

Called to Be the Loving Face of Christ



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF NEW ULM, MN

PASTORAL PLAN FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Pursuing the Mission of Jesus Christ as Priest, Prophet, and King

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The Church and Her Special Mission to Educate

Fiftieth Anniversary of the
Declaration on Christian Education
from the Second Vatican Council
(*Gravissimum Educationis*)
October 28, 1965

[The] duty of educating belongs to the Church, not merely because she must be recognized as a human society capable of educating, but especially because she has the responsibility of announcing the way of salvation to all men, of communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and, in her unfailing solicitude, of assisting men to be able to come to the fullness of this life. The Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ and at the same time do all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human.

Gravissimum Educationis, no. 3

Among all educational instruments the school has a special importance. It is designed not only to develop with special care the intellectual faculties but also to form the ability to judge rightly, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a sense of values, to prepare for professional life. Between pupils of different talents and backgrounds it promotes friendly relations and fosters a spirit of mutual understanding; and it establishes as it were a center whose work and progress must be shared together by families, teachers, associations of various types that foster cultural, civic, and religious life, as well as by civil society and the entire human community. Beautiful indeed and of great importance is the vocation of all those who aid parents in fulfilling their duties and who, as representatives of the human community, undertake the task of education in schools. This vocation demands special qualities of mind and heart, very careful preparation, and continuing readiness to renew and to adapt.

Gravissimum Educationis, no. 5

Foreword

As the *Fourth Plan for Parishes* encourages individuals and groups to study and reflect on the documents of Vatican II, it is appropriate and notable that the planning efforts for the *Pastoral Plan for Catholic Schools* took place in the year recognizing the fiftieth anniversary of the Vatican II document *Gravissimum Educationis*. The celebration of the anniversary of *Gravissimum Educationis* provided a world-wide as well as a local opportunity to revitalize planning efforts for Catholic schools. A World Congress on Catholic Education was held in Rome in November 2015 and numerous ideas and conclusions that were summarized by the Congress are incorporated within this *Pastoral Plan for Catholic Schools*.

The delegates to the World Congress were presented with the 2014 document *Instrumentum Laboris, Educating for Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion*. The *Instrumentum Laboris* reminds us *Gravissimum Educationis* is the only Document of Vatican II specifically related to Catholic education. However, it has significant connections to two Constitutions of Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. The combined reading of all three documents is helpful in appreciating the theological-spiritual dimensions of education.

Effective planning is critical for the sustainability and vitality of Catholic schools. The New Ulm Diocesan *Fourth Plan for Parishes* identifies demographic realities within the diocese. The same demographics and many of the other challenges effecting parishes also effect Catholic schools. We must be continually ready to renew and to adapt to these challenges as we prepare for a future of Catholic school educational opportunities within the diocese. This *Pastoral Plan for Catholic Schools* identifies areas for various groups to discuss and address in the upcoming years.

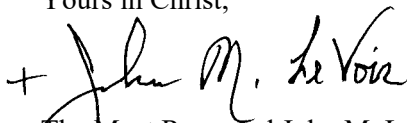
Catholic schools are a vital aspect of the Church's mission to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We must keep a focus on the link between the mission of Catholic schools and the proclamation of the Gospel. As *Gravissimum Educationis* challenges us, may each Catholic school within the Diocese of New Ulm distinctly "create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity" (GE, no. 8). As Council teachings inform us, may Catholic schools continue to provide students with a Christian education that matures together with human education so as to develop within each student a Christian character that animates the varied activities of human life (IL, 2014).

As mentioned in the Forward of the *Fourth Plan for Parishes*, and is appropriate for this *Pastoral Plan for Catholic Schools*:

It is the hope that as we implement this pastoral plan, we will continue our journey of faith refreshed by a rediscovery of the riches of Vatican II and with a heart deeply converted to Christ so as to show forth the loving face of Christ to all. "It is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize. Today as in the past, he [Jesus] sends us through the highways of the world to proclaim his Gospel to all the peoples of the earth (cf. Mt 28:19)" (Porta Fidei, no. 7).

May the youth we educate today be the face of Christ in our diocese and beyond, now and into the future.

Yours in Christ,

+ 
The Most Reverend John M. LeVoir
Bishop of the Diocese of New Ulm, MN

Introduction

These planning efforts are rooted in the *Fourth Plan for Parishes* and the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (hereafter referred to as the National Catholic School Standards), published in 2012 by the Center for Catholic School Effectiveness, School of Education, Loyola University Chicago, in partnership with Roche Center for Catholic Education, School of Education, Boston College.

With the National Standards and Benchmarks as a guiding document, many people across the Diocese of New Ulm were engaged in determining the needs of the Catholic schools. School parents and community members in area faith communities with Catholic schools were surveyed, with just over 660 responses. School faculties and students from grades five through twelve were also surveyed. School administrators met on several occasions to discuss the standards as they aligned to the state-approved accrediting process used by the schools within the diocese. Priests of the diocese were involved through surveys and a consultation meeting.

The Schools Planning Committee, formed as an outcome of the initial *Plan for Schools: Formation in the Catholic Faith*, assisted with the writing of this *Pastoral Plan for Schools: Called to Be the Loving Face of Christ*. The Schools Planning Committee was established as a subcommittee of the Committee on Parishes. The Schools Planning Committee used the information gathered throughout the process to finalize the goals and objectives found in Section II. This *Pastoral Plan for Schools* was also reviewed by the diocesan Committee on Parishes and finally recommended for the bishop's approval by the diocesan Priests' Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

Section I: Foundational Principles

Chapter 1. The Identity and Mission of Catholic Schools

A Catholic school provides a complete education, that is, an education given in and by the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, so that her children, like the Christ child, may “advance in wisdom and age and favor before God and man” (Lk 2:52).

The Dominican order education apostolate has identified the mission of Catholic schools at its fullest: The tradition is rooted in prayer, supported in community, committed to truth, and united in love. It is a formula that is ancient and yet ever new. Catholic schools are called

- To enlighten minds and inspire hearts with knowledge and love of the truth, especially the person of Christ, the source of all truth;
- To encourage reverence for the Holy Eucharist, devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and fidelity to the Church;
- To promote a greater awareness of the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the human person;
- To provide students with a solid liberal arts education, so that with a strong academic foundation and the development of their personal gifts, they might more freely respond to their God-given vocation;
- To promote an authentic Catholic culture, thereby enabling students to appreciate all that is good, true, and beautiful;
- To strengthen family life by offering support, guidance, and instruction to parents in their role as the primary educators of their children.

The *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC) tells us: “The sacred duty and joy of each succeeding generation of Christian believers has been to hand on the deposit of faith that was first entrusted to the Apostles by Christ himself. We have received this gift, the deposit of faith – we have not conceived it. It is the heritage of the whole Church. It is our privilege and our responsibility to preserve the memory of Christ’s words and the words themselves and to teach future generations of believers to carry out all that Christ commanded his Apostles” (NDC, no.26).

The NDC and statements made by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops make it clear that Catholic schools are a vital part of the teaching mission of the Church. Once more, the NDC states: “The Catholic school affords a particularly favorable setting for catechesis with its daily opportunity for proclaiming and living the gospel message; for learning and appreciating the teachings of our Church; for acquiring a deep understanding, reverence, and love for the liturgy; for building community; for prayer; for proper formation of conscience; for the development of virtue; and for participating in Christian service. In addition, Catholic schools strive to relate all of the sciences to salvation and sanctification. Students are shown how Jesus illumines all of life – science, mathematics, history, business, biology, and so forth. For these reasons, whenever possible, parents should send their children to a Catholic school” (NDC no. 54.B.9d).

Catholic schools assist the bishop and pastoral leaders in carrying out the prophetic office of the Church by proclaiming and teaching of God’s word. The students receive daily religious instruction and receive insights into the gospel message through the study of various disciplines. Students proclaim God’s word in their actions and in their interactions with each other, as well as with other groups of people. Moreover,

where there is a vibrant Catholic school community, the staff, the parents, and the entire community benefit by receiving ongoing formation in their faith. The prophetic ministry requires that school faculties establish a sound foundation for the future successful life of students.

Catholic schools assist the bishop and pastoral leaders in carrying out the priestly office of the Church by celebrating the sacred mysteries of the Church as a school community within the area faith community. A weekly Eucharistic celebration is a significant celebration in the life of the school. Other prayer services are also incorporated throughout the school year, especially during the seasons of Advent and Lent. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament has returned to many of our Catholic schools. Members of Catholic school faculty are challenged to view themselves as exercising their roles on behalf of Christ rather than on their own behalf. They, therefore, should exercise their role in imitation of Christ.

Catholic schools assist in carrying out the kingly office by forming the consciences of their students and by planting the seeds of virtue in their souls. A Christian code of conduct with high, but reasonable, expectations is the hallmark of every Catholic school. Catholic schools also act as Christ's kingly people when they share his life in the larger community with various service and outreach projects. The kingly ministry demands that the members of the Catholic school faculty see themselves as servants in their roles as administrative leaders and teaching leaders.

Chapter 2. Catholic Schools and the New Evangelization

The Secretariat of Catholic Education of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) published a brief document entitled, *Renewing Christian Witness: Reflections on Catholic Schools as Instruments of the New Evangelization*. The document speaks clearly about the vital role Catholic schools can and must play for the New Evangelization to thrive in the United States.

The New Evangelization calls the Church to spread the Gospel with new energy – to bring the joy of the Good News of Jesus Christ to a world in desperate need of authentic hope. As Catholic schools are integral agents in the mission of the Church (Pope Benedict XVI: *The National Congress*, 1992), they are at the very heart of the New Evangelization. As stated within the USCCB document, “Catholic schools are instruments of grace, sacred places where the Gospel comes alive daily – and where children and families encounter (and, not infrequently, re-engage) the faith” (page 1, paragraph 2). In recognizing the significance of Catholic schools, it is necessary to renew our efforts to strengthen this extraordinary apostolate.

