



Current Direction

Snapshot of current status

Universal Church

- New evangelization
- Popular pope with charisma for joyful outreach (“Evangelii Gaudium”) to the poor and most vulnerable; care for the environment (“Laudato Si”)
- Year of Mercy
- Synod on the family and new apostolic exhortation “Amoris Laetitia”

National Church

- Defense of religious freedoms
- World Meeting of Families
- Preparation for the V Encuentro (national pastoral planning for Hispanic ministry)
- Mass attendance rates declining
- National and regional Catholic school enrollment decline

Diocese of Grand Rapids

- Our Faith, Our Future Pastoral Plan
- Bishop’s Catholic Schools Initiative and Bridging Faith and Future school planning process
- Pastoral planning for Hispanic ministry
- Deacon program being reinstated
- Many pastors called on to lead clustered parishes and other diocesan responsibilities
- Declining parish membership 2008-14
- Catholic school enrollment stabilizing

Diocesan Schools

- Catholic schools are priority for our bishop
- 25 elementary/5 high schools with 6,550 PK-12 students enrolled (2016/17)
- 11 parishes in north deaneries have no access to Catholic school; large number of Catholic students in SE/SW parishes with no schools
- 41K school-age Catholic children in diocese, approx. 15% attend Catholic schools

- Our students outperform local, state, national peers on standardized assessments (MAP, ACT)
- Our high schools collectively are one of 15 districts out of 550 in MI on 2016 College Board AP Honor Roll for 2nd consecutive year
- Our high school college attendance rate for two- and four-year colleges is 97%
- 9% of Catholic school students have identified learning needs that are being served
- In past five years, racial/cultural diversity in our schools increased to 20%; enrollment of Hispanic/Latino students has grown by 60%
- Families pay average of 52% of cost for elementary student and 68% of cost for high school student; remainder covered by parish and development efforts
- Movement toward diocesan administrative shared services model to support schools

Environment

Trends

Economic, social, political, religious, etc. trends that may impact us

Demographic

- Percentage of children in poverty continues to increase
- Strong state/federal support for early childhood education
- Nationally, enrollment of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools is growing
- Increasing number of high school graduates enrolling in college/post-secondary programs
- Hispanic population continues to increase nationally and locally
- Grand Rapids metropolitan area is one of fastest-growing areas in U.S. (2014)
- Stabilizing enrollment in GRPS and diocesan schools

Family Dynamics

- Parents have security and safety concerns
- Many two-income families face logistical challenges
- Families caring for aging parents face additional financial/resource constraints

- Non-traditional families becoming more common
- Same-sex marriage legal nationwide
- Less perceived disposable income; growing number of funding priorities
- College costs continue to rise; growing sensitivity to student loan burden
- Parents more demanding/less loyal to parishes/schools

Faith

- Post-Vatican II Catholic parents (1970s-2000) lack strong catechesis
- Declining vocations to priesthood/religious life in U.S.
- Catechesis steadily improving since mid-late 1990s with the Catechism of the Catholic Church
- Mostly lay teachers serving in Catholic schools
- People report being less religious but more spiritual
- Rising appeal of evangelical churches
- Secularization of society

- People drawn to Pope Francis’ call to go to the outskirts

Social

- Ubiquitous access to unfiltered information
- Growing entitlement mentality
- Distrust/dislike of institutional authority
- Lack of civil discourse
- Terrorism/violence/threats of violence on the rise
- Increase in accountability measures for students, teachers, schools
- High expectations for educational facilities, especially technology/athletics
- Philanthropists nationwide increasingly value and support Catholic schools as means to address poverty/achievement gaps and prepare future leaders
- LGBT ideologies popularly promoted

Roles of Diocesan Schools

What we do?

- Model Catholic faith and encourage its practice in daily living
- Educate and prepare children for life and eternity
- Nurture the dignity of each person
- Value and promote the universal diversity of the Church, the Body of Christ
- Support, respect and foster the unique gifts of each individual
- Provide a safe environment for optimal growth and development
- Meet each individual’s learning needs
- Partner with parents to assist them in their primary role as educators
- Foster service and stewardship with students, parents and community
- Make Catholic education accessible to all who desire it

Values

What is important to us?

