



# SCHOOL MATTERS



PENNSYLVANIA  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

If we had vouchers in Pennsylvania 15 or even 10 years ago, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia would not have had to restructure its schools drastically to ensure their sustainability. Vouchers and an increase to the Educational Improvement Tax Credits (EITC) would have helped the burden felt by families and schools across our region. The need for major restructuring in our schools is one of the most vivid examples we have to justify school choice with our legislators. If school vouchers are enacted and EITC funding is increased, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia can redistribute its funding to support middle-income families, allowing all families who desire a Catholic education the ability to choose one for their children. We must act now if we don't want to see Catholic education disappear entirely in the next 20 years.

The PA Catholic Advocacy Network has a special, easy-to-use tool for concerned Philadelphia families to send messages to their elected officials in support of school choice. [Follow this link](#) to contact your legislator in support of school choice today! Without a demonstrated push for vouchers and increase EITC from our families, the legislator will never act.

If you would like more information about school choice, including the current legislation still actively being considered by the PA legislature, please [click here](#). We need to channel our energy into ensuring that this legislation passes, thus creating a more just and equitable educational system in our state.

PS: [Follow this link](#) to contact your legislator in support of school choice today! ❖



## PEOPLE LOVE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS!

The past three weeks continue to bring home the message across the Archdiocese of Philadelphia that people love Catholic Schools! The reorganization of the schools has long been held in abeyance partially avoiding what happened on January 6, 2012. The Blue Ribbon Commission Report that was met with an outcry from many people who want Catholic

schools to continue where they currently exist for years to come. The desire is held by many but the reality is supported by few.

When I was in elementary school in the 1960's, I never realized that those were the years Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia held their largest enrollments. I also was not aware that my parents paid only for the uniform and supplies. What I did understand, however, was the expectation that the parish led the way in providing the path to that school and practicing members of the parish were instrumental in sustaining the school for all of those many children for all of those many years.

The sad reality is we have met several challenges that are not easily remedied with simple solutions: a declining birth rate, changing neighborhoods, costly tuition (even with dedicated and committed teachers), additional educational choices and separation from the life of the parish leaving diminished resources to carry on the ministry of Catholic schools. Some will say these are a list of excuses but they are the current reality. They pose problems but, for the most part, they can be solved. The solution rests in people stepping up with support that goes beyond blame and intends to lend a hand to strengthen the future that has arrived.

My hope is people are riled enough to reach out and support the school that is in their parish or is present for their parish children so that we do not continue to simply love Catholic schools to death! The future is in our control so please be a part of the solution and not a sideline critic whose words are hurtful, harmful and without any lasting impact. Alums, parishioners, politicians, philanthropists—

come one, come all to the next chapter in the life of the schools in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia! The following words from the 2005 Notre Dame Report, "Making God Known, Loved and Served," leave us with much to think about. ❖

-Mary Rochford,  
*Superintendent of Schools*



**When the story of Catholic schools is written, historians will look back on our age and marvel that against great odds, we changed the ending. By then, of course, we will know one thing better than those who write this history.**

**We will know – we will see – the promise that Christ Himself made: that He will come, that He will inspire us through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as history unfolds to make all things new.**

## THE IMPORTANCE OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS

### Part II: Creativity and Innovation

It is through experiences that children grow and learn. It is through experiences that children tap into their creativity and innovative thinking. One of the 21st Century skills that educators hope to fully develop in students is creativity. Recently, teaching creativity has taken center stage at educational conferences throughout this country.

As we continue to focus on the ways that America will remain competitive in a global marketplace, the discussion turns to the ways that future business leaders will use their creativity and ingenuity to ensure the competitive edge.

“We live in an era where everything that can be automated will be. Only individuals who can regularly go beyond the conventional wisdom will be valued,” said Howard Gardner, an educational researcher and professor at Harvard University. At the Learning and Brain Research Conference in November, he said, “While cognitive capacities are obviously valuable for creating, only those of a robust, risk-taking personality and temperament are likely to pursue a creative path.” Of course, we know that all individuals are valued and that all individuals bring their own gifts and talents to everything they do. So, while respecting, valuing, and nurturing all gifts and talents in our students, how can educators go the extra mile to specifically nurture creativity and ingenuity?

The December 14, 2011 issue of Education Week offered some ideas on ways to draw creativity out of students:

- **Positive risk-taking** – when students engage in positive risk-taking they are often more likely to construct creative ways to solve problems.
- **Play** – when students are taught to play and have fun, they develop new strategies for team work, for collaboration, and for relationship-building all of which lead to new ways of solving problems.
- **Stretch and explore** – when students have to figure out how to approach a problem, rather than being told how to solve the problem, they develop new methods and approaches.
- **Make mistakes** – when students are free to make mistakes and to capitalize on their mistakes rather than becoming paralyzed by them, they develop new insights.
- **Cognitive insightfulness** – when students face an obstacle and can push themselves to find ways around it, brain activity increases in the part of the brain associated with creativity and problem-solving.

Classrooms which nurture creativity would provide for some of the ideas above. They would offer the students an opportunity to take positive risks without penalty. They would offer students opportunities to have fun and collaborate with peers in developing solutions to problems. They would provide meaningful and relevant problems to solve. They would allow mistakes to be made and learning to occur as a result of the mistake-making. Finally, they would stretch the students to think beyond what has been and to explore new ways of solving problems and would stretch them to think of potential problems before they become problems that need to be solved. In summary, classrooms would celebrate creativity and ingenuity and would allow these skills to define success in school.

John Dewey recognized the value of creativity and ingenuity and through experiential learning he nurtured creativity. The partnership for 21st Century Skills includes creativity and innovation in the key skills needed for college, career, and citizenship.