To repeat a concept from the Diocese of New Ulm’s first *Plan for Schools*: Christ’s call to discipleship is a call for us to be evangelizers. That call is both a great privilege and a considerable challenge for parents, the first teachers of the faith to their children. It is an awesome experience to introduce a child to Jesus and his teachings. It is a daunting and ongoing challenge for parents to pass on their faith to their children. That challenge of faith formation, designed to strengthen the child’s union with Christ and to instruct the child in the teachings of the Church, begins in a child’s earliest years, continues through teenage maturation, and holds ongoing implications for parents as the child leaves home and enters into his adult life.

Since their beginnings in the mid-1800s, Catholic schools, working with parents, have had a proven track record of success in passing on the faith. As the bishops state in *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*:

Catholic schools collaborate with parents and guardians in raising and forming their children as families struggle with the changing and challenging cultural and moral contexts in which they find themselves. Catholic schools provide young people with sound Church teaching through a broad-based curriculum where faith and culture are intertwined in all areas of a school’s life. By equipping our young people with sound education, rooted in the gospel message, the person of Jesus Christ, and rich in the cherished traditions and liturgical practices of our faith, we ensure that they have the foundation to live morally and uprightly in our complex modern world (no 5, 2005).

Chapter 3. References to Catholic Schools in Church Documents

In the book *At the Heart of the Church: Selected Documents of Catholic Education*, editors Ronald J. Nuzzi and Thomas C. Hunt remind us of the importance of reviewing Church documents related to Catholic education. The documents reference the understanding that the Catholic school is understood to be a community of faith first. “The Catholic school community takes advantage of the educational opportunities provided in a curriculum to evangelize and sanctify, and to bring to full bloom the God-given gifts of everyone in the building” (Alliance for Catholic Education Press, Notre Dame, Indiana. 2012. p 3).

For those desiring to learn and understand more about Catholic educational philosophy and what is unique about Catholic schools, this compilation of documents is a recommended resource.

“These documents express what may be called the constitutive elements of Catholic identity, or the unique and essential aspects of Catholic schools not found in other schools, public or private. These documents announce a philosophy of Catholic education, a Catholic worldview that is intended to permeate every moment of life within a Catholic school. As the astute reader will notice in these official documents, the Catholic Church has an elevated view of the Catholic school in ecclesial life and conceives of the school as integral to the mission of the Church and at the heart of its efforts at evangelization” (ibid. p 2).

A listing of the documents included in the book can be found in the table.

Selected Episcopal and Papal Documents on Catholic Education (1792-1962) (Compiled Summary)	Thomas C. Hunt
Divini Illius Magistri (Encyclical on Christian Education), 1929	Pope Pius XI
Gravissimum Educationis (Declaration on Christian Education), 1965	Second Vatican Council
To Teach As Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education, 1972	National Conference of Catholic Bishops
Teach Them: Statement on Catholic Schools, 1976	United States Catholic Conference
The Catholic School, 1977	Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education
Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, 1982	Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education
The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, 1988	Congregation for Catholic Education
In Support of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1990	United States Catholic Conference
The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1997	Congregation for Catholic Education
Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines, 2002	Congregation for Catholic Education
Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium, 2005	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful, 2007	Congregation for Catholic Education

Chapter 4. References to Catholic Schools in Canon Law

Following are guiding principles as we strive to undertake planning efforts and a specific citing from the Church's *Code of Canon Law* that underscores the importance of each one. As mentioned in the introduction to this document, this *Pastoral Plan for Schools* is aligned to the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*. Following the stated principles and canon law citations is a reference to the major division of the National Catholic School Standards document to which the principle is aligned.

Principle 1. Catholic Schools Are of Great Importance

- Canon 796 §1: "Among the means to foster education, the Christian faithful are to hold schools in esteem; schools are the principal assistance to parents in fulfilling the function of education."

Principle 2. Catholic Schools Must Be Mission-Driven, Focusing on Our Catholic Faith

- Canon 794 §1: "The Church has in a special way the duty and the right of educating, for it has a divine mission of helping all to arrive at the fullness of Christian life."

Principles 1 and 2 are closely aligned with the first division of the National Catholic School Standards document, Mission and Catholic Identity.

Principle 3. Catholic Schools Must Provide for Excellence in Academics

- Canon 806 §2: "Directors of Catholic schools are to take care under the watchfulness of the local ordinary that the instruction which is given in them is at least as academically distinguished as that in the other schools of the area."

Principle 3 is aligned with the third division of the National Catholic School Standards document, Academic Excellence.

Principle 4. Catholic Schools Must Strive for Complete Formation of the Whole Child

- Canon 795: "Education must pay regard to the formation of the whole person, so that all may attain their eternal destiny and at the same time promote the common good of society. Children and young persons are therefore to be cared for in such a way that their physical, moral, and intellectual talents may develop in a harmonious manner, so that they may attain a greater sense of responsibility and a right use of freedom, and be formed to take an active part in social life."

Principle 4 encompasses a focus on the first and third divisions of the National Catholic School Standards document, Mission and Catholic Identity and Academic Excellence.

Principle 5. Catholic Schools Must Be Strategic and Forward-Thinking in Planning, Yet Operationally Viable

- Canon 800 §2: "The Christian faithful are to foster Catholic schools, assisting in their establishment and maintenance according to their means."

Principle 6. Catholic School Choice Advocacy and a Broadening of Financial Support Is Important

- Canon 797: "Parents must possess a true freedom in choosing schools; therefore, the Christian faithful must be concerned that civil society recognizes this freedom for parents and even supports it with subsidies; distributive justice is to be observed."
- Canon 793 §2: "Parents have moreover the right to avail themselves of that assistance from civil society which they need to provide a Catholic education for their children."

Principles 5 and 6 are aligned with two divisions of the National Catholic School Standards document, Governance and Leadership, and Operational Vitality.

Chapter 5. Defining Characteristics of Catholic Schools

Excerpt: Ozar, L.A. & Weitzel-O'Neill, P. (Eds.). (2012). *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*. Chicago, IL: Loyola University Chicago, Center for Catholic School Effectiveness, pp 1-4.

Section One of the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (The National Catholic School Standards) lays out the Defining Characteristics of Catholic schools. The defining characteristics flow directly from the Holy See's teaching on Catholic schools as compiled by Archbishop J. Michael Miller, SCS (*The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools*, 2006) and from statements by Pope Benedict XVI and the American bishops. The defining characteristics authenticate the National Catholic School Standards, the standards and benchmarks on which the goals and strategies of this *Plan* are based. The defining characteristics are as follows:

Centered in the Person of Jesus Christ

Catholic education is rooted in the conviction that Jesus Christ provides the most comprehensive and compelling example of full human potential (*The Catholic School*, nos. 34-35). In every aspect of programs, life, and activities, Catholic schools should foster personal relationships with Jesus Christ and communal witness to the Gospel message of love of God and neighbor and service to the world, especially the poor and marginalized (Miller, 2006, pp. 25-26).

Contributing to the Evangelizing Mission of the Church

By reason of its educational activity, Catholic schools participate directly and in a privileged way in the evangelizing mission of the Church (*The Catholic School*, no. 9; *The Catholic Schools on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, nos. 5, 11; *The Religious Dimensions of Education in a Catholic School*, no. 33).

As an ecclesial entity where faith, culture, and life are brought into harmony, the Catholic school should be a place of real and specified pastoral ministry in communion with the local bishop (*The Catholic School*, 44; *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, no. 14; *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, no. 34). The environment in Catholic schools should express the signs of Catholic culture, physically and visibly (*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*; Miller, 2006, p. 40).

Distinguished by Excellence

Church documents, history, and practices, supported by canon law, establish that first and foremost a Catholic school is characterized by excellence. Consistent with the defining characteristics, Catholic schools should implement ongoing processes and structures and gather evidence to ensure excellence in every aspect of its programs, life, and activities (*Gravissimum Educationis*, nos. 8 and 9; *Code of Canon Law*, c. 806 §2).

Committed to Educate the Whole Child

Catholic school education is rooted in the conviction that human beings have a transcendent destiny, and that education for the whole person must form the spiritual, intellectual, physical, psychological, social, moral, aesthetic, and religious capacities of each child. Catholic schools should develop and implement academic, co-curricular, faith-formation, and service/ministry programs to educate the whole child in all these dimensions (*The Catholic School*, no. 29).

Steeped in a Catholic Worldview

Catholic education aims at the integral formation of the human person, which includes "preparation for professional life, formation of ethical and social awareness, developing awareness of the transcendental, and religious education" (*The Catholic School*, no. 31). All curriculum and instruction in a Catholic

school should foster: the desire to seek wisdom and truth, the preference for social justice, the discipline to become self-learners, the capacity to recognize ethical and moral grounding for behavior, and the responsibility to transform and enrich the world with gospel values. The Catholic school should avoid the error that its distinctiveness rests solely on its religious education program (Miller, 2006, pp. 43-45, 52).

Sustained by Gospel Witness

Catholic schools pay attention to the vocation of teachers and their participation in the Church's evangelizing mission (*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, no. 19; *Lay Catholics in Schools*, no. 37). A Catholic educator is a role model for students and gives testimony by his or her life and commitment to mission (Benedict XVI, June, 2005; Miller, 2006, p. 53). As much as possible, Catholic schools should recruit teachers who are practicing Catholics, who can understand and accept the teachings of the Catholic Church and the moral demands of the Gospel, and who can contribute to the achievement of the school's Catholic identity and apostolic goals, including participation in the schools' commitment to social justice and evangelization (NDC, no. 231).

Shaped by Communion and Community

Catholic school education places an emphasis on the school as community – and educational community of persons and a genuine community of faith (*Lay Catholics in Schools*, nos. 22, 41). Catholic schools should do everything they can to promote genuine trust and collaboration among teachers, with parents as the primary educators of their children, and with governing body members to foster appreciation of different gifts that build up a learning and faith community and strengthen academic excellence (*Lay Catholics in Schools*, no. 78). The Catholic school should pay especially close attention to the quality of interpersonal relations between teachers and students, ensuring that the student is seen as a person whose intellectual growth is harmonized with spiritual, religious, emotional, and social growth (*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, no. 18).