Defining Characteristics of a Catholic School (NSBECESS)*

- Centered in the person of Jesus Christ
- Contributing to the evangelizing mission of the Church
- Committed to educate the whole child
- Distinguished by excellence
- Steeped in a Catholic world view
- Sustained by Gospel witness
- Shaped by communion and community
- Accessible to all students
- Established by the expressed authority of the bishop

**National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*

Mission

Why we exist

We are an alliance of Catholic schools where Christ illuminates learning and life.

Strategies

Our shared agenda for success

1. Catholic Culture and Mission

- A. Enroll an increased number of families/students who desire a Catholic education
- B. Nurture in each student a deeper relationship with Christ and participation in the sacramental life of the Church
- C. Promote the active engagement of all students and families in parish life
- D. Support programs to increase vocations to the priesthood and religious life
- E. Strengthen diocesan approach to Catholic school curriculum development

2. Programmatic Excellence

- A. Conduct continuous strategic planning to improve collaboration and transparency
- B. Grow leadership capacity at all levels
- C. Consider new governance and instructional models to address unique circumstances
- D. Enhance academic excellence and cocurricular opportunities
- E. Consider the needs of school facilities for 21st-century learning
- F. Improve the perception of the value of our schools

3. Affordability and Accessibility

- A. Increase affordability through enrollment increases, strategic tuition setting, scholarships, education, development, and the G.O.D.S. Plan tuition model
- B. Explore the feasibility of launching new/additional schools and ways to make all schools more accessible
- C. Include and support students with a broad range of learning needs
- D. Welcome families of diverse cultural heritage and raise cultural awareness to support an increasingly universal population

4. Stewardship and Sustainability

- A. Examine and propose more sustainable revenue models to optimize the mix of funding sources between development, parish support and tuition
- B. Find cost savings through administrative best practices and implementation of shared services to increase efficiency and reduce administrative workload
- C. Ensure transparency and impact through accountability and measurement
- D. Create classrooms of optimal size
- E. Increase teacher compensation

Vision

What we aspire to achieve

An alliance of Catholic schools expanding outstanding educational ministry.

Vision Metrics

(Five years)

Quantitative indicators that we have reached our vision

Catholic Culture and Mission

- Increased proportion of baptized Catholic children attending Catholic school from 15% to 17% (approx. +600 PK-12 students)
- Increased active engagement by students/family in Sunday liturgy/parish life
- Increased opportunities to encounter Christ (sacraments, prayer, service)
- Diocesan school curriculum standards published/accessible to target audiences
- Number of graduates enrolling in seminary/other religious training trending up

Programmatic Excellence

- Every school engages its community in strategic planning evidenced by an updated plan
- Network of teacher leaders, school leaders, board leadership established and credentials shared
- New governance and instructional models explored and implemented as appropriate
- Curricular/cocurricular opportunities expanded
- Plans in place to optimize facilities and technology for 21st-century learning
- Value (ROI) of Catholic school is well publicized and marketed

Affordability and Accessibility

- Bishop’s increased scholarship opportunities sustained
- Development infrastructure identified, established and growing according to plan
- Feasibility of launching new schools is determined; plans underway as appropriate
- Schools ready to welcome/support broad range of students with special needs
- Schools welcome and celebrate the universal diversity of the Church, the Body of Christ
- Schools seek and embrace our universal diversity to enrich the experience for all families

Stewardship and Sustainability

- Best practices implemented through shared services (reduced cost/workload and increased efficiency/effectiveness)
- All parishes support Catholic schools; return on their investment is communicated
- Development goals established for school alumni, friends, parents, grandparents, foundations, corporations; results published
- Schools have optimized efficiency with average class sizes between 18-24
- Teacher compensation review is the norm; considered a priority in each new school budget

Perceptions

How do we want to be known? By whom?

