and identifying potential concerns during the operational year. Initiate clear action steps to remediate budget concerns in a timely way.
- 18) **Pursue alternate tuition models, including parental choice.** Each school will develop a plan for tuition that meets the financial and pastoral realities and needs of the communities they serve and balances enrollment initiatives with financial sustainability. Where possible, increase actual or perceived financial aid based on a total school funding and budgeting model. Increase collaborative lobbying efforts with other dioceses in NJ to establish parental choice programs.

Summary and Next Steps

Summary

The Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Camden have a long and rich history of building the Church through the education and formation of school aged children. This duty and responsibility is among the most important callings for the faithful to develop and sustain the Church in Southern New Jersey. Our Catholic schools bring the message of Jesus Christ to new generations and inspire lifelong faith in Him and actions to bring His Good News to the world through faithful discipleship and citizenship.

The landscape in which our schools operate has changed significantly since enrollment peaked in the 1960s, with many new challenges to sustainability now confronting them. However, the challenges facing our Catholic schools are not insurmountable. The thoughtful work of the clerical, religious, and lay leaders who served on the Bishop's Commission lays the groundwork for important changes in how our schools operate that in the aggregate will help us to face those challenges together. This report validates the mission of our Catholic schools and keeps the focus on the students and families we serve now and in the future, while making recommendations for delivering on our mission in new and innovative ways suitable for today's Church.

The pillars described in this report will form a strong foundation for the immediate and long-term success of our schools. The first priority is ensuring that our schools are exceptional Catholic and academic environments that nurture the whole person. Catholic Identity is the top priority, with recommendations to ensure that that culture of our Catholic schools is unapologetically Catholic, including the integration of Church teaching and values into all aspects of the curriculum and more fully supporting teachers in their own formation as witnesses of Christ's love. Closely related is a renewed commitment to academic excellence, ensuring equitable access to the best curriculum resources, ideas, and approaches, and empowering teachers to use classroom information and data in new ways to ensure that every student reaches his or her full potential.

Concurrent investments must also be made in establishing new models for governance, operations, and finance for our Catholic Schools. Dioceses and Catholic schools nationwide recognize the need for updated models to ensure strong financial and operational principles that enable the core mission, Catholic Identity, and Programmatic Excellence to thrive. The Collaborative Schools Model described in this report decouples governance from finance, which gives the Office of Catholic Schools and the diocese the tools to assist schools more directly and with greater accountability. It also empowers local leadership, including pastors, principals, and their advisors, to develop creative solutions and make well-informed decisions that address the specific concerns of their communities.

The new governance model will require strong collaboration between the Office of Catholic Schools and each school to ensure that performance and excellence metrics are clear and achievable. It will require creativity on the part of local leadership to meet aggressive enrollment, retention, and fundraising goals. The finance model, including seeking new funding sources and recalibrating how parish support is offered, will require shared accountability, transparency, and trust. These changes will not necessarily be easy, but they are necessary for the sustainability of our Catholic schools. The successes of our forebears demand that we honor the tradition of excellent academic preparation and religious formation to ensure

that all parents who seek it can provide a Christ-centered environment that prepares their children to be faithful disciples and citizens in the modern world.

Next Steps

The recommendations articulated in this plan will take significant effort and time to communicate, unpack into specific milestones and benchmarks, and implement. The outline presented below provides potential milestones for consideration of the recommendations by additional approving bodies and first steps toward their realization.

Procedural Next Steps

- **Submit recommendations for consultation of relevant ecclesial bodies.** During Summer 2015, recommendations will be presented to the Presbyteral Council, Diocesan Finance Council.
- **Form committees to draft Explanatory Benchmark Manuals.** During Summer and Fall 2015, five committees will draft manuals for each pillar, detailing specific actions, responsibilities, procedures, and policies for implementation.

Priorities for Implementation

- **Conduct assessment of Catholic Identity.** Each school will be asked to conduct an assessment of its Catholic Identity, using a rubric based on the National Benchmarks and Standards for Catholic Schools and existing data.
- **Develop infrastructure and procedures for ICSF.** The Operational Vitality committee, working with the Catholic Schools Action Team, will prioritize procedures for the ICSF prior to the development of school budgets for the 2016-2017 school year.
- **Hire Catholic Schools Communication Director.** The priority for personnel is the Communication Director, who will begin developing and implementing communication strategies to increase enrollment and retention.
- **Set goals for enrollment and fundraising for 2016-2017, using baseline data.** Work with elementary school principals on site-specific enrollment and fundraising goals for 2016-2017 and hold them accountable to implement creative steps to meet the goals.

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