Accessible to All Students

By reason of their evangelizing mission, Catholic schools should be available to all people who desire a Catholic school education for their children (*Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 6; *Code of Canon Law*, c. 793 §2; *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, Introduction). Catholic schools in concert with the Catholic community should do everything in their power to manage available resources and seek innovative options to ensure that Catholic school education is geographically, programmatically, physically, and financially accessible.

Established by Expressed Authority of the Bishop

Canon law states, "Pastors of souls have the duty of making all possible arrangements so that all the faithful may avail themselves of a Catholic education" (*Code of Canon Law*, c. 794). Bishops need to put forward the mission of Catholic schools, support and enhance the work of Catholic schools, and see that the education in the schools is based on principles of Catholic doctrine (John Paul II, *Pastores Gregis*, no. 52). Catholic schools have a formal and defined relationship with the bishop guided by a spirituality of ecclesial communion, and should work to establish a relationship marked by mutual trust, close cooperation, continuing dialogue, and respect for the bishop's legitimate authority (*Code of Canon Law*, c. 803 §1 and §3; Miller, 2006, p. 33).

Section II: Planning Considerations

These planning efforts are rooted in the theology of the Diocese of New Ulm's *Fourth Plan for Parishes* and Catholic school best practices of the National Catholic School Standards, published in 2012 by the Center for Catholic School Effectiveness, School of Education, Loyola University Chicago, in partnership with Roche Center for Catholic Education, School of Education, Boston College.

The Schools Vitality Index

Planning for the long-term vitality and viability of Catholic schools is perhaps the most significant challenge facing administrators and school committees. Good planning is the best way to deal with the realities facing the school and the parish(es) that support the school. As is frequently said, "A failure to plan is often a plan to fail."

A shifting mindset is needed when considering viability, vitality, and sustainability of the Catholic schools within the diocese. The initial *Plan for Schools* offered a viability index for school leaders and their leadership committees as a tool to help realize when viability was becoming a concern. All school leaders within the diocese need to realize an index is no longer a point of consideration; all schools must continually be planning for an increase in the vitality of the school. The standards and benchmarks are all factors to be continually reflected upon for planning and for effecting desired change in the school.

For a school to be viable, the school must follow the Minnesota Nonpublic School Accrediting Association (MNSAA) process along with the aligned National Catholic School Standards. It is not optional. It is a diocesan policy that every school is to retain a fully approved accreditation status. The National Catholic School Standards aligned with the MNSAA accreditation tool are the viability standards and benchmarks. School stakeholders foregoing the accreditation process are making the decision to recommend closure of the school.

For a school to be viable, there must be sufficient financial resources to ensure that the school can accomplish its mission. The teacher-to-pupil ratios must be cost effective and affordable to maintain. Consideration should be given to the cost to educate each child; the viability of the school may be reviewed in relation to the average cost schools within the diocese incur to educate a child. School leaders should be cognizant of the danger of failing to continually focus on building relationships and on making an intentional commitment to pursue marketing initiatives. Since a school is one of many ministerial programs within an AFC/parish community, consideration needs to be given as to the financial ability to provide for other valued ministries within the AFC/parish; parish and school leadership need to evaluate and discuss their shared goals.

Some leaders or community members may desire to have numerical metrics or targets that are given to quantify the level of vitality; however, this *Pastoral Plan for Schools* does not provide them. Appendix 2 is a listing of considerations that may be easier to share with stakeholders, though this is not intended as an exhaustive listing. It is for each community to determine what numerical metrics or norms they choose to set. The Office of Catholic Schools is available to guide and to facilitate discussions regarding vitality.

Should the leadership in the school and the AFC/parish determine that trends cannot be reversed, efforts should be made to look at increasing the level of the cooperative ventures with neighboring Catholic schools. Ongoing collaborative leadership efforts will lead to smoother transitions with innovative ways of serving our Catholic school students.

Financial Transparency

All schools have smaller student populations than five years ago, and all schools need to be particularly attentive to the standards and benchmarks, especially those relating to operational viability. Smaller student populations mean higher per pupil costs, which places greater demands on the parishes supporting the school as well as parents' ability to pay tuition. As measures are taken to reduce costs, sometimes the quality of the school's offerings is called into question.

School administrators are required to complete annual reports to stakeholders and an annual accreditation report to the state accreditation association. Both the annual stakeholder report and the accreditation report are to be filed with the Office of Catholic Schools each June. The director of Schools for the diocese may at his/her discretion schedule meetings with school and parish leaders or committees for education if the report appears to indicate concerns. The annual report to stakeholders is to include clear and meaningful financial information (see Appendix 1 for annual report guidelines).

The Area Catholic School Concept: Definition and Integration

The hope is to have a viable Catholic school in as many areas of the diocese as is feasible. A continued emphasis on the area faith community as an important collaborative organization, by which the full complement of pastoral ministries is made available to parishes, is believed to be advantageous for the continuation and enhancement of viable Catholic schools. Current and evolving technologies may assist with providing for enhanced and additional opportunities.

As noted in the USCCB's 2005 document *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, all parishes need to be responsible for supporting Catholic schools, including those parishes without schools. Having a school as a part of the AFC will assist with the call to the entire Catholic community. Concerns are often voiced in regards to alumni support with possible consolidations or school name changes; however, changes in other areas of the country have shown that people do adapt and are supportive of the Catholic school continuing to exist. When alumni and supporters are given the opportunity to have a Catholic school with a different name or no Catholic school, the decision becomes quite clear that the name change is not the final factor for consideration.

An area Catholic school is not necessarily the same in any two situations. Each area will look different depending upon the number of buildings and the grade levels available. It should be understood that an area Catholic school does not necessarily indicate one building or one site. An area Catholic school model may allow for local parishes to retain various parish school sites even though they are a part of a system of schools. The area faith community may be the first boundaries considered for an area Catholic school, but in some situations the boundaries may be extended outside the AFC. Again, the area Catholic school model does not presume that sites will close or sites will necessarily lose financial autonomy.

Some areas will be able to move forward more effectively with a one-pastor-per-AFC model, and even more effectively should a strong business manager model be implemented for an AFC with financial management support and oversight. It is imperative that the diocese continue to assist in establishing best business practices for parishes and schools and that these become the norm. A move to area business managers would be of great benefit in this area. The proactive development of human resource materials by an outside consultant has already provided great benefits in this area.

The area Catholic school model may very well have its beginnings in what one could call a Collaborative School or Family of Schools model. In this model, school leadership meets and thoughtfully reflects upon the question, "What can we do better together than we can do alone?" The thought is that schools may

begin gradually to collaborate and continue forward in a possible move to full collaboration. The Collaborative School model provides numerous opportunities: joint marketing efforts, joint resource purchasing (specifically in regards to textbook and technology support), planning (updating of various manuals and handbooks), curriculum writing, shared employment of personnel with common pay scales, joint budgeting for shared services, various committee work, and school leadership initiatives.

The Office of Catholic Schools divided the schools of the diocese into three geographical regional groups to encourage additional administrative support and dialogue. Regional leadership has occasionally provided collaborative professional development and faith-sharing (retreat) opportunities. Each region is responsible for initiating these collaborative opportunities. Other regional initiatives may be advantageous in moving the Collaborative School model or the area Catholic school concept forward while maintaining localized control. It is interesting to note that comprehensive research released in 2009 by the Center for Rural Policy and Development recommends rural public schools consider collaboration instead of consolidation, stating that the negatives of consolidation outweigh the positives.

Staffing Catholic Schools

The inability to adequately staff a Catholic school is a school viability concern. At the time this document is being written, rural Minnesota is experiencing an inability to attract new teachers and administrators to rural areas. This difficulty is more prevalent at our Catholic schools than the public schools due to our desire to hire practicing Catholics, which are a smaller portion of applicants than those at a public school, and due to financial constraints. Schools that have a high rate of attrition of teachers and school leadership need to assess if the school can continue, being as high-quality faith-filled teachers and stable leadership are two key factors for student academic success.

In order for schools to maintain a strong Catholic identity, the spiritual and professional qualifications required of teachers to effectively impart an authentic Catholic education must be continually developed. Ongoing personal and professional development is necessary.

Localized or Central Decision-Making, Collaboration, and Diocesan Support

Oftentimes, school leaders may be influenced to believe centralized solutions may be a preferred method to resolve a situation or provide an opportunity for programming initiatives. Proposals should be well thought out before jumping into diocesan-wide or centrally controlled programming decisions. Although most fully developed by the Church in the context of social justice, subsidiarity has a correlative application for the context of collaboration efforts in educational systems. Our faith encourages us to find resolution to issues at the point closest to the point of interest; those involved within the community should maintain advisory input. When possible, it is best to have parents of the school students and key community members serve in leadership positions and help in the decision-making process. In the context of school administration, particular and ongoing decisions regarding school operations should be made at the local level.

According to documented research, Catholic schools tend to operate as communities rather than bureaucracies, which results in higher levels of teacher commitment, student engagement, and student achievement (Marks, 2009, as cited by The University of Notre Dame Alliance for Catholic Education Web site). The area faith community, an area Catholic school, and a Collaborative School model all provide for continued localized control, which is advantageous for building community. The stakeholders of the schools within the Diocese of New Ulm consistently cite the “family atmosphere” of the school, the small-school experience, the “school family,” and other positive community attributes; these can be jeopardized if localized control within an area faith community or nearby area is not maintained. The

current wave of and overall positive perception of the charter school movement is due to the concept that they provide for localized control – a concept we have always had in place within our Catholic schools.

At the same time, collaborative initiatives and centralized support are quite different than centralized solutions. Individual schools and school administration should be supported as much as possible at the diocesan level or at a level that has the possible resources for providing assistance. In this way, the strengths of both the local and the diocesan levels can assist in endeavors to build a school system that promotes the common good of our Catholic school educators and students. The diocesan support the Office of Catholic Schools provides at this time is largely leadership consultation and school leadership professional development. Though not a part of the strategies set out within this *Pastoral Plan for Schools*, diocesan centralized services, such as accounting, tuition collection, payroll, advancement, and marketing, have been a part of some collaboration discussions. Perhaps these, too, could find their start at the Collaborative School model level.