- Catholic parent: “Seeing our child grow spiritually and academically is well worth the sacrifice and investment.”
- Catholic school graduate: “I will never forget the great education and friends; my spouse and I continue to support and utilize our Catholic schools.”
- Parent considering Catholic school: “Sending our children to a Catholic school will be the best decision we can make.”
- Diocesan leader: “Our Catholic school graduates are essential to the future of the Church.”
- Catholic philanthropist: “I know our financial support will have an impact far beyond our lifetime.”
- Catholic influencer: “We look to Catholic education as the foundation for those who follow us in living the Church’s mission.”
- Priest: “The children of our Catholic schools experience an authentic daily encounter with Christ, and I see their lives being transformed.”
- Parishioner without school children: “We very much enjoy attending the school Mass and the students’ participation; it’s beautiful!”

Critical Realities

Issues that affect our work

- Increasing population of Hispanic/Latino families
- Large number of recent (and projected) refugees from a variety of countries and cultures
- Conservative budgeting at diocesan and parish levels
- Aging facilities throughout the diocese

- Technology in increased demand and rapidly changing
- Fierce competition for students among public, charter, private schools
- Individual parishes are primarily responsible for parish school financial support
- Economic challenges are perceived at all socioeconomic levels

- While a total stewardship (tithing) model is preferred, few dioceses have successfully implemented
- Aging priests and religious, with projected ongoing shortages
- Religious liberty being challenged and undermined through civil law

Catholic School Practices

Typical/Atypical of other diocesan or private schools

How our schools are typical

- Catholic identity and practices
- Faith-based curriculum
- School uniforms
- Peaceful, disciplined environments
- Parental involvement
- High academic expectations
- High graduation rates
- High college attendance rates

How our schools are atypical

Innovations:

- W.I.N.G.S. instructional model
- Classical instructional model
- Dual-language immersion
- Dual enrollment (elementary to high school; high school to college)
- Alliance (collaborative, consortium) of Catholic schools
- Growing diocesan shared services
- Bishop’s Catholic Schools Initiative (Welcome Scholarships, unique diocesan professional staff positions)





Tactics for Strategic Priorities

1. Catholic Culture and Mission

- A. Enroll an increased number of families/students who desire a Catholic education**
- Create awareness and interest through increased mass and digital marketing
 - Incorporate Catholic school information into existing preparatory communications for the sacraments of baptism, first reconciliation, first Eucharist, confirmation, and matrimony
 - Foster the implementation of sophisticated relationship management software to get connected and stay connected to current families and prospective students and families when they sign up to receive the sacraments of baptism, first reconciliation, first Eucharist, confirmation, and matrimony
 - Utilize our powerful, common messages about the value (ROI) and personal testimonial stories in all promotional efforts
 - Educate families about the importance of planning financially to afford Catholic school
 - Engage current parents/families through multiple communication channels to strengthen retention efforts; use student data as appropriate
- B. Nurture in each student a deeper relationship with Christ and participation in the sacramental life of the Church**
- Hire faculty and staff for mission
 - Encourage students to set aside 5-10 minutes daily for personal prayer time outside of school
 - Increase opportunities for reception of the sacraments of Eucharist and reconciliation
 - Set aside grade-appropriate time for silent prayer, when possible before the blessed sacrament or in Eucharistic Adoration
 - Encourage and present methods for personal prayer and scriptural reflection in school
 - Use devotional prayers/novenas as a regular way of practicing intercessory prayer
 - Provide intentional opportunities for classes to spend time with their pastors, deacons, and religious sisters
 - Articulate as part of the diocesan curriculum the necessity of nurturing a relationship with Christ
 - Create and/or promote opportunities for all students and their families to grow in faith together
- C. Promote the active engagement of all students and families in parish life**
- Leverage the parish as a vehicle to bring families from different “groups” together (e.g., Catholic school, religious education, youth ministry, parishioners at large) for common experiences – classes, programs, athletics, volunteering, faith-focused learning, and celebrations
 - Strongly encourage, as an expectation for stewardship and service, that all students (and their families) become involved in giving to their parish and participating in some aspect of ministry on Sunday
 - Strengthen the connection between school, parish religious education and youth ministry
 - Identify children/families within parishes who don’t attend the school/religious education/youth ministry program for targeted and collaborative outreach
 - Partner and engage with Strong Catholic Families program to provide opportunities for families to grow in faith
 - Institute a process for students to personally thank their pastor for his commitment to financially supporting their Catholic education
- D. Support programs to increase vocations to the priesthood and religious life**
- Make a limited number of merit-based scholarships available each year for those expressing interest in a possible religious vocation
 - Increase visibility of religious as role models
 - Extend the National Vocation Awareness Week activities to become a regular focus throughout the entire year
 - Standardize a system of prayer and communication (e.g., penpal, prayer partners in person, etc.) between current seminarians and schools
 - Become the “go to” vehicle for the implementation of innovative schools programming for diocesan vocation director
- E. Strengthen diocesan approach to Catholic school curriculum development**
- Update and enhance our diocesan schools’ curriculum standards to also include in each content area an explicit connection to (1) Church teachings, (2) Scripture, and (3) Church documents
 - Expand the Disciple of Christ: Education in Virtue program
 - Develop a K-12 Catholic-based digital citizenship program tied to virtues and embedded in curriculum standards
 - Standardize report card language (English and Spanish) for reporting academic progress that will better leverage Infinite Campus and learning management system (LMS) tools
 - Identify and offer various electronic curriculum-mapping and lesson-planning tools
 - Provide ongoing faculty professional development
 - Educate parents on value of Catholic curriculum

