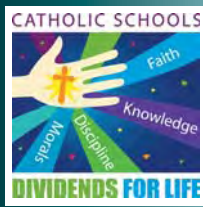


The future of Catholic schools in the diocese



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adonna Turner, the diocesan assistant superintendent of Catholic schools, recently answered some questions about the study her office is undergoing to develop a strategic plan for the future of Catholic schools in the diocese.



Madonna Turner, assistant superintendent of Catholic schools for the diocese

What do you think is the most important task of your position? If you would ask the staff, they may say dealing with phone calls. I spend a lot of time speaking to principals, teachers, parents, etc. I believe that all of the tasks are important and that the most rewarding would be when I am able to help someone.

Until last school year, I led the teams that visited our elementary schools for their state recognition/diocesan school improvement visits. It was the job of those teams to verify the learning process and safety of our schools. Visiting the schools, seeing the principals lead their staffs, and teachers helping students to learn, the students themselves and sharing our Catholic faith with future generations and bringing them to a level of academic excellence – that’s what it is all about.

Beginning last school year the Catholic Schools Office embarked on a planning initiative for the schools in our diocese with the help of Meitler Consultants Inc. The plan, entitled “Lighting the Path to Our Future,” has been my major focus for the last 18 months. I’ve worked with the consultants visiting our schools, gathering data, and attended the many meetings of the planning committee – a group of 16 very hard working pastors, principals and laity dedicated to compiling the best possible plan to present to Bishop Peter Sartain for approval. The reason the Catholic Schools Office is developing this plan is to ensure that our schools will remain strong into the future, as they have always been – thriving, not just surviving.

At what phase is the strategic planning now? What’s the next step?

In October and November, three consultative sessions were held across the diocese during which a draft of the strategic plan was shared by the consultants with pastors, principals, school board and other parish members. Those in attendance were asked to submit their feedback. Planning committee members

then had a meeting in December and will meet again in January to refine the plan that will be presented to the bishop for his approval. We need to remember that this is a plan, and the implementation process will be the next most strategic step.

What do you predict will be one of the best outcomes that will emerge from the strategic planning? Predictions are difficult. I would only hope and pray that – with the nonstop time, energy, and work from those involved in developing this strategic plan – it will allow our diocese an investment in the future of Catholic education for all children. That is the mission Jesus entrusted to us – “Bring the little children unto me” – and I believe that is what all our schools do, and, in the process provide an excellent education, helping our students to become lifelong learners.

How does the theme of this year’s Catholic Schools Week – “Dividends for Life” – fit in with what the planners are hoping to accomplish in the future? The theme this year for Catholic Schools Week emphasizes the areas in which students receive dividends from attending a Catholic school: faith, knowledge, morals, and discipline. Our schools are able to teach the Catholic faith to students while helping them become knowledgeable in all subject areas. Our teachers strengthen the moral values of their students and encourage them to become self-disciplined by acting as Jesus would to all people they encounter. ☺

Survey reveals positive perception of Catholic schools in the diocese

On behalf of the diocese, School Perceptions, an organization that has worked with hundreds of schools throughout the country, recently gathered and analyzed public perception data regarding Catholic schools in the diocese. More than 11,500 people responded. These included 3,428 parents, 1,472 staff members, 600 parishioners and about 6,000 students. Here are some of the major results:

- More than 90 percent of the parents in the survey said they would recommend their school to a friend moving into the area.
- Students were also happy with their schools as 92 percent of them indicated that their school had done a good job in teaching about the Catholic faith. “Students gave the schools high marks in quality, especially in the areas of math, extra-curricular athletic programs and English/literature/language arts,” the report said.
- More than 92 percent of the parishioners felt that Catholic schools made a “positive contribution” to the well-being of the Catholic Church and society.
- Overall, the survey concluded, “The perceptions of both the schools and the faculty in the Diocese of Joliet are good.”