Visioning Considerations: The New Evangelization, Engaging Faith Communities, and Dynamic Leadership

Our future is in God's hands, but with human knowledge and fortitude for each faith community to mold. As the New Evangelization is lived out and the faith communities assist the faithful in deepening their relationship with Christ, Catholic schools will continue to partner with parents and faith communities in catechizing efforts. High-quality and ongoing interactions and relationships among people will lead us into the future. Opportunities will be presented with new, forward-thinking technologies. The faith community councils, education advisory committees, and school principals all play important roles as the focus shifts to vitality. School leadership must provide for teacher leaders to be empowered so that all may maximize the impact on the school program vitality. Time devoted to building the capacity of teachers to work in teams is of great value.

All matters begin in prayer. In joining our prayers with the concepts explained by Michael Fullan and Andrew Hargreaves in the book, *Professional Capital, Transforming Teaching in Every School* (Teachers College Press, 2012), leaders can effectively undertake planning initiatives. Combining human capital and social capital leads to effective and vital decisional capital. In other words, prayer combined with the resources of knowledge, intelligence, and energy, that are required to put human and social capital to effective use, leads to the capacity to choose well and make good decisions. The beneficial interaction of all four – prayer, human capital, social capital, and decisional capital – provides for the creative imagining and the spreading of these change efforts from individual schools to groups of schools and throughout the diocese.

May the Lord our God provide us with the human capital, the social capital, and the decisional capital for vital Catholic schools to educate youth to be the face of Christ in our diocese and beyond now and into the future.

Section III: A Ministerial Plan for Educating Youth in Our Catholic Schools

Chapter 1. Catholic Identity, Mission, and Evangelization

The Church's teaching mission includes inviting young people to a relationship with Jesus Christ or deepening an existing relationship with Jesus, inserting young people into the life of the Church, and assisting young people to see and understand the role of faith in one's daily life and in the larger society. "This unique Catholic identity makes our Catholic elementary and secondary schools 'schools for the human person' and allows them to fill a critical role in the future life of our Church, our country, and our world" (*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, 1997).

– Excerpt from the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Elementary and Secondary Schools*, p 4, no 1.

Goal 1. The Catholic schools in the Diocese of New Ulm will be guided and driven by a clearly communicated mission that embraces a Catholic identity rooted in gospel values, is centered on the Eucharist, and is committed to faith formation, academic excellence, and service.

On the one hand, we want our schools to be places where people feel welcome, where the love of Christ is extended to as many people as possible, and where we evangelize those who are not fervent in their faith. On the other hand, while we take a more "open" approach to marketing and enrollment, there is the undoubted difficulty that arises when students come from homes where the Catholic faith is not taken seriously. No matter the composition of our classrooms between practicing Catholics, non-practicing Catholics, or non-Catholics, we need to be very clear about what we are offering to families as Catholic educators.

A core, non-negotiable of the Catholic schools of the diocese is that they will be completely and unapologetically Catholic. Catholic identity will be a tangible presence in all of the schools. Schools currently have a strong Catholic identity in place and the desire is to maintain and improve this.

Objectives

1.1 Schools are required to annually involve key stakeholders in a review and update of the school mission statement. (Refer to Rubric 1.1 of the National Catholic School Standards Rubrics.)

1.2 Documentation (minutes of meetings) verifying the annual mission statement review is to be on file. (Refer to Rubric 1.3 of the National Catholic School Standards Rubrics.)

Goal 2. An excellent Catholic school in the Diocese of New Ulm understands itself as a center of evangelization and catechesis for teachers, students, and their families.

Catholic schools today are called to reach out to households in addition to providing for the catechesis of children.

Objectives

2.1 The Office of Catholic Schools will continue to use the Minnesota Catholic Identity Standards alongside the aligned National Catholic School Standards to assess the Catholic identity and faith formation within the schools.

The document aligning the Minnesota Catholic Identity Standards with the National Catholic Schools Standards was first introduced to diocesan school leaders in June 2014 as they were beginning preparations for the one-year accreditation self-study process. The aligned documents will be used for school Catholic identity review visits by the Office of Catholic Schools beginning with the 2015–2016 school year.

2.2 The Office of Catholic Schools will continue to collaborate with the Office of Adult Faith Formation in providing new teacher training for Catholic school teachers and ongoing faith formation programs for all educators.

The prophetic ministry requires that school faculties establish a sound foundation in their faith to be able to provide for the future successful life of students. With the dissolution of the Minnesota Catholic Education Association, a biannual state-wide conference is not currently offered. The Office of Catholic Schools will collaborate with the Office of Adult Faith Formation in planning and facilitating a day of reflection and learning for all educators on an annual basis.

A video emphasizing the role of the Catholic school teacher has been developed by Dynamic Catholic. The viewing of the video will be a requirement of all newly hired Catholic school teachers. The workbook which accompanies the video, *Teach – Lead – Serve*, is one of the many newer resources becoming available to pass on the Catholic faith to the teachers within our Catholic schools. As additional resources are developed, they will be made available to Catholic educators. The video and workbook was published and first introduced in the fall of 2015.

The Office of the New Evangelization has made numerous online recordings available. Additional recordings will be added to the ongoing site at www.nikacatholic.com under the free distance education tab.

The Cardinal Newman Society published a Catholic education report in June 2015 entitled, “The Call to Teacher: Expectations for the Catholic Educator in Magisterial Teaching” by Jamie F. Arthur. The report provides a good summary of what it means to be a Catholic teacher as well as the qualifications needed to effectively impart an authentic Catholic education. The report should continue to be reflected upon as additional teacher formation opportunities are considered.

2.3 Faculty handbooks and employment contracts must explicitly mention the expectation of Catholic faculty members to be fully living their Catholic faith and to be visible members within their area faith communities.

2.4 Catholic school leadership should coordinate with the AFC/parish to promote the role Catholic schools fulfill in faith formation in assisting parents as the first educators of their children. A key time for this promotion is when parents are attending Baptism preparation classes.

2.5 Catholic schools are encouraged to play a significant role in the implementation of Early Catholic Family Life Programs (ECFL).

In the spring of 2013, the Office of Catholic Schools facilitated the introduction of the ECFL program into the diocese to help build the faith and prayer life of young families and to assist schools in marketing the school to young families. Catechesis of young families is an important role that Catholic schools must assist with. The ECFL program should be considered an important outreach program for all schools in reaching the young families within the area faith community.

2.6 The Office of Catholic Schools will continue to collaborate with the diocesan Office of Adult Faith Formation in providing information on resources that are available and recommended to use with the parents of our school communities. Schools will strive to enhance the faith development of Catholic parents and familiarize parents of other faiths with the Catholic faith.

Catholic schools are encouraged to continue to provide catechesis opportunities for parents throughout a child's school years. Parent catechesis must continue alongside the catechesis of youth. Parents are to be the first educators of their children. Catholic schools support the parental role. "The single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents" (*Soul Searching, The Religious and Spiritual Lives of America's Teenagers* (2005, p 261, no 2.).

One possible program is Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth. Parents could be invited to this program at an opportune time, such as when their children are in second grade and are receiving the Sacraments of Reconciliation and first Eucharist. In this program, parents are asked to live, model, and talk about the faith they wish to pass on. They are asked to make faith a top priority and to actively protect time for family and faith. They are asked to support each other in interfamily networks of faith and general life support. Finally, they are asked to let the Church be their partner through this process. Other possible programs include parish adult faith formation offerings, small faith-sharing groups, and Bible studies.

The parent formation and family formation provided must be done well. Participants should experience hospitality, joy, and passion that reflect our faith and model discipleship. Everything about the experience should point toward an encounter with and conversion to Jesus Christ.

2.7 School leadership and school teachers are encouraged to routinely share their faith experiences and faith traditions with the school community, through short articles in school and classroom newsletters or through other appropriate communication formats.

School communication that is sent to parents and other stakeholders should serve to build relationships. It should include personal faith stories and it should include a variety of catechetical information. Schools that have a religion series with parent resource materials should regularly include them with the newsletter.

2.8 The Office of Catholic Schools, as well as the schools within the diocese, will continue to collaborate with the Office of Vocations and the diocesan vocation awareness team in providing vocation activities and vocation lessons for students.

The Office of Vocations recently subscribed to online vocation awareness lessons developed by Vianney Vocations; these lessons are taught in all grades of all of the Catholic schools. The online lessons provide an engaging opportunity for students to learn about vocations.

2.9 The Office of Catholic Schools will continue to monitor and implement newly developed tools and resources that are provided as a part of the National Catholic School Standards initiative (available at www.catholicschoolstandards.org) as well as the Catholic Identity Curriculum Initiative (available at www.CICI-online.org).

Goal 3. The Catholic schools of the Diocese of New Ulm are to provide opportunities for faith formation and action in service of social justice.

Objectives

3.1 Schools will adopt a Catholic worldview in all aspects of instruction and faith formation and develop a written record for new teachers to utilize as a resource.

3.2 The Office of Catholic Schools will provide a professional development opportunity to fulfill Objective 3.1.

3.3 Schools will adopt the diocesan written religion curriculum standards and utilize support resources (textbooks and/or online texts) that are aligned to the diocesan religion standards. The diocesan written curriculum standards are to be completed in the summer of 2016.

3.4 The Office of Catholic Schools will work with the Office of Family Life in the review, evaluation, and coordination of Catholic school materials for age-appropriate theology of the body curriculum as well as chastity education.

3.5 Schools will encourage staff, students, and families to be integrated into parish life through service and ministerial opportunities.

Schools will actively communicate an invitation and expectation that parents participate in the life of their parish or respective faith community. Parishes and schools will work together to identify ways to more effectively involve students and their parents in parish life. Best practices will be identified and shared. As a parish and school align service and ministerial opportunities, this objective is more likely to be successful.

3.6 Schools will invite and encourage students and parents to participate in evangelization and spiritual experiences at their respective parishes and those organized by the diocese.

Schools often publish stories and events of the school within the parish/AFC bulletin. Schools should also publish items in the school newsletter regarding parish/AFC and diocesan events.

