



# RENEWAL AND HOPE:

## A Strategic Plan for Catholic School Vitality

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



LED BY THE SPIRIT, FRANCIS WENT IN TO PRAY AND KNELT DOWN DEVOUTLY BEFORE THE CRUCIFIX. HE WAS SHAKEN BY UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES AND DISCOVERED THAT HE WAS DIFFERENT FROM WHEN HE HAD ENTERED. AS SOON AS HE HAD THIS FEELING, THERE OCCURRED SOMETHING UNHEARD OF IN PREVIOUS AGES...THE IMAGE OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED SPOKE TO HIM. “FRANCIS,” IT SAID, CALLING HIM BY NAME, “GO REBUILD MY HOUSE; AS YOU SEE, IT IS ALL BEING DESTROYED.”

—Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Blessed Francis*



© Karen Callaway, Chicago Catholic

Dear Catholic School Supporters,

The Archdiocese of Chicago has a long and rich history of providing students with an excellent education in the Catholic tradition. The societal benefits of Catholic schools and a Catholic education are many. From providing safe havens for students in crime-ridden areas; to instilling the importance of community service; from forming children for a personal and living encounter with Jesus; to shaping civically engaged adults, our Catholic schools are and continue to be a force of good in our communities.

Our strategic plan is a clear and comprehensive roadmap for the future of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Many thanks to our Archdiocesan Catholic School Board, our Office of Catholic Schools, all who worked to develop this plan, and all who will put this plan into action.

Catholic schools truly are centers of hope in our world. We are proud of everything our Archdiocesan schools, students, teachers and staff members have accomplished over the past 170 years, and we look forward to a bright future in the centuries to come.

With every good wish I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*Card. Blase J. Cupich*

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich  
Archbishop of Chicago





Dear Catholic School Supporters,

For decades, the Archdiocese of Chicago has inspired the future by providing a top-notch Catholic education for tens of thousands of students. I continue to be deeply impressed at the enthusiasm of our students, the talents of our educators and leaders, and the invaluable support of our benefactors. Our schools have earned a national reputation for preparing our students to achieve positive change in a world that desperately needs it.

We are extremely pleased to release our new strategic plan for Catholic school education. This plan, the result of a months-long planning process, represents an investment in the future of our schools. Catholic school education is a priority for the future of our local Church. While our population continues to change, our commitment and mission remain consistent. We are wholly dedicated to providing the best possible education in faith and academics, serving the wide diversity of communities in Cook and Lake Counties.

Our strategic plan would not be possible if it were not for the participation and support of Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, the Archdiocesan Catholic School Board, our pastors, our principals and the thousands of stakeholders who love our schools. Thank you for your commitment to Catholic school education. I look forward to our continued work together as we inspire a future of growth, vitality and hope!

Yours in Christ,

Jim Rigg, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Catholic Schools  
Archdiocese of Chicago

## OUR COLLECTIVE COMMITMENTS

The development of our strategic plan was guided by the following commitments.

### EVANGELIZING MISSION

Catholic schools exist to evangelize, to foster a relationship between each student and Jesus Christ and His Church. This mission of evangelization and discipleship should remain the top priority for our schools.

### SCHOOLS AS A PRIORITY

A Catholic school is the optimal comprehensive setting for religious education, and the Church and society benefit from strong Catholic schools. Therefore, sustaining and growing high-quality schools are priorities for the Archdiocese of Chicago.

### BEST POSSIBLE QUALITY

Each Catholic school must provide the best religious and academic quality possible, driven and supported by excellent leadership.

### ACCESS TO CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Each geographic grouping of parishes in the Archdiocese should have reasonable access to at least one high quality Catholic elementary school.

### CONNECTION TO PARISHES

Catholic schools benefit parishes, and parishes benefit schools. When possible, schools should maintain formal sponsorship by parishes, and they should mutually work to achieve a close, vibrant relationship.





© Jerry Naunheim Jr.

