



• ARCHDIOCESE OF DETROIT •  
**CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

Dear Reverend Fathers and Catholic School Leaders,

We wish to update you on the progress the Department of Catholic Schools and the Catholic Schools Council are making to implement the strategic vision for Catholic Schools: [Unleashing our Catholic Schools](#), which was introduced in January 2019.

Over the last 20 months we have achieved many successes and encountered some serious challenges arising from the COVID pandemic. However, we continue to lean into the work we were called to do during Synod 16 and outlined in the pastoral letter, with the unwavering recognition that Catholic schools are everyone's responsibility.

As directed by the people of the Archdiocese through the Synod, our Vision reflects the following important charges:

- To make Catholic schools the responsibility of all parishes and all Christ's faithful. This conviction needs to be a foundational principle for the renewal of this ministry.
- To ensure that any Catholic family in the Archdiocese of Detroit that seeks an excellent Catholic education for their children can have one.
- To ensure that school leaders have evangelization and discipleship as their highest priority as together we re-envision the mission, funding and governance of Catholic schools.

A detailed list of the work accomplished in each of the Vision's four dimensions follows. Where relevant, we note how the Archdiocese's new Family of Parishes effort includes our schools and, top of mind – how we are preparing to teach children this fall. Please know that the Department and Council's work has been intense this summer with many other actions underway to help make all of our Catholic Schools Proudly Catholic, Academically Excellent, Accessible to All and Sustainable for the Future.

### **Returning to Classrooms this Fall**

Without question, Catholic education is a vital and essential ministry, which is why our heroic school pastors and educators were able to pivot and quickly move instruction online when the virus hit. The recent [announcement](#) concerning return-to-school protocols in the Archdiocese, whether in the classroom or virtually, depending upon the health environment, took an enormous effort. We are grateful to everyone who was and continues to be involved in that effort.

We are pleased to share that many of our schools are experiencing [fall enrollment increases based on the confidence our families](#) have in our schools providing a safe, authentically Catholic and academically excellent education for their children. Our teachers, administrators, and priests responded in March and our parents noticed. Despite some challenges, all 86 of our schools will open this fall, while an estimated one hundred plus Catholic schools across the country will sadly permanently close. We know, too, there are pandemic-related financial hardships facing some of our families which many are working hard to address. We will do all that we can to ensure we don't lose a single child from our schools this fall because their family can't afford tuition.

We are praying for each of you and for our collective wisdom and fortitude, through the intercession of St. Anne, that God will bless our efforts and help our children and schools to flourish. Thank you for all that you do to unleash the potential of our Catholic schools and make them among the finest in the country.

With gratitude and in Christ,

[The Archdiocese of Detroit's Catholic Schools Council and the Department of Catholic Schools](#)



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## Implementing the Vision: “Unleashing our Catholic Schools”

### Proudly Catholic

- Parents choose to send their children to a Catholic school for many reasons and most importantly, to learn in an authentically Catholic environment imbued with our Christian worldview. Our new **religion curriculum**, which was implemented in 2017, helps ensure that we are providing rigorous and consistent formation.
- **Catholic Culture Guideposts** reflect the work of the Catholic Culture Committee and many others including pastors, principals, parents and educators. They were introduced by Bishop Robert Fisher, a member of the Council and former school pastor, in February 2020. The Guideposts are currently in effect and outline standards for our elementary and high schools to ensure our students encounter, grow and ultimately give witness to Christ. They reflect the promise made to parents who seek an authentically Catholic education for their children. To read the letter and guideposts please click [here](#).
- In addition to professional development opportunities, **spiritual and retreat opportunities are now available** for faculty and administrators. Many principals participated in an offsite retreat about apostolic boldness led by Fr. Pullis, Bishop Battersby and Bishop Fisher.
- For the last two academic years a **workshop has been offered to help onboard recently ordained priests and other pastors who are new to leading a Catholic school** to foster collaboration and to share best practices. Those Pastors leading schools for the first time also are provided priest mentors who have successfully led schools.
- **Cultural competency training** was presented by [Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers](#), cohost of the EWTN radio program, “Morning Glory” to Catholic school principals, in August 2020. Deacon is well known for his passionate training on the Catholic response to racism.

### Academically Excellent

- The introduction of **STAR Renaissance computer adaptive testing** last fall enables teachers to conduct student assessments online versus in a classroom with standardized paper testing. It replaces the Iowa test and allows for a real-time assessment of a student’s progress. This proved to be an issue for many public schools during the pandemic who did not have such a tool. Having this capability enabled archdiocesan school faculty to pivot to online distance learning while still evaluating student learning and needs.
- Extensive research was conducted involving a significant number of our principals which resulted in the selection of a **common student information system (SIS) along with a corresponding learning management system (LMS) throughout the Archdiocese**. Many schools currently use the chosen FACTS management system which includes fully compatible SIS and LMS platforms. Wider adoption ensures efficiencies through shared data, educational content as well as a reduced cost for all due to economies of scale. The SIS will be adopted across all of our schools by the end of 2022; the LMS is highly recommended, though not required if schools are comfortable with their current LMS provider.
- Bi-annual **archdiocesan-wide professional development has been offered for all school faculty prior to COVID-19 and was especially helpful at the onset of the pandemic**. The virtual spring session was dedicated to distance learning best practices, content specific instructional methods,

and computer adaptive assessment practices to offer early interventions to promote student academic growth.