3.7 The priests of the diocese will be visible to the school community during the school day and at significant events.

Goal 4. The Office of Catholic Schools will work in collaboration with other diocesan offices and faith community personnel to assist the school leadership team as it strives to provide for an environment for the teaching of doctrine and Sacred Scripture, the building and experiencing of community, the serving of others, and the opportunity of worship.

In fulfilling their priestly, prophetic, and kingly roles in the mission of the Church, principals are reminded that the leadership required of them is faith-based. As members of the ecclesial community fulfilling their Christian vocation, Catholic school principals need to renew their understandings of leadership for a better exercise of their role. As described by Woodard (2009) and cited in *The Servant - Leadership Role of Catholic High School Principals* by Joseph Nsiah and Keith Walter,

A major task for the Catholic school principal is to focus on *who* the students are becoming. The kind of person being formed in schools

comes as priority over the job that person will eventually perform. Here, character formation of students takes precedence over tasks, since good character formation will naturally influence their future roles and responsibilities. Persons in positions of authority in the Catholic school need to have standards of behavior which include the promotion of discussions regarding how the weakest members of the school community are treated and cared for in the prospect of their formation as students. p 12

Educational leadership as a *vocation to serve* is the way to total dedication to one's responsibilities for the holistic formation of students and faculty.

Objectives

4.1 The Office of Worship will assist the Catholic schools in identifying and implementing appropriate guidelines regarding sacred music for Eucharistic celebrations. Music classes are to include the teaching and practice of sacred music.

4.2 Catholic schools will re-examine the devotional practice opportunities currently provided for the faculty and the students and renew its commitment to providing individual-, classroom-, and school-wide opportunities. Students should have the opportunity to experience a variety of devotional practices: Eucharistic adoration, Stations of the Cross, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Rosary, devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and Our Lady of Guadalupe, etc.

4.3 With the guidance of the area faith community pastor, school leadership will review the frequency of the opportunity for the school community to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The sacrament is to be offered for the school students a minimum of two times per school year and preferably four. School leadership, through school communication, should encourage opportunities for AFC family celebrations of the sacrament.

4.4 Catholic schools are encouraged to strongly consider praying the Liturgy of the Hours during faculty prayer. The Liturgy of the Hours should also be prayed before school committee meetings.

4.5 The Catholic schools will continue their commitment of prayer and fasting for vocations.

Friday school lunch meals remain meatless in the Catholic schools. Students are to be educated on the practice of fasting as an opportunity to bring them into deeper prayer and almsgiving.

Chapter 2. Governance and Leadership

Central to the mission of the Church is the work of Catholic school education. The success of this mission depends on the key components of effective governance, which provides direction or authority, and leadership, which ensures effective operations. Catholic school governance and leadership can be seen as a ministry that promotes and protects the responsibilities and rights of the school community. Governance and leadership based on the principles and practices of excellence are essential to ensuring the Catholic identity, academic excellence, and operational vitality of the school. Although governance models vary based on the sponsorship of the school (parish, area, corporate, etc.), those who serve on the governing body or leadership team in Catholic schools provide for an environment for the teaching of doctrine and Sacred Scripture, the building and experiencing of community, the serving of others, and the opportunity of worship.

– Excerpt from the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Elementary and Secondary Schools*, p 7.

Goal 5. Catholic school governance and leadership principles and practices will be enhanced to advance the mission of Catholic education.

Objectives

5.1 With the support of the Office of Catholic Schools, local school principals and local school committees shall meet on an ongoing basis with other school committees within their area or region to discuss shared resource opportunities and efforts towards moving towards increased levels of collaboration, with the opportunity to remain autonomous in determined areas (e.g., independent building sites, governance, and financing).

The Office of Catholic Schools will provide recent news articles describing collaborative best practices in other Catholic schools with the intent that the articles be used as agenda discussion items for faculty meetings, local committee meetings, and joint committee meetings.

Building relationships and creating meaningful opportunities is important to move any initiative forward. Collaborations and partnerships need to be developed. Methods for effectively maintaining communication is essential. Please see Section II, Chapter 5 (C), The Area Catholic School Concept: Definition and Integration and Appendix 5, Guidelines for Shared Resource Discussions.

5.2 The membership, functions, and the committee operational guidelines for the diocesan Schools Planning Committee shall be reviewed and formally established. The committee will continue to be responsible for the monitoring of the *Pastoral Plan for Schools*.

The initial *Plan for Schools* called for the formation of a diocesan Schools Planning Committee. The committee's membership, functions, and operational guidelines were not established. The 2015 membership includes four Catholic school principals, one Catholic school retired principal, one priest of the diocese, and the director of the diocesan Office of Catholic Schools. As we move forward, in establishing the committee, the membership needs to be varied and needs to include individuals with educational and financial expertise.

5.3 The Office of Catholic Schools, with the support of the Minnesota Catholic Conference, will continue to promote advocacy and faithful citizenship efforts through local school committees and school leadership.

The entire Catholic community should be encouraged to advocate for parental school choice and personal and corporate tax credits, which will help parents to fulfill their responsibility in educating their children. Continued and consistent legislative pressure for policies that benefit families paying private school tuition is a just and equitable right of our students and families.

At the same time, the faithful associated with the school must be educated on the importance of carrying out their civic responsibilities on all issues in reference to the social doctrine of the Church. Catholic adults must be informed and be attentive to all public policy proposals in the political arena.

5.4 The Office of Catholic Schools will lead a review of the governance structures of the local parish/AFC committees that are currently advising school leadership in regards to school-related issues; recommendations will be made for updating diocesan policy relating to local committee structures.

Vatican II brought forth a major shift for the role of laity in the Church, and the same can be said in regards to the role of the laity in carrying out the advisory roles for Catholic schools. Initially, the Diocese of New Ulm encouraged schools to have a board of education. A shift took place in the 1970s to an education or an evangelization and catechesis committee that oversaw all evangelization and catechesis efforts. The committee's orientation materials of the time described the committee as one that oversaw programs from "womb to tomb." This model is still prevalent within the diocese, but it has been ineffective in addressing the advisory needs relating to the Catholic schools. This *Pastoral Plan for Schools* is calling for a review of governance structures and an updating of diocesan policy relating to local committee structures.

5.5 The Office of Catholic Schools will provide recorded Webinar training for the governing bodies to orientate committee members to their roles, responsibilities, and functions.

The Office of Catholic Schools is also available to provide onsite training at the request of local committee leadership. Training is available in a variety of formats ranging from one hour to four hours.

5.6 The Office of Catholic Schools will work with the school communities in providing leadership succession planning.

The preparation and ongoing formation of new administrators is vital if our schools are to remain truly Catholic. In a school where leadership has a high turnover rate (more than one leadership change every four years), viability of the school may suffer. The fundamental elements of successful leadership succession in any organization are recognizing the inevitability of leadership change and the necessity of a plan for leadership succession. Leadership succession planning should be included in all Catholic school strategic plans.

5.7 The Office of Catholic Schools and the Schools Planning Committee will collaborate with the diocesan human resource consultant to establish consistent contract language addressing work calendar concerns within principal contracts.

Part-time principals (less than twelve months) need to check in at the school office throughout the summer, for it is not realistic to believe a principal will not work during the month of July. Contract and position description language needs to incorporate flexibility for continued employment while at the same time acknowledging that the employee is not a twelve-month employee. A template will be created and made available.

Chapter 3. Academic Excellence

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops affirms the message of the Congregation on Catholic Education that intellectual development of the person and growth as a Christian go forward hand in hand. Rooted in the mission of the Church, the Catholic school brings faith, culture, and life together in harmony. In 2005, the bishops noted that “young people of the third millennium must be a source of energy and leadership in our Church and our nation. And, therefore, we must provide young people with an academically rigorous and doctrinally sound program of education” (*Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, 2005). The essential elements of “an academically rigorous and doctrinally sound program” mandate curricular experiences – including co-curricular and extra-curricular activities – which are rigorous, relevant, research-based, and infused with Catholic faith and traditions.

– Excerpt from the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Elementary and Secondary Schools*, p 10.

Goal 6. The Office of Catholic Schools will continue to assist school leaders in exploring and implementing appropriate and beneficial innovative instructional models.

Objectives

6.1 The Office of Catholic Schools will provide professional development for principals and teacher leaders on various innovative models that may be identified (multi-age classrooms, increased technology integration, blended learning, etc.).

Pope St. John Paul II’s encyclical letter (12-7-1990) *Redemptoris Missio* and the pastoral instruction published by the Pontifical Council for Social Communication in 1992, *Aetatis Novae*, emphasize that a new world culture is emerging. Catholic education has a moral, religious, social, and educational responsibility to engage in the formation of this new culture on all levels. Learners find themselves immersed in a sea of new and easily accessible information. New locations and styles of learning communities are emerging and inviting learners to deeper understandings of global and interdisciplinary collaboration. New leadership and administrative skills are challenging all to re-think school environments.

Multi-age Classrooms: A multi-age instructional model is an innovative instructional model and needs to be understood for its differences from the combined-grade classroom. Multi-age classes can be an effective strategy because children develop at different rates both physically and cognitively. In a multi-age classroom, students are provided with instruction that is differentiated to meet their specific ability levels.

Technology: Technology plays a key role now and will into the future. Technology appropriately integrated into all levels of the educational environment provides educators and learners with diverse techniques to reach new depths of education in order to ensure optimum learning experiences for all in the school community. It can assist in providing individualized learning initiatives and immediate feedback of student understanding of key concepts. Schools must seek to benefit from the efficiencies technology formative assessment provides, as well as the variety of other benefits in carrying out the school curriculum. Catholic schools are a great environment in which to learn with new technology because the schools provide structure in which digital citizenship can be taught.

Blended Learning: The use of a blended learning model is identified as an innovative model for preparing students for this world and the world of the future. It, too, allows for individualized learning initiatives, immediate feedback of key concepts, and larger, multi-age classrooms. Leadership of smaller schools within the diocese should become familiar with the W.I.N.G.S. satellite model for Catholic schools currently in place in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, Michigan. “W.I.N.G.S.” is an acronym that stands for World knowledge; Individualized, innovative education; Nurturing, family environment; God-centered; and Supportive technology. W.I.N.G.S. satellite sites are small schools that have been virtually consolidated under one administration with many shared services. They feature one-to-one computing and blended learning in classrooms of students of multiple grade levels. Students in these classrooms work with their teacher through an individualized workshop model that allows students to advance through much of the core content at a personalized pace. Training on this model is currently being developed at the national level.