2. Programmatic Excellence

- A. Conduct continuous strategic planning to improve collaboration and transparency**
- Offer a streamlined, common strategic planning process across schools which integrates elements of the Bridging Faith and Future Plan, accreditation and school improvement processes, and facilitates best practice sharing; educate school leaders and boards
 - Post completed strategic plans and relevant updates (e.g., progress) to school websites
 - Develop and communicate an annual State of the Schools progress report
- B. Grow leadership capacity at all levels**
- Educate school staffs and boards on how to attract a culturally-diverse field of qualified candidates for all positions (teachers, principals, boards, etc.)
 - Identify a network of teacher leaders to be facilitators and primary contacts in content areas for excellence in teaching and learning
 - Identify and formalize regional networks of teachers, principals, priests, seminarians, business and board leaders that can be called upon to provide support and professional development
 - Provide leadership training and recruitment opportunities for aspiring and current teachers, school, business and board leaders to facilitate good succession and retention planning
- C. Consider new governance and instructional models to address unique circumstances**
- Study the feasibility of new W.I.N.G.S. model satellite schools to reach the underserved Catholic families in the north deaneries
 - Study the feasibility of launching new/additional schools to serve large populations of underserved Catholic families in southeast and southwest regions of suburban Grand Rapids
 - Explore possible models to deliver Catholic high school opportunities to communities without Catholic high school access as satellites of existing Catholic high schools
 - Consider part-time Catholic school options to include more homeschooled students and families during portions of the school day
 - Consider the development of or partnership with a Catholic virtual school to add depth to Catholic schooling options available to parents within the diocese
- D. Enhance academic excellence and cocurricular opportunities**
- Implement a method for internal and external surveying to determine demand for potential cocurricular and curricular opportunities (including trade and vocational options)
 - Prioritize opportunities according to demand for maximum impact
 - Create resourcing efficiencies by exploring regional or multi-school collaboratives, as well as online courses
 - Consider international sister school connections to engage the opportunity of the universal dimension of the Catholic Church
 - Explore a diocesan educational technology professional position, as a member of a shared services network for Catholic schools, to assist schools in optimizing the use of powerful technology tools to improve instructional practice
 - Create a partnership between our alliance of Catholic schools and the Christian Learning Center Network, as part of a diocesan shared services network, to deliver high-quality professional services for students with special needs and various exceptionalities
 - Strengthen partnerships between Catholic high schools and middle schools and explore additional collaboration to strengthen middle school opportunities where applicable
- E. Consider the needs of school facilities for 21st-century learning**
- Develop a standardized formal review process for safety, technology infrastructure, 21st-century instructional practice and capital improvements
 - Invite schools to utilize the review process to gain outside feedback for consideration at the local level and possible integration into local plans
 - Explore diocesan positions for development and technology as potential members of a shared services network for Catholic schools, to assist schools in capital campaign planning and educational technology
- F. Improve the perception of the value of our schools**
- Educate the community on the value of a Catholic school education using powerful ROI data and testimonial stories
 - Equip staff, parents, and students with easy to use/share informational tools about the value of our schools
 - Assist and encourage the formation of parent ambassador groups to optimize powerful “word of mouth” marketing techniques
 - Encourage, educate, and lead pastors, boards, principals, teachers, parents and students (as appropriate) in the use of social media tools for promoting schools
 - Promote through publication and recognition the unique qualities of Catholic school pastors, boards, principals, and especially our teachers
 - Create awareness through increased mass marketing
 - Expand our communication channels and increase communication frequency to reach the broader Catholic community
 - Implement sophisticated relationship management software to send automated, targeted messages about the value of Catholic schools at strategic moments in the life of the student/family