- **Standards for distance education were developed** by grade level to help ensure optimal student learning, including students with special needs, rooted in best practices, extensive research and feedback from faculty and parents.
- The Department of Catholic Schools **partnered with the University of Notre Dame to help interested schools start a multi-year planning and implementation process of nationally acclaimed STEM programming** within their schools. A collection of suburban and urban schools is currently engaged in this process.
- The Institute for Catholic Liberal Education was engaged to assist interested schools in moving to a **classical education** model. St. John Paul II Classical Catholic School was the first school to do so.
- Two specific programs have been implemented to support and build leadership within our schools. The **Instructional Leadership Institute** provides an opportunity for teacher leaders to come together to build upon their knowledge and skills in order to drive improvement across their schools. The **Principal Formation Institute** provides educators interested in school leadership an opportunity to discern their career path in a year-long program while developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective leadership in a Catholic school.
- Exceptionally **talented principals and central office staff have been recruited to our schools, each with particular gifts that complement our existing high quality co-workers.** The feedback regarding their contributions has been uniformly positive from pastors, principals and teachers.

### Accessible to All

- Affordability continues to be the greatest challenge faced by most of our schools. For more than a year, dozens of faithful including clergy, financial, legal, business and education professionals participated in a rigorous effort with the goal of launching an **equitable tuition plan to make Catholic education more affordable** for our families. Weeks away from an announcement, the pandemic struck and immediately changed the underlying assumptions and the financial landscape. While disappointed that the time and resources invested in this effort have yet to bear fruit and to accomplish the vision contained in *Unleash the Gospel* that any Catholic family in the Archdiocese of Detroit who seeks an academically excellent education for their children can have one, we fully intend to resume this work when we have post-pandemic stability. We are even more committed to develop and offer a sustainable and global solution that makes our Catholic schools affordable and recognizes that this responsibility must be shared by all parishioners, not just those with schools or those with school age children.
- Families who are struggling under the burden of COVID-19 are benefitting from the recent **creation of the St. Anne's Scholars Fund.** Principals have nominated families to apply for support this fall. This fund is managed by the Catholic Foundation of Michigan. We are hopeful that the success of this short-term solution will serve as a possible approach regarding how Catholic education philanthropy can be accomplished on a macro level.
- Access to technology is a real barrier to several families who cannot afford personal mobile devices. When schools were ordered to close in March, **iPads equipped with LTE internet capabilities were distributed to students that needed them the most**, both in the city of Detroit and in the suburbs, [to ensure that children could continue to learn remotely.](#)
- The [active participation by the Department of Catholic Schools](#) in **federal and state advocacy** efforts help ensure equitable funding for Catholic Schools in the CARES Act and further education around the positive developments [concerning the anti-Catholic Blaine amendments](#) enshrined in state constitutions that limit funding to private schools.



### **Sustainable for the future**

- The **Forecast School Model (FSM)** is a forecasting and budgeting tool developed to help schools better understand and manage their operations based on demographics, enrollment forecasting, faculty and staffing needs as well as other factors. This helpful tool empowers schools to see three years into the future, which assists with the prudent planning and allocation of financial resources. These insights, combined with a common dashboard, help school leaders and the Archdiocese better respond proactively to issues at the local level and collegially craft solutions. For example, a handful of schools were identified as potentially experiencing financial stress due to the pandemic. The FSM permitted the Department of Catholic Schools to assist in making essential operational adjustments. As a result, no schools needed to close in the Archdiocese due to the pandemic. The adoption of the FSM is a key aspect of the institution of the tuition plan referenced above.
- New **school governance models have been introduced and continue to be refined, with attention to the move to Families of Parishes**. The models offered will help ensure we have the right talent, resources, skills and engagement for schools to thrive and to best leverage and maximize our resources for mission.
- There is now a dedicated **focus on marketing Catholic schools** within the entire Archdiocese. A new website, [detroitcatholicschools.org](http://detroitcatholicschools.org), and social media channels were launched in fall 2019 including an expansive marketing campaign to encourage enrollment. The site includes ongoing **Detroit Catholic coverage** about Catholic schools in the Archdiocese.
- Many school leaders have attended the Partners in Mission program to learn how to better market their respective schools and to create **comprehensive enrollment management plans**.

*September 2020*

To view this letter as a PDF, please [click here](#).