6.2 The Office of Catholic Schools will continue to coordinate and provide facilitators to lead grade-level and subject-area teacher collaborative meetings and provide oversight of an online professional learning community.

Research has shown that teaching and student learning improve most effectively when teachers are in ongoing communication with other teachers. The Office of Catholic Schools has provided grade-level teacher group meetings and will continue to provide these on an ongoing basis so teachers are able to meet one another and build a rapport for sharing. The Office of Catholic Schools has also provided professional development to facilitate the use of an online community for sharing and exchanging ideas and for teacher support within the diocese. The online tool allows for a repository of unit lesson plans and best practice examples. The online community is advantageous over the use of e-mail communication, as it maintains a record ensuring that all within the grade level have continued access to the communication and resources. Focused, collaborative work will lead schools forward.

Chapter 4. Operational Vitality

Catholic schools are temporal organizations committed to the Church and the mission of Catholic education, including a commitment to a culture of excellence and rigor. These schools exist in a milieu of constant socioeconomic challenges grounded in continuous need for sustainable financial planning, human resource/personnel management and professional formation, facilities maintenance and enhancement, and the requirement for institutional advancement and contemporary communication. Catholic schools must adopt and maintain standards for operational vitality in these areas and define the norms and expectations for fundamental procedures to support and ensure viability and sustainability. When a school does not maintain standards for operational vitality, the continuation of academic excellence is in grave jeopardy. Over time, even an academically rigorous school with strong Catholic identity will not survive without operational vitality. Standards for operational vitality must focus on the “operation” of the school – how it works and how it is supported – in four key areas: finances, human resources/personnel, facilities, and institutional advancement.

– Excerpt from the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Elementary and Secondary Schools*, p 13.

Goal 7. With assistance from the Office of Catholic Schools, the school governing bodies and the school leadership teams will all engage in an increased level of financial planning.

With a proactive approach to planning for the future, time is available for establishing clear goals to meet. All schools are encouraged to proactively engage school parents and the broader AFC in efforts to solidify their long-term goals. There should be ongoing consultation in regards to enrollment, finances, and other topics of local interest.

Every school should review the value of an annual appeal and consider establishing an appeal if one is not currently in place.

Objectives

7.1 The Office of Catholic Schools will conduct annual workshops for school leadership and finance staff emphasizing best accounting practices and procedures, resources available to schools, and the tools needed to make reasonable financial projections.

7.2 Schools will establish a collaborative process with the administrators and lay leaders at each school to develop current and three-year projected financial plans emphasizing faithful stewardship.

7.3 After receiving initial training as provided by Objective 7.1, every school shall begin using the National Catholic Schools Standards benchmark self-assessments (rubrics) relating to financial forecasting, which are a part of Benchmark 10 of the Standards, Rubrics 10.1 through 10.8. Catholic schools shall incorporate appropriate related objectives into their existing school strategic plan.

7.4 The Office of Catholic Schools will assist schools, as needed, in identifying and developing an appropriate funding mix that utilizes revenue from tuition, parishes, development (annual fund/fundraisers), grants, and state and federal sources.

7.5 The Office of Catholic Schools will work with pastors, AFC/parish leadership, and school leaders to review and understand the various tuition models used throughout the country to enable the local community to clearly identify the local philosophy for moving forward with an identified tuition plan (stewardship model, modified stewardship model, negotiated tuition models, scholarship – cost-based model, etc.).

Goal 8. The Office of Catholic Schools will assist in helping schools to be transparent with their achievements and their challenges.

Objectives

8.1 Every school shall publish and distribute an annual report to stakeholders.

Every Catholic school is expected to publish and distribute an annual report to stakeholders as one aspect of the school's partnership with the local parish/AFC. The report assists with carrying out the factors identified for successful transformations: community engagement, transparency in budget process, clear communications, and shared beliefs. The report is to be reviewed by the advisory committees directly associated with the school. Some schools may choose to hold an annual meeting to present the report; this is a preferred method, since the highest level of engagement occurs when information is shared in person. Some schools may choose to post the report on the school and parish/AFC Web site. At a minimum, a brief synopsis of the annual report and availability of the full report is to be announced through the appropriate parish bulletins and school newsletters. An annual report may be an effective marketing and development tool. Guidelines for items to include with the annual report are found in Appendix 3.

Schools are to provide a copy of the annual report to the Office of Catholic Schools, and schools are requested to inform the Office of Catholic Schools when an annual meeting is scheduled. Schools not holding an annual meeting should gather parental input through a committee-constructed survey regarding school programming. Community members should always be given an annually scheduled opportunity for input.

8.2 Every school is required to fulfill the Minnesota Nonpublic School Accreditation Association accrediting process as fully aligned with the National Catholic School Standards.

The school accreditation process should result in a school strategic plan that is a “living document.” The plan should seek to move the vitality of the school forward. Again, the school strategic plan must not simply be written to meet accreditation requirements; the plan should be written with the intent to ensure a strong and vital Catholic school. Too often this strategic planning work is pushed to the side and overtaken by day-to-day duties. Stakeholders must find time to address the long-range issues. Committee agendas and minutes must reflect that time and energy is spent addressing long-range issues. Schools are requested to forward school-related advisory committee minutes to the Office of Catholic Schools in a timely manner for communicating and documenting the planning efforts.

Goal 9. The Catholic schools in the Diocese of New Ulm will have a comprehensive plan for advancement based on a compelling mission through communications, marketing, enrollment management, and development.

Objectives

9.1 The Office of Catholic Schools will maintain marketing materials and resources for schools to access.

There are many best practice ideas for school marketing. The Office of Catholic Schools will make these ideas accessible through a shared intranet portal. The Catholic schools within the diocese are not typically in competition with one another due largely to the distances that separate them; sharing of resources is a key objective for future endeavors.

The New Evangelization provides us with the basis for a marketing initiative that is most effective: parents with students enrolled in the Catholic school talking with other parents about their faith and the Catholic school experience for their children.

9.2 Catholic schools within the diocese will develop an enrollment management plan with specific strategies to address recruitment and retention.

The Office of Catholic Schools will provide information for schools to use in developing exit surveys to give to families leaving the school either for graduation, moving, or opting for a different school choice. A summary of the exit survey data will be collected and reviewed annually by the Office of Catholic Schools as a part of the fall reporting survey data collection.

Specific strategies to recruit students not enrolled in Catholic schools, especially at the transitional grades in the community schools, are to be included in the plan.

9.3 Catholic schools should assess the demographics of their local areas and should strive to reflect the general population of the community. Pastors and principals should identify leaders with the Latino communities to assist in the recruitment of students for Catholic schools.

As more and more new residents of varied cultural backgrounds move into an area, the Catholic school should strive to reflect the general population of the community. The Catholic schools of the diocese are called to be as multi-cultural as the community they serve. Schools that are looking to diversify their student enrollment and welcome students of various cultures are encouraged to consult with the Office of Catholic Schools for resource assistance. Resources and workshops continue to be developed at the national level to assist with outreach efforts.

Goal 10. The Office of Catholic Schools will assist in exploring financial support opportunities for Catholic school education with the philosophy that financial support is the responsibility of all parishes in the diocese.

Objectives

10.1 The Office of Catholic Schools, the Schools Planning Committee, and the Office of Finance will review and propose a revision of diocesan policy 513.1.

The current diocesan policy promulgated in 1983 requires a child's own parish and parents to be responsible for educational costs for children in Catholic schools. The parents are to provide for the amount charged as tuition and the resident parish of the student is to pay the remainder of the education costs to the school of attendance, as determined by the education committee.

10.2 The Office of Catholic Schools, in collaboration with the Office of Finance and the Office of Development, will establish a committee to review various options for diocesan-wide financial commitment for Catholic school education. Possible options to be considered will include:

a) Development of a policy, a formula, and a process for the assessment, collection, and disbursement of a financial contribution from parishes that do not directly sponsor a school/system

b) An increase in the Diocesan Ministries Appeal to include an additional amount each year to be designated for tuition assistance

c) A diocesan campaign for Catholic education to benefit total Catholic education – religious education, Catholic schools, and adult education. The need for building the diocesan endowments, increasing tuition assistance, and funding program enhancements should be a focus of the case statement for Catholic schools

10.3 Parishes will be encouraged and assisted through diocesan training to actively develop the understanding and practice of stewardship to enhance the faith life of the parish and strengthen the funding base for all parish ministries including Catholic schools.

Goal 11. The Office of Catholic Schools and the leadership of the Catholic schools within the diocese will need to continually assess viability and sustainability issues through prayerful discussions and initiatives.

Objectives

11.1 AFC/parish and school committee leaders need to identify and agree upon appropriate benchmarks to determine the viability of the school. Progress in achieving these benchmarks must be assessed annually.

Stakeholders may refer to Appendix 2, A Listing of Vitality Considerations for Key Stakeholders' Review, to assist with establishing local benchmarks, or may request consultation with the Office of Catholic Schools. Please refer to Section II, Subsection A, The Schools Viability Index, of this document.

11.2 The Office of Catholic Schools, at times in collaboration with planning consultants, will assist pastoral and school leaders that have identified a need for consultation on school program changes.

At some point, a Catholic school may not be able to function well simply within a parish community. The loss of a principal or the ability to hire trained professionals may be difficult in some settings. This is when changes to the structure of the school may come into play. It is also when school mergers and school closings may need to be considered. These are serious undertakings as they affect the lives of the faithful in important ways. Appendix 3 is included as a resource for shared resource discussions between two schools or a group of schools.

At the same time, there may also be the need for other program changes either due to an identified desire for an increase in the Catholic school education offerings or in the need for an updated structure to house the existing educational programming. In hopes to have a viable Catholic school choice in as many areas of the diocese as feasible, there may be community support for considerations for school programs in sites currently without a school. These considerations all involve careful consideration and possibly the assistance of contracted consulting services.

