



DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER
Superintendent of Schools



February 1, 2024

Dear Catholic School Communities,

A Blessed Catholic Schools Week! I wanted to mark this week of celebration by sharing an update on the Strategic Plan for the Catholic Schools Office, which was published three years ago as our vision for Catholic education in NH. This vision has been aligned into four key pillars: **Catholic Identity and Culture, Operational Vitality, Leadership, Governance, and Formation, and Scholastic Excellence**. To read the strategic plan, please visit <https://www.catholicnh.org/schools/>.

The future of Catholic education in this diocese is ripe with opportunity. Therefore, creating models of success in particular areas will help reimagine what is possible. As our system of Catholic schools continues to grow, our office needs to be responsive to the needs of the staff, students, and families whom we serve. This Strategic Plan sets forth a vision for the future that extends far beyond any one individual school or region.

Catholic Identity and Culture

We are in the second year of implementation with the ARK (Assessment of Religious Knowledge) Test. In year one, our schools completed a baseline assessment with faculty, staff, and students. The ARK is a non-profit, sister apostolate of Sophia Institute for Teachers, designed to “provide educators with actionable information to help improve Catholic education in schools and parishes” (arktest.org). This assessment allows educators to utilize data to improve a school’s Catholic identity; including knowledge, beliefs and behaviors. Catholic identity is paramount to our existence as educational institutions, and we look forward to reviewing this year’s data as a means to improvement.

Sister Mary Rose Reddy, DMML, joined the Catholic Schools Office in October as the new Director of Catholic Identity and Mission. She will be working with our schools to implement Pre-K-12 Theology standards and integrated faith standards across all content areas. Her work will include reviewing current Theology standards and approved curriculum materials, providing school-based professional development connected to the curriculum framework and integration of the Catholic faith into the curriculum, and the implementation of Theology of the Body in grades K-12 in all Diocesan and Parish schools. This is in line with our strategic vision to embrace and enhance our Catholic identity.

School chaplaincies, whereas a priest ministers to the spiritual needs of a non-parish school, are growing. Since initiating a chaplaincy program in 2021, nearly every Catholic school has a chaplain, including the Catholic Schools Office. Establishing a chaplaincy program strengthens a school’s liturgical and devotional life, forming our schools with a Eucharistic heart.



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Parents are the primary educators of their children; this is an essential tenet of the Catholic faith. We consider it our privilege to educate and form the students in our care. Our office released a “Statement on Parental Partnership in Education” in 2022, which outlines our commitment to families, and we are actively working on ways to create a deeper, more meaningful -and intentional- connection with parents as they strive to lead families of faith. The full statement can be found online at www.nhcatholicschools.com/partnering-with-parents.

Operational Vitality

In the initial stages of our strategic planning, the Catholic Schools Office launched Catholic School Vision (CSV) 2020. This initiative had a singular focus: to renew and reinvigorate our Catholic schools, while providing affordability, accessibility, and availability to all. CSV 2020 is considered the “action arm” of our strategic plan, deployed when we are actively working on a particular region of the state.

Our CSV planning began in Nashua; where we consolidated Catholic schools in the city and launched Saint Christopher Academy, the largest Diocesan Catholic elementary school in our state. Now operating with a Board of Limited Jurisdiction, Saint Christopher’s offers Prekindergarten through Eighth grade on two separate campuses and continues its legacy of strong Catholic formation in the Gate City.

Immediately following the initial meetings in Nashua, our team began working on a CSV plan to revitalize and reinvigorate our Catholic schools in NH largest city: Manchester. Saint Anthony and St. Casimir Schools unified in 2018 as Cardinal Lacroix Academy. This parish school is home to our diocese’s most diverse and multi-cultural student population, serving a critical need in the community. A major aspect of the Manchester CSV was the decision to move St. Joseph Regional Junior High School to an upgraded Trinity Campus as part of an expanded grade 7-12 experience. Heavy community input directed our approach in the building design, and we reorganized the leadership structure for both schools by instituting a president-principal model. After five years of planning, the project broke ground in March 2023. Our partnership with construction is on-schedule, and the junior high plans to move to the Bridge Street location for September 2024. This project is a historic endeavor for our diocese, serving as a model for future projects, in support of our vision for the future.