3. Affordability and Accessibility

- A. Increase affordability through enrollment increases, strategic tuition setting, scholarships, education, development, and the G.O.D.S. Plan tuition model**
- Sustain increased scholarship levels of the Bishop’s Catholic Schools Initiative for need-based Bishop’s Scholarships and acquisition-based Welcome Scholarships; assess/adapt as needed
 - Identify, establish, and offer an educational program for families about the importance of planning financially to afford Catholic school
 - Implement in all schools a G.O.D.S. Plan tuition model designed to create unique opportunity for families of all income levels, not just those who qualify for scholarships
 - Study the possibility of a tuition waiver among interested schools for the children of faculty and staff
 - Shift the communication of tuition rates from annual to daily, weekly or monthly amounts
 - Encourage use of a thoughtful strategy to create additional welcome/ scholarship opportunities at the local level to select highly-involved Catholic families or other targeted groups for admission
 - Leverage enrollment increases, which broaden the base of tuition support, to minimize dependency on tuition increases while strategically setting tuition that is compatible with local economic factors
 - Advocate for non-public school funding reforms at the state level (e.g., tax credits, education savings plans, etc.)
- B. Explore the feasibility of launching new/additional schools and ways to make all schools more accessible**
- Study the feasibility of new W.I.N.G.S. model satellite schools to reach the underserved Catholic families in the north (e.g. Hart, Shelby, Rothbury)
 - Study the feasibility of launching new/additional schools to serve large populations of underserved Catholic families in suburban GR southeast and southwest and other potential areas
 - Meet with pastors and community leaders for “scouting sessions” to gauge interest and explore options
 - Identify a taskforce to spearhead the feasibility study of new/additional schools
 - Identify a taskforce to study extended transportation opportunities
- C. Include and support students with a broad range of learning needs**
- Provide ongoing professional development to assist teachers with best practice, instruction and intervention strategies, and support to address the needs of all learners
 - Formalize a partnership with the Christian Learning Center Network, as an offering of a diocesan shared services network, to empower all schools to deliver high-quality professional services for students with special needs and various exceptionalities
 - Create an icon or special feature that participating network schools can use on their website to highlight the high-quality professional resources available for students with special needs or exceptionalities
 - Explore a diocesan development professional position, as a member of a shared-services network for Catholic schools, to assist schools in the creation of specific targeted fundraising opportunities designed to support and enhance special-needs programming
- D. Welcome families of diverse cultural heritage and raise cultural awareness to support an increasingly universal population**
- Examine and expand logistical solutions to help families more easily attend Catholic schools (e.g., transportation, child care, etc.)
 - Demonstrate and communicate that a Catholic education is unique, attainable and inclusive of all of God’s children
 - Ensure that every diocesan and school promotion is translated (as appropriate)
 - Include the Google translate widget on the diocesan and every school website
 - Identify and assign a cultural mentor from business/Catholic community to each school
 - Identify parent/family “leaders” in local communities to promote Catholic schools and mentor newcomers and families of different cultural heritage
 - Consider adding Masses in other languages in more parishes
 - Demonstrate increased cultural competency through curriculum, faculty and staff sensitivity, awareness and advocacy training
 - Increase emphasis on recruiting and hiring faculty and staff who represent diverse cultural backgrounds and the universal nature of the Church
 - Provide training for faculty and staff in English as a Second Language (ESL) and language learning theory
 - Expand admissions advocate efforts, as part of diocesan shared services, to include multilingual translation support, Madrinan program support and Catholic school presence at predominantly Hispanic parish events