As communities are looking at possible changes, it is imperative that the entire area faith community and appropriate regional stakeholders engage in the considerations under review. The budgets that are a part of the considerations need to be transparent and the communications need to be clear and effective. It is important that transparency is an ongoing commitment. It is also important for a community to reflect upon their shared goals. Pastoral and/or school leadership may choose to take a more in-depth review of the school viability by following the process described in Appendix 4 of this document.

11.3 The Office of Catholic Schools, with input from the Schools Planning Committee, will make an annual report to the bishop and the Committee on Parishes in regards to the progress made on the goals set forth in this *Pastoral Plan for Schools* and any proposed updates to it.

Section III of this *Pastoral Plan for Schools*, which sets forth the goals, should be updated on an ongoing basis. While each chapter focus will remain on one of the four domains of the National Catholic School Standards, the goals and objectives will need to be updated over time. This section should be considered a “living document” that is under ongoing review by the Schools Planning Committee and, at a minimum, annually reviewed by the Committee on Parishes.

Section IV: Demographical and Statistical Data

Chapter 1. The Catholic Schools of the Diocese of New Ulm Today

The chart on the last page of this chapter reflects the fall 2015 enrollment information of the fifteen elementary schools and the three high schools in the Diocese of New Ulm. The Office of Catholic Schools collects enrollment information annually from each school. An updated chart will be posted annually on the Catholic School's Web pages of the diocesan Web site and will be available by contacting the diocesan Office of Catholic Schools.

Catholic school data has been collected by the Office of Catholic Schools since the diocese was formed in 1957. Much of the data previous to 1957 is held by the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. School data is collected and compiled each fall. School principals, pastors, and education advisory committee chairs are sent some of the data for all the schools of the diocese in an effort to help with local school planning. Data that is collected and sent out to all schools includes the following:

- Enrollment trends – totals for all schools by grade level for the current year, as well as for each respective school over the course of the previous several years
- Salary ranges and benefits of professional staff and substitute teachers
- Tuition rates and associated tuition information
- Calculated teaching staff full-time equivalents
- Financial summary data, including total operating expenses, total tuition collected, a calculated average cost per pupil, and parish and inter-parish investment. This data is for all schools for the current year and for each respective school over the course of the previous eight years.

Additional data is required to be collected and reported to the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA). This data is collected for all Catholic schools throughout the nation and reported back through an annual NCEA publication. This data is not typically shared with schools within the diocese unless there is a defined need. The data is used by the NCEA and the USSCB Secretariat for Catholic Education in congressional lobbying efforts. This data includes the following:

- Staff race and religion data
- Information relative to government funding programs (Title programs, E-rate, nutrition programs, transportation access, etc.)
- Additional miscellaneous information (extended day programs, waiting lists, Internet access, students with diagnosed disabilities, school closings/openings/mergers, school committees, etc.)
- Diocesan staff information

Confidential data is not shared and is for diocesan use only. Included in this category is salary and wage information collected regarding the principal, administrative office personnel, and personnel support positions (paraprofessional, school-only business administrators, and lead maintenance).

Historical data may be requested from the Office of Catholic Schools as needed for planning initiatives.

Chapter 2. School-Age Population Projections for the Diocese of New Ulm

General population data and statistics have been included in the *Fourth Plan for Parishes* (see Section III: Figures). A primary source for demographic information regarding the various counties and municipalities of the diocese is the Minnesota State Demographic Center Web site. Some data specific to the birth through school-age population has been summarized for specific counties and is included in the following pages. The Office of Catholic Schools can be of assistance during planning initiatives to identify and analyze population and enrollment data trends as requested.

The current fifteen elementary schools and the three high schools of the diocese are geographically located in eight of the fifteen counties of the diocese:

- Brown (New Ulm*, Sleepy Eye*, Springfield)
- Lyon (Marshall, Minneota, Tracy)
- McLeod (Glencoe, Hutchinson, Winsted*)
- Meeker (Litchfield)
- Nicollet (St. Peter)
- Redwood (Morgan, Wabasso)
- Renville (Bird Island)
- Yellow Medicine (Canby)

*Denotes high school location

It is important to look at all age-group population projections in the eight counties (and in some instances adjacent counties). Obviously, the 0-4 and the school-age K-12 population are the students our schools would hope to serve or are currently serving. The general population projections and parish self-study data is also important, as these represent the parish members that financially support the ministries of the local Church.

According to data collected and reported in Figure 3.10 of the *Fourth Plan for Parishes*, six of the schools are located in municipalities identified as losing population between 1990 and 2010 and nine of the schools are located in municipalities identified as gaining population between 1990 and 2010. By comparison, a percentage change in the birth-through-school-age population for the same cities is provided.

Municipalities identified as losing population		Municipalities identified as gaining population	
Bird Island	-21.4 %	Winsted	49.0 %
Morgan	-7.2 %	Hutchinson	23.0 %
Sleepy Eye	-2.6 %	Glencoe	21.1 %
Minneota	-1.8 %	St. Peter	18.8 %
Canby	-1.7 %	Marshall	13.8 %
Springfield	- 1.0 %	Litchfield	11.3 %
		Tracy	5.1 %
		New Ulm	3.0 %
		Wabasso	1.8 %

Figure 3.18 of the *Fourth Plan for Parishes* shows projected population percentages in smaller age groupings that are most useful for identifying school-age population trends; however, this data is for the entire diocese and can be further disaggregated by county as needed.

Chapter 3. Summary of 2014 Survey Data Analysis

2014 Diocesan Catholic School Survey Data Results available at <https://www.dnu.org/news-and-events>

Section V: Addenda

Appendix 1. Guidelines for School Annual Reports to Stakeholders

Every school is expected to publish and distribute an annual report to parents and other stakeholders. The report is to be reviewed by the education committee and then by the administrative council prior to it being disseminated. (The Area Pastoral Council is an appropriate body to review the report as well.) Some schools may choose to publish it for all stakeholders, and some may choose to post it on their Web site. The annual report can easily be made available for review within a parish library or from the school office. At a minimum, a brief synopsis of the annual report and availability of the full report is to be announced through the appropriate parish bulletins and school newsletters. An annual report may be an effective marketing tool. Perhaps the most effective opportunity to share the annual report is through an announced stakeholder (parents and AFC/parish community) meeting.

Guidelines for items to include in the annual report are as follows:

- A. (Optional, but recommended): Introductory letter from principal and/or pastor and/or education committee chair
- B. Mission statement of school (philosophy statement is optional)
- C. Catholic identity related highlights
- D. Component One of MNSAA Requirement – Progress Report on School Strategic Plan – Highlights of the Year¹
- E. Updated Copy of Strategic Plan or Summary of Updates²
 - a. New Goals/Strategies/Action Steps
 - b. Completed and Deleted Goals/Strategies/Action Steps(Note: For D and E you may use the actual MNSAA strategic plan document or you may summarize, but be as complete in the reporting as is appropriate.)
- F. Component Three of MNSAA Requirements – Report on Learner Progress³
 - a. Include summary of standardized test results
 - b. May include summary regarding other learner progress(Note: You may use the MNSAA report information if you have included appropriate student aggregated data.)
- G. Financial Summary of School Operations – Statement of Revenues and Expenses (Note: This is required for transparency purposes as stated in the diocesan *Pastoral Plan for Schools*)
 - a. Minimum requirements:
 - i. Revenue: tuition, parish investment, fundraising, misc.
 - ii. Expenses: salaries and benefits, general administrative, student activities, instructional, facility, other
 - b. Optional (recommended if appropriate):
 - i. Endowment funds and related information
 - ii. Scholarship funds and related information
- H. Education Committee (E & C/Board of Education) Member Names⁴
 - a. (Optional, but recommended) Summary of committee work for the year
 - b. (Optional, but recommended) Home & School Committee names – activity report
- I. Dated with Date Approved in Education Committee Minutes (Note: The report should be accepted no later than October 1 of each year.)

¹⁻⁴These are similar to Minnesota statutes for public school reporting requirements, MN Statute 120B.11.

Appendix 2. A Listing of Vitality Considerations for Key Stakeholders Review

Discussion Questions for an Education Advisory Committee

Catholic schools must adopt and maintain standards for operational vitality . . . and define the norms and expectations for fundamental procedures to support and ensure viability and sustainability.

– *National Catholic School Standards* Operational Vitality introductory paragraph

- Is the school fully accredited by a state-approved accrediting association?
- Has the school integrated the National Catholic School Standards as a part of the accreditation process and the updating of the strategic plan? (Note: Many of these simple questions are a part of the National Catholic School Standards review.) Are key stakeholders involved in this ongoing process?
- Is the school strategic plan reviewed and updated on a regular basis (a minimum of two times annually) by school leadership, school personnel, and the school advisory/governing body?
- Are there an overwhelming number of areas in regards to the National Catholic School Standards rubrics that fall below a level three? Are these areas of significant importance to stakeholders or to fulfilling the mission of the school? Can these areas be effectively improved upon in a timely manner?
- Does the school publish an annual report and make it available to all stakeholders?
 - Does the published annual report include all items referenced in Appendix 1 of this *Pastoral Plan for Schools*?
 - Does the school hold an annual forum for reviewing the annual report and receiving feedback on it?
- Is the academic program of the Catholic school shown to be at least as outstanding as other school choices in the local area?
- Does the school use student data for curriculum/teaching pedagogy review and decision making? (Note: Student and school-wide annual growth is a key appropriate measure.)
- Is an analysis of recruitment potential reviewed on a regular basis and considered in planning and budget forecasting? Is this information reviewed by key stakeholders?
- Are home visits, parent invitational meetings, and other means of stakeholder contacts used in marketing/enrollment initiatives?
- Are exit interviews given for families/students no longer enrolled with the school regardless of the reason for leaving (graduation, moving, changing local school, etc.)? Is this data used in planning decisions?
- Does the school leadership garner parental input (survey distributed) regarding the school programming on an annual basis? Is the input shared with stakeholders and used for decision making?
- How does the Catholic school retention rate compare to the public school rate when adjusted for other local school enrollment changes?
- Does the community attract qualified Catholic educators and leaders who give witness to their Catholic faith?
- Is there a leadership succession plan in place?
- Are the monthly or quarterly financial statements of the school monitored by school leadership and a school governing/advisory committee?
- Realizing that working in a Catholic school with a shared mission provides many benefits not offered by other employment opportunities, it is still important to offer a just wage. What is the

comparison of the employee wages and benefits to local wages and benefits of employees with comparable responsibilities?