Since 1843, the Archdiocese of Chicago's Catholic schools have served as a force for good in our communities. Our schools have set the standard for faith, excellence and service, and are particularly effective in serving those in poverty who deserve the opportunity to rise up economically through an excellent education.

Today the Archdiocese's Catholic school system, comprised of 215 Catholic schools with more than 78,000 students, makes us one of the largest Catholic school systems in the world. We boast one of the most diverse systems in the U.S., welcoming families from all races, income levels, religions and geographic origins.

We benefit heavily from the generosity of numerous donors and from partnerships, including the Big Shoulders Fund, which raises more than \$18 million per year to assist families and schools in high-poverty areas of Chicago.

In spite of our success, the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese face continued challenges, including a decline in enrollment due to demographic changes, an increase in competitors, an overall decrease in Mass attendance and other factors. This decline in school enrollment has led to closures and consolidations in recent years. Even with these challenges the Archdiocese knows that Catholic schools are vital in forming the next generation in faith and knowledge.

- Archdiocese of Chicago  
Catholic Schools**
- Ninety-eight percent high school graduation rate
  - Recipient of the greatest number of U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon Awards of any school system (public or private)
  - Ninety-six percent college-bound rate
  - Accredited by AdvancED, the largest community of education professionals in the world
  - Catholic high school graduates earn millions of dollars in college scholarships annually
  - Catholic school graduates are four times more likely to vote
  - Catholic school graduates found in leadership positions in business, government and non-profit organizations
  - Catholic school graduates are civically engaged and committed to service as adults



# OUR PLAN

The Archdiocese of Chicago is in a period of exciting and transformational change. In 2015, Cardinal Blase Cupich instigated the *Renew My Church* initiative, designed to revitalize parishes and schools to better evangelize and serve. To accompany *Renew My Church*, the Archdiocese of Chicago's Office of Catholic Schools and the Archdiocesan School Board shepherded the creation of our new strategic plan for Catholic schools. Our strategic plan represents the input of thousands of stakeholders, and represents the vision and hopes of the people of the Archdiocese. Although we face challenges, our Catholic schools can prosper with careful planning, innovation and faith.

The plan addresses five focus areas, each with supporting initiatives and metrics. These focus areas are:

- Catholic Identity,
- Academic Excellence,
- Leadership,
- Governance, and
- Financial Vitality.

Task forces, comprised of Archdiocesan School Board members, school parents, pastors, principals and other Catholic school supporters, were formed for each focus area. Throughout the planning process, extensive performance data on individual schools were collected and analyzed. The Office of Catholic Schools also conducted focus groups and surveys of stakeholders, including school parents and teachers. Additionally, the Office of Catholic Schools worked with the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University to conduct a study of the retention and compensation of Catholic school educators.



# CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Our Catholic faith is the heart of our mission. The future of our Church will depend upon how we foster the faith of the students we serve. In spite of this, engagement in the Church amongst Catholics has declined for several years, and is particularly pronounced among the millennial generation. As we revitalize our Church, Catholic schools will lead the way in guiding each young person to a direct encounter with Christ.

## OUR VISION FOR CATHOLIC IDENTITY

- Schools that vibrantly live out the Catholic faith, forming students as missionary disciples,
- Schools led by passionate and involved pastors and principals who provide evangelizing witness in their leadership,
- Teachers who are well-formed in the faith who empower parents as the primary faith educators of their children, and
- Students who are engaged in dynamic worship and the Sacraments, and inspired to live Christ through service to others.

## INITIATIVES

The initiatives for Catholic Identity are divided into three areas: Wisdom, Worship and Works. Our initiatives include (but are not limited to):

- Fully implementing the new catechetical formation program for all teachers (of all subject areas) through My Catholic Faith Delivered,
- Expanding the formation program for Catholic school principals, including enhancing training for new principals and the implementation of an annual principal retreat,
- Updating and implementing a rigorous religion curriculum, paired with a new standardized assessment of religious learning,
- Partnering with the Vicar for Pastoral and Professional Development of Priests to provide training to pastors on supporting the Catholic identity of schools,
- Evaluating the strength of Catholic identity at schools through the AdvancED accreditation process and parent, staff and student feedback, and
- Implementing a set of key behaviors that are directly linked to improvements in school-level faith formation (such as regular prayer, worship spaces, inter-disciplinary religious teaching, etc.).

## HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

- Student performance on a new standardized religion assessment.
- Development of measurable Catholic Identity improvement goals, aligned with the AdvancED accreditation process.



© Lia Goyer

## New Methods and Models for Teacher Preparation

In 2016, the Archdiocese unveiled an innovative, technology-based catechetical preparation program for all Catholic school teachers. Through the My Catholic Faith Delivered program, teachers are exposed to engaging, rigorous lessons that prepare them to be passionate evangelizers and witnesses to the Catholic faith. To learn more about the program, visit: [schools.archchicago.org](https://schools.archchicago.org).





### Attracting and Keeping the Very Best Teachers

Excellence in education depends upon the quality of our teachers. During the formation of this plan, we partnered with the Kellogg School of Management from Northwestern University to study the reasons why teachers come and stay in Catholic schools. This data deeply informed our future strategies. A few select takeaways from the study include:

1. Teacher satisfaction is driven by a number of factors, most notably our commitment to excellence, our religious mission and the quality of leadership.
2. In spite of differences in pay, teacher turnover rates are slightly better than most local public districts.
3. While salaries are important, there are a number of other strategies that could be impactful to improve recruitment and retention.

## ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

For generations, our schools have achieved a well-deserved reputation for academic excellence. Through our strategic plan, we will build upon this reputation to assure all students are immersed in an environment of achievement and inclusion.

### OUR VISION FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

- Schools that provide a rigorous 21st century academic program, supported by the very best instructional resources and technology,
- Schools that attract and retain highly skilled, passionate and faith-filled teachers,
- Educators who continually grow in the craft of teaching, supported by thorough professional development plans and accountability systems,
- Schools that define and work toward clear improvement goals that continuously motivate the school toward excellence, and
- Schools that serve students of diverse backgrounds and students with defined learning needs.



### AdvancED System Accreditation

All Catholic schools were accredited through AdvancED Systems Accreditation in 2015. This rigorous accreditation model enables each school to develop individual improvement goals that are directly tied to student learning. While our schools deliver a great education, it is vital that we keep growing, improving and innovating.

### Archdiocese of Chicago Receives \$1M Grant from CME Group Foundation to Launch Innovative Personalized Learning Program at Selected Schools

In early 2017, the Archdiocese received a \$1 million grant from the CME Group Foundation to launch a five-year personalized learning program at three Catholic schools. The grant funds professional development, training, software, technology infrastructure and maintenance needed to successfully implement the literacy and writing-focused program. The Archdiocese is collaborating with LEAP Innovations.

The program began with three schools that serve diverse populations. Through integrating technology, focused training for teachers, and collaborations between the schools, the LEAP program represents our commitment to innovation and 21st century learning.

### INITIATIVES

The initiatives in Academic Excellence address four areas: Quality Teachers, Quality Curriculum, Equitable Learning and Culture of Continuous Improvement. Our initiatives include (but are not limited to):

- Fostering intensive instructional coaching to teachers by freeing principals to focus on encouraging the best instruction. This work will be supported by the introduction of a standards-based teacher assessment that focuses on differentiation and inclusion,
- Developing and systematically working toward continuous improvement goals, focused through the rigorous AdvancED school improvement process,
- Leveraging available funding, most notably federal dollars through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), to financially support robust professional development on the educator, school and Archdiocesan levels, and
- Developing and implementing an enhanced teacher recruitment/retention initiative.

### HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

- On average, third grade students achieve on grade level in reading and math (based upon ACT Aspire scores).
- On average, students in all grades grow at least one full grade level per year (based upon ACT Aspire scores).
- All schools perform above local competitive options on standardized tests.
- All schools make adequate progress on school-specific academic goals, as defined through the AdvancED accreditation process.