4. Stewardship and Sustainability

- A. Examine and propose more sustainable revenue models to optimize the mix of funding sources between development, parish support and tuition**
- Recruit development professionals to assist in building development infrastructure, promote best practices for school advancement, leverage the Catholic Foundation of West Michigan and existing school resources to increase giving to Catholic schools
 - Grow development/advancement/fundraising capacity at all levels – annual appeals, events, major gifts, capital campaigns, bequests/planned gifts, grants, endowments and foundations (diocese, church, school)
 - Optimize the use of Raiser’s Edge and other development software tools for all schools through a diocesan shared services network for development
 - Institute grandparent/godparent/parent gift programs to support the G.O.D.S. Plan tuition model
 - Optimize tuition revenue by growing enrollment and providing more financial tools for families to afford tuition through the G.O.D.S. Plan tuition model
 - Provide education for families on how to plan financially to afford Catholic schools, and encourage tithing at all levels
 - Attract private, corporate and foundation interest in investing in Catholic schools
 - Strengthen development among Catholic and Hispanic employers; create cost-sharing models for tuition (e.g., a “Catholic Promise” program)
 - Offer options to ensure that ALL parishes and Catholics support Catholic school ministry as an investment in the Church’s future (addition to CSA as percent of offertory, separate annual campaign, etc.)
- B. Find cost savings through administrative best practices and implementation of shared services that increase efficiency and reduce administrative workload**
- Conduct an administrative needs assessment of pastors, business managers, principals, school board finance committee members and finance council members to determine if there are business services that could be provided through a shared services network resulting in significant cost savings and consistent best practice (HR, finance, technology, development)
 - Explore potential for creation of a self-supporting shared services network for delivery of administrative best practice in parishes/schools (litmus test – parishes/schools would more than pay for these services from the savings they experience)
 - Identify a business/finance officer to coordinate the needs assessment, identify current best practices, leverage existing diocesan and school resources, and provide support and training to business managers
- C. Ensure transparency and impact through accountability and measurement**
- Support validated quantitative measures that reflect overall program effectiveness, academic achievement and growth, financial health, revenue sources and expenditures
 - Establish annual progress reports and data dashboards for both internal and external audiences
 - Standardize and simplify reports/dashboards for consistent community-wide sharing with internal and external audiences
- D. Create classrooms of optimal size**
- Share the good news about the data on blended learning, multi-age instruction and competency-based education (W.I.N.G.S.) as an opportunity for creating classrooms of optimal size
 - Implement innovative instructional models for classrooms not operating at an optimal size
 - Empower teachers and school leaders, in consideration of policy and guidelines, to determine classrooms of optimal size based upon the multiple factors that can only be determined at the local level
 - Encourage an attitude of stewardship whereby a generous and welcoming response to new students is the norm
 - Encourage use of a thoughtful strategy to fill every seat to include as many Catholic students and families as possible in the transformative ministry of Catholic schools
- E. Increase teacher compensation**
- Conduct a market analysis of teacher salaries/compensation in West Michigan and within the Midwest region of the U.S.
 - Make the market analysis widely available for planning within local parishes and schools
 - Encourage multi-year compensation adjustment plans as necessary
 - Identify and pursue potential revenue sources as necessary
 - Research tools and assessment models for teacher performance appraisal
 - Implement as a best practice a common diocesan teacher performance appraisal model
 - Implement teacher compensation adjustments informed by market analysis and performance appraisal
 - Utilize non-salary incentives to reward teachers

**Repeated tactics are intentional to demonstrate the crossover and collaboration required for effective implementation*