Our CSV discussions for Cardinal Lacroix Academy, Saint Benedict Academy, and St. Catherine of Siena School are still ongoing, ensuring that a vibrant and Christ-centered elementary experience remains paramount, while guiding students onward to our Diocesan Catholic junior high and high school.

More recently, we’ve launched CSV discussions in both the capital region and the seacoast, assessing the needs of those communities, and outlining goals that align with our strategic pillars. In other areas of the state, we’ve launched exploratory committees that are determining the feasibility of opening new Catholic schools! This resurgence of interest follows the success of four new Catholic schools that have



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opened in our diocese since 2019: Mount Royal Academy-North, Salve Regina Academy, Our Lady of Mercy Academy, and Seton Academy.

Across our system of Catholic schools, grant programs such as the Education Tax Credits and Education Freedom Accounts have bolstered Financial Stability. Internal financial assistance has decreased by over \$500,000 in the last two years, largely because of the EFA and ETC. There are currently 492 education tax credit scholars enrolled in our NH Catholic schools, which is 8.7% of our total Catholic school population. Increasing access and affordability continues to be our mission, and these scholarships and grants help us shepherd families into the educational environment that best fits their child's needs.

Additionally, the St. John Neumann Trust has awarded over \$750,000 in grants since its inception in 2017. These grants are for tuition assistance and the general benefit of our Catholic schools. Funds like this aid our schools in breaking barriers to entry for families with demonstrated need, while also relieving the financial burden of small capital or curricular-related projects.

Leadership, Governance & Formation

In the last five years, our office has assessed the governance and leadership structures of our Catholic schools. In particular cases, such as Saint Christopher Academy and Saint Thomas Aquinas, we restructured the model into a Board of Limited Jurisdiction. President-Principal models have been implemented in two of our diocesan high schools, and we are actively engaged in school boards to improve unification and efficacy.

A partnership was established in 2020 with Schoolhouse Educational Services to provide high-quality, faith-based teacher training toward either Diocesan or NH State Educator Certification for those who have been called to teach in Diocese of Manchester Catholic Schools across New Hampshire. This partnership is our Cabrini Institute. The Cabrini Institute professional development courses are designed as small group mentoring sessions led by consultants on the Schoolhouse Education and Therapy Services team. Upon prior approval, these courses can be used toward a Diocesan certificate or as a pathway for alternative NH licensure. Courses are designed as a hybrid model to support teachers throughout the school year in three sessions, fall, winter, and spring. The content of each course serves to help build teachers' assessment and instructional skill to be informed and responsive.

Scholastic Excellence

Our commitment to scholastic excellence focuses on curriculum development and differentiation through teacher training. We use data to inform instruction and differentiate- leading to better outcomes for students. Addressing individual needs of students in an academically inclusive environment is of critical importance.

In December, our office implemented a new assessment software, iReady. iReady is an adaptive and diagnostic assessment that will inform teacher instruction with valid, dependable, and easy-to-interpret



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data. The assessment will assist teachers in identifying student strengths and learning priorities to help give a comprehensive picture of classroom and individual student learning. Our goal is to not only improve student achievement through proper assessment, but also better inform individual instruction and teaching proficiency amongst our staff.

To promote the highest level of academic achievement, the Diocese of Manchester is engaging equitable services through federal grants to actively train teachers to respond to students' academic needs through high quality professional development in the areas of literacy, curriculum mapping, and assessment. Teachers are learning to be flexible in their instruction and collaborate with specialists for all students, including those with diverse backgrounds, abilities, dispositions, and skills.

We have contracted with ADAC and are working with Dawn Florino, ADAC's liaison to our system of Catholic schools, to help schools institute layered support for students beginning at the core level of well-designed curriculum, instruction, and assessment. She also supports the school leaders and teachers in the areas of professional development, equitable services, and title funding. Last year alone, our diocese utilized roughly \$1.5 million in title grants, allowing students and teachers greater access to training, high-quality resources for instruction, enrichment programming, and technology integration.

This is a historic moment for Catholic education in New Hampshire! I am grateful for your ongoing commitment to Catholic education and the trust you have placed in us. +Pope Benedict XVI described Catholic education as an "outstanding apostolate of hope" (Address to Catholic Educators, 2012). This hope, which is in Christ Jesus, propels us forward.

May St. Joseph, patron of our Diocese, and the Blessed Mother, to whom our schools are consecrated, pray for us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

David A. Thibault
Superintendent of Schools