**The Invitation to Lead**

The ministry of leadership in the Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic schools is unique. It is a call to be the faith leader, the instructional leader and the steward of the school's vitality and viability.

Since 2012, the Archdiocese has supported the Leadership Academy, an invitation to possible future leaders to discern becoming a principal. A similar program exists for onboarding new principals, providing them with both a mentor and a support system as they enter their new role.

Our strategic plan will expand these efforts, strengthening and affirming those who have accepted the invitation to lead.

# LEADERSHIP

The success of our Catholic schools depends upon the men and women who lead them. Our research indicates that a highly effective principal has more impact on the success of a Catholic school than any other factor. Leadership is the vanguard of our strategic plan, representing a renewed investment in the people who will lead our schools to quality and sustainability.

**OUR VISION FOR LEADERSHIP**

- Schools that attract and retain the very best principals, who are surrounded by support systems and a rigorous program of ongoing professional development,
- A strong pipeline of qualified principal candidates primarily produced through internal programs (such as the Leadership Academy) and partnerships with local universities,
- Principals who seek out individuals in their schools with leadership potential. Working with the Archdiocese, they help empower future leaders and support them to obtain proper qualifications to become principals,
- Principals who make a substantial difference in the quality and vitality of their schools by focusing on teacher coaching, culture building and community relations (vs. administrative and operational demands), and
- Pastors who are positively engaged with their schools, driving a vision for evangelization and community.



© Karen Callaway, Chicago Catholic



© 2017 Eleanore Menke



**INITIATIVES**

The initiatives for Leadership are divided into six areas: Recruitment, Professional Development, Retention, Optimization, System Mindset and Distributed Leadership. Our initiatives include (but are not limited to):

- Investing in new resources in the Office of Catholic Schools to assist in leadership recruitment and support. In the fall of 2017, employ a full-time Director of Leadership Formation, who will lead principal recruitment, oversee the principal evaluation process and provide a comprehensive and individualized system of principal professional development,
- Fully implementing a new principal evaluation process, tied to six defined standards areas, as well as each school's improvement plan,
- Integrating standards tied to Distributed Leadership and cultivating future leaders,
- Implementing individual retention plans for high performing principals, including a review of principal compensation structures, and
- Auditing and streamlining the administrative and operational demands placed upon principals.

**HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS**

- Increase the average number of qualified principal applicants per open position to at least double the number of candidates participating in university cohort programs.
- At least 70 percent of principals will achieve a "Satisfactory" rating on the new principal evaluation system.
- Assure a turnover rate of no less than six years for principals who perform at the "Satisfactory" level or better.

**Principal Performance Standards**

1. Leading the Catholic Vision/Mission of the School
2. Leading and Managing Change
3. Improving Teaching and Learning
4. Building and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships
5. Leading with Integrity and Professionalism
6. Creating and Sustaining a Culture of High Expectations





# GOVERNANCE

As we build a sustainable future for the Archdiocese's Catholic schools, it is important to focus on the governance, or systems of oversight and authority, that govern our schools. Our strategic plan suggests a flexible approach to governance, where each school's unique circumstances define the most appropriate governance model. Through the facilitated *Renew My Church* groupings process, the optimal governance model will be defined, complete with a properly functioning and structured local school board.

## OUR VISION FOR GOVERNANCE

- There is no set approach to governance; governance models should best match the local needs of each school,
- In general, the best governance models preserve a sense of support and ownership by a sponsoring parish (or parishes),
- The *Renew My Church* grouping process provides the vehicle for systematically researching and selecting the optimal governance model for each school, engaging local stakeholders in the decision, and
- In some cases, the Archdiocese assumes a greater governance role, particularly in schools facing significant financial or demographic challenges.

## INITIATIVES

The initiatives for Governance are divided into two areas: Central Governance and Local Governance. Our initiatives include (but are not limited to):

- Assuming a position of strategic flexibility in which governance models are defined based upon local circumstances and through the school/parish review and discernment process,
- Through *Renew My Church*, assuring the Archdiocese supports each school through every stage of governance transitions, from preparation through long-term implementation, and
- Designing and implementing a board development program through the Office of Catholic Schools. This process will involve collective training, a revised board manual and enhanced monitoring.

## HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

- Overall improvements in school vitality (see metrics for Financial Vitality).



© Mary Lou Tallud



© 2017 Eleanor Menke





# FINANCIAL VITALITY

Our schools must be financially sustainable if they are to realize the indispensable mission of Catholic education. Our strategic plan calls for a combination of efforts to improve financial vitality, including implementation of the *Renew My Church* initiative, improvements in financial/operational practices and implementation of new sources of revenue.

## OUR VISION FOR FINANCIAL VITALITY

- Schools that are made financially sustainable through better stewardship of financial resources,
- *Renew My Church* generates lasting vitality in parishes and schools, instigating deep conversations among stakeholders about current realities and hopes for the future,
- New sources of revenue are unlocked to support Catholic schools, particularly those that serve high poverty populations, and
- Dynamic systems of marketing are implemented, with a particular emphasis on recruiting and supporting students of Hispanic background.



## INITIATIVES

The initiatives for Financial Vitality are divided into three areas: Operational Improvements, New Funding Sources and Structural Strategies. Our initiatives include (but are not limited to):

- Improving the operations of each school by:
  - Introducing best-practice models for financial management, tuition collection and expense control to improve operational efficiency,
  - Enhancing marketing and enrollment strategies, with particular attention to the growing Hispanic population, and
  - Intensifying training for pastors, principals and business managers in effective operational management.
- Generating and growing new sources of revenue by:
  - Fully implementing the new Phoenix Scholarships, needs-based scholarships funded through the successful *To Teach Who Christ Is* capital campaign,
  - Securing donors to fund specific operational strategies, and
  - Continuing to advocate for publicly-funded parental choice programs.
- Addressing structural challenges through the school/parish review and discernment process, enabling a long-term plan for each school's vitality.

## HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

- Through implementing our strategic plan, overall school enrollment will stabilize and eventually increase.
- Archdiocesan aid to schools will not surpass \$10 million per year (not counting Archdiocesan scholarships).



## Renew My Church

At the start of His ministry, God called St Francis to “Renew My Church.” In this spirit, the Archdiocese of Chicago has embarked on a multi-year initiative to instill new vitality in its parishes, schools and other ministries. Through deep local and regional conversations, with careful consideration of vitality data, the people of the Archdiocese will reimagine how to best achieve our unified mission: to bring people closer to Christ. To learn more about *Renew My Church*, visit: [archchicago.org/renew](http://archchicago.org/renew).





## THE TOP SEVEN TAKEAWAYS

1. Catholic school education is, and will continue to be, a priority for the Archdiocese of Chicago.
2. Our evangelizing mission is at the heart of our schools, and must be prioritized and enhanced, working with local parishes and the Church as a whole to address declining trends in Mass attendance and active participation in the Catholic faith.
3. Catholic school education must be the highest possible quality.
4. The school principal is the most important determinant of school success. We must be extremely intentional about recruiting, forming, retaining and supporting leaders.
5. We must intensify our efforts to build a sustainable future and establish vital schools.
6. There are several key factors that can improve the economics of our schools (e.g. marketing, tuition management, right-staffing, etc.). The Archdiocese will more closely engage, in some cases, to drive positive change.
7. In spite of our challenges, there continues to be demand for Catholic education, and many examples of thriving schools. We are a Church of hope, and we have hope for the future!

“THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT TASK IN FORMING THEM AS FREE AND RESPONSIBLE HUMAN BEINGS. IT AFFIRMS THEIR DIGNITY AS AN INALIENABLE GIFT THAT FLOWS FROM OUR ORIGINAL CREATION AS CHILDREN MADE IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD. 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.”

— Pope Francis



ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



Catholic Schools  
835 North Rush Street  
Chicago, IL 60611-2030  
[schools.archchicago.org](http://schools.archchicago.org)