- What is the balance of local school endowed funds? Are these funds growing, being depleted, or being used for interest only?
- Is the school able to provide a Catholic education to those who are unable to pay full tuition?
- Is the tuition policy fully communicated to all stakeholders and does it include information regarding the true cost to educate a student?
- Is outstanding tuition income kept to a minimum? Is there a timely process for reviewing and addressing unpaid tuition?
- Is the school making use of all available funding sources? Federal and state sources?
- What is the percentage of the AFC/parish general offertory income that is provided as income to the school (scholarships/subsidy)? Related question: Is AFC/parish stewardship at a level that adequately provides for the ministerial programs valued by the AFC/parish members?
- What is the percentage of school expense that is covered by AFC/parish scholarships/subsidy?
- What is the calculated cost per student and how does it relate to the diocesan average cost per student? To schools of similar enrollments? To the schools within our surrounding community? To the national average cost per student for this region of the United States?
- What would the cost per student be if enrollment could increase by four students? Eight students?
- What comparisons can be made with schools having lower diocesan average costs and those having higher diocesan average costs? Are these comparisons favorable to the local school or considerations for areas of improvement (tuition comparison discussions, faculty salary comparison discussions, etc.)?
- What is the teacher-to-student ratio of the school?
- What is the percentage of tuition in relation to the calculated cost per student? Are fundraising initiatives aligned with an agreed upon fundraising philosophy? Is there an effective annual fund drive?
- Are the school leadership and the school community open to collaborative initiatives with neighboring Catholic school communities?
- What are the identified facility needs and considerations? What plans are in place to address the needs?
- Can school advisory committee members give the answer to each of the above questions? In all questions, is there sharing of the information with stakeholders, and are stakeholders involved in related decision making?

Appendix 3. Guidelines for Shared Resources Discussions

“It is in collective wisdom that we will find the possibilities!”

School leaders are to engage in regional discussions to ensure the sustainability of Catholic schools. School communities should examine potential outreach within a region to provide more families a Catholic school educational choice as well as to increase enrollment. Possible outcomes of these discussions are greater sharing of resources and the development of moving towards greater levels of collaboration.

1. Commitment to Prayer and Focus on Diocesan Efforts

This process must be rooted in prayer and the recognition that all schools are under the leadership of the bishop, while individual parishes, schools, priests, and principals have accountability for the individual parish and school life.

2. Safety and Open Environments for Participation and Voice

This process must strive to listen to differing voices in the assessment and planning phases. Oftentimes in processes such as these, some voices and interests have a hidden or even explicit advantage over others due to established patterns of power and privilege. This process will ensure safe and open environments without special favor to any group or interests.

3. Balancing of Data/Analysis with Story/Experience

Wisdom emerges from a combination of data and story, of analysis and experience. It is the blend which holds the greatest potential for both creativity and sustainability.

4. Ability and Willingness to Learn

This process must assume that participants will learn, not just defend a predetermined position. One’s ability to learn enhances the depth of conversation and creativity. One’s unwillingness to learn usually creates division and polarity.

5. Collaboration and Management of “Identity”

Regional conversation and decision making always requires the managing of “identity” of parishes and schools, while deferring to the good of the region and diocese. Participants should not just protect and acquire resources and outcomes for their individual school. Rather, they should represent the needs and views of the individual schools and parishes while working in collaboration for the most viable and sustainable solution for all.

Moving Schools towards Greater Levels of Collaboration!
Collaborating for Excellence!

Appendix 4. Catholic School Review Process for School Sustainability

The review process has been developed based upon diocesan policy #123.21 and best practices in implementing change. It is to be used when a parish begins to question whether the Catholic school can continue to be sustained or when it is obvious that changes need to be made in current practices. The process is to be undertaken prayerfully and thoughtfully with the involvement of the entire faith community.

The recommended outcomes in the diocese are determined locally and then presented to the diocese as stated by policy. The recommendation goes to the bishop and the diocesan director of the Office of Catholic Schools. Ideally, the process could take approximately eighteen months, but it can be done in a shorter timeframe if the faith community deems necessary. It is to involve all the stakeholders: parishioners, parents, staff, and students.

The following is offered as a guide and a step-by-step outline of where to begin and who needs to be involved along the way. It is expected that the local leadership will adapt the guidelines to fit the needs of the local faith community and in consideration of the area faith community. Applicable New Ulm diocesan policies:

- a) Education/Shared Responsibility Policy #123.21
- b) Education/Administration Policy #712
- c) Education/Administration Policy #731.1

When a Catholic school decides to review its viability because of financial issues, enrollment decline, educational models, and demographic shifts in population; the following steps form a process to investigate thoroughly all of these major components wrapped within the issue. In each case, the process may vary depending on the leadership structure of the parish and school undergoing the review process.

From New Ulm Diocesan Policy Bulletin #123.21 Guidelines:

Before a program change is made, the education committee(s) should prayerfully study the total educational needs of the parish/area in light of our mission to hand on our faith. The aim of any revision is to meet the total educational needs of the parish/area more effectively and to use the financial assets in the best possible way.

Begin the process by reviewing the long-range plan of the parish and school in the light of the mission of the parish. (See Policy Bulletin, Education, Administration #712.) The previous school MNSAA Accreditation report [as well as the current school strategic plan] should be of assistance.

Consultation should take place with the diocesan Office of Catholic Schools prior to beginning any significant review affecting school programming to establish the process that will be used. A recommended process follows.

Step I: A task force or committee is formed by the pastor

Task force is to include:

- School and parish volunteer leaders
- Trustees and/or chairs of the various parish and school committees (preferably administrative council, Area Pastoral Council, and school advisory committee members)
- Business/parish administrator (if appropriate and/or applicable)
- Principal of the school
- Two to three school parents at large

A chair or co-chairs are appointed by the pastor or by the group itself.

In addition to the committee, the parish and school may want to seek the services of a planning consultant or an outside advisor with formal school leadership background and experience to assist in this process. The diocesan director of the Office of Catholic Schools is available if this is not deemed financially feasible.

Required:

1. The pastor's role would be to take part in some of the meetings but would ultimately allow the task force/review committee to do its work without any undue influence.
2. The diocesan Office of Catholic Schools is to be notified that a review process is underway. It is to know what the issues are and what timetable will be followed to arrive at a set of formal recommendations on the viability of the school. Regular communication with the office on the progress being made is essential. The diocesan director will participate in the process as much as possible.
3. If the director of the Office of Catholic Schools initiates the process, initial meetings will be held with the education committee and the administrative council prior to forming the task force.

Step II: Communication should be school-wide and AFC/parish-wide

Extensive communication is to be used to announce the nature of the review process and key elements to be examined by the named group. It should include:

- Mailings as necessary to all parishioners
- Pulpit announcements
- School and parish bulletins as pertinent
- Subsequent parish/school-wide meetings to share the findings

Step III: Collection of data

Key data that should be a part of the review process is to include:

- Demographic analysis:
 - potential enrollment in the region, including from neighboring schools
 - the pattern of disposable income of households with school-age children
 - financial capacity for supporting the school
- Trend analysis of the enrollment pattern (including projections by linear progression of enrollment for the next three years for the school under review and neighboring schools)
- A financial history that includes the prior year's ending financial statement

- The current year's projected financial year end financials
- Budget projections for, at a minimum, the next two fiscal years
- Curriculum and testing data
- Facility information/analysis

All the information collected and analyzed needs to be made available in a form appropriate for presentation to the parish and school communities involved and the diocese.

The Office of Catholic Schools is available to assist with data collection and presentation.

Step IV: The principal and the professional staff study alternative educational models other than what is currently in place

Possible study topics include:

- Multi-age grouping
- Split grades
- Sharing a teacher between grades, shared personnel between schools
- Virtual shared arrangement or a blended learning environment
- Other schools in the area
- Shared programs, facilities

The principal presents the model or models to the task force for further clarification.

Step V: A public meeting for parents and parishioners is held*

The meeting's purpose is:

- To hear and answer questions about these models
- To present the financial picture of the parish and school
- To present a budget with a tuition figure to support the model of operation that best meets the educational and financial needs

*Subsequent meetings may be necessary to let school parents "talk among themselves" and then come back to have further questions answered.

Step VI: Finalizing the enrollment commitment for the next year using the educational model that meets fiscal needs

- Registration letter to every school family asking them to commit to the educational model(s) being presented
- Payment of a registration fee
- Personal follow up with the parents who do not register

The results will dictate whether or not the school is sustainable based on the retention level of the current student population.

Step VII: Task force recommendations

After the information is analyzed and all data is reviewed by the task force:

- A recommendation is made to the education committee for consensus, with supporting documentation
- Recommendation is sent to the administrative council for consensus
- Pastor receives recommendation or recommended options
- The parish/school community is informed of the recommendation
- The diocesan director of the Office of Catholic Schools is to be updated at each step of the process

Step VIII: Follow up to recommendations

If the recommendation specifies that a reduction in staff is needed, the services of the diocese's human resource consultant is required. An attorney to assist with a reduction in workforce may also be advised by the consultant.

If the findings do not support continued operation of the school, a formal recommendation, along with supporting documentation, is made to the bishop and the director of the Office of Catholic Schools by the pastor and parish leadership.

Step IX: A meeting with the bishop, director of the Office of Catholic Schools, the pastor, and possibly key task force/review committee members is scheduled and the recommendation is discussed and reviewed

Parish and school communities are informed of the final decision.

Should the decision be made to close a site and merge several schools, the pastor should request a list of steps to follow from the director of the diocesan Office of Catholic Schools. The pastor should also write a letter to all of the parishioners and school parents that the bishop has accepted the recommendation of the parish to close or merge the school.