Parents and educators in Catholic education have an awesome responsibility to embrace the value of creative work and ingenuity in all individuals especially when creativity and ingenuity are used to bring glory to God. ❖

-Dr. Carol Cary,

*Director of Secondary Curriculum and Instruction*



The teacher of a primary grade wrote the word, “In-car-nation” on the board. As she turned to introduce the new vocabulary word, a student enthusiastically waved his hand. “I know what that word means,” the young student said, “You get in a car and go across the country.”



A second grader who had just made her First Penance approached her teacher. The teacher noticed that the student looked very confused and asked her if something was the matter. The little girl replied, “Father asked me to say three Hail Mary’s for my penance and I only know one Hail Mary.” ❖

**Do you have a Silly Story to Share?**

**[CLICK HERE](#)** to send it to us and it could be featured in the next newsletter!





A Kindergarten classroom is a new environment for young learners; a place where a child comes to transition from the playground to the classroom. This environment has evolved immensely through the years: I can remember my kindergarten experience and the curriculum consisting of building blocks and ABC's. Today, the students attending Kindergarten are expected to read, write, tell time, add, and subtract before graduating to first grade. It is very important they learn and comprehend how to behave in a classroom setting, interact with their peers, and progress through the educational system. For both the young child and the teacher, this can be a very stressful and challenging time. For some children, it is their first real world experience away from the home and it is the teacher's responsibility to realize and

accept this feat of creating a nurturing environment. These children are 5-6 years old, love to sing and smile, and can always brighten up their teacher's day. They spend their time in a student-centered classroom with many activities via an Interactive Smart Board; which they view as a magic television. Even though these children are novice learners, they are veterans when it comes to the utilization of new technology.

At St. Eugene School, my class of 24 Kindergarten students has been given iPads to use for the school year. There are thousands of "applications" which can be used to reinforce concepts and enhance the creative imaginations of these young learners. Observing a Kindergarten student navigate their way on an iPad is nothing short of amazing. It is second nature to most of these students; almost an innate sense of technological savvy. Using an iPad to practice their letters, numbers, addition facts, and sight words are only a few of the benefits of this new technology.

The iPads provide practical learning tools: students use the camera to take pictures of shapes in the classroom or pictures of items according to their "Letter of the Week." They also utilize "Sketchio," the iPad version of a whiteboard to practice their sight words. The students access "First in Math" to practice their Math facts, and "Starfall" to practice their letters and reading skills. The capabilities are endless: they complete puzzles, practice with rhymes, discover their five senses, learn to sort objects, and also view the calendar and weather to help them comprehend the months and seasons. Stories can be downloaded to the iPads, and students can take "picture walks," and read with their friends. Some applications even help a student with their recall and decodable skills when beginning to read. The students visualize something they would like to write about, draw a picture on their iPad, and then complete their journal writing from that picture.

When thinking of a Kindergarten classroom, you would never imagine 5 and 6 year olds actually learning from playing on the iPad. I stressed the word playing because it is my opinion that these students view the iPad curriculum as exactly that: playing and having fun. Through this technological breakthrough, we have become successful in creating proficient and efficient ways in which to communicate and promote independent learning at a very young age. The kindergarten students want to use the iPads everyday and are eager to discover and utilize new applications which I have installed. Children work as one collaborative unit: teaching each other how to navigate and utilize each application; thus encouraging teamwork and a creative environment. It is my opinion that these iPads are becoming a critical piece of classroom culture; just as the black boards were revolutionary back in the early 1800's. ❖

**-Lauren Faggiola,**  
*Kindergarten Teacher, St. Eugene School*



## A PLEA FOR YOUR SUPPORT



**Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia have enjoyed a tradition of spiritual formation, social growth and academic excellence for more than 100 years. While many schools can offer solid academics, Catholic schools rigorously prepare students to be life long learners and contributing members of the global community. Please support our young people. Consider making a gift now by clicking the link below:**

### Make a Donation



Your investment in Catholic Education will make an invaluable difference in a child's future.



## DID YOU KNOW...

that businesses in Pennsylvania can receive a 75-90% tax credit by donating to Business Leadership Organized for Catholic Schools (BLOCS) through the EITC program? Applying is easy...

[Click here](#)

## THE “GOOD NEWS” OF “CATHOLIC” EDUCATION



“How beautiful are the footsteps of those who bring good news”  
(Romans 10:15-17)



With these words, Pope Benedict XVI greeted Catholic educators of the United States in 2008. The Holy Father continued that the Catholic school “is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News... First and foremost, every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth... Teachers and administrators have the duty and privilege to ensure that students receive instruction in Catholic doctrine and practice. This requires a public witness to the way of Christ as found in the Gospel and upheld by the Church’s Magisterium... both inside and outside the classroom.”

The Holy Father also stressed that Catholic identity “is a question of conviction—do we really believe that only in the mystery of the Word made flesh does the mystery of man truly become clear? Are we ready to commit our entire self—intellect and will, mind and heart—to God? Do we accept the truth Christ reveals? Is the faith tangible in our universities and schools? Is it given fervent expression liturgically, sacramentally, through prayer, acts of charity, a concern for justice, and respect for God’s creation? Only in this way do we really bear witness to the meaning of who we are and what we uphold.” He added that “divergence from this vision weakens Catholic identity and ... inevitably leads to confusion, whether moral, intellectual or spiritual.”

How then does the Catholic school embrace this vision of evangelization?

The U.S. Bishops outline six fundamental tasks integral to “all efforts of evangelization and catechesis” in the National Directory for Catechesis. The teaching of the faith (catechesis) should:

**Promote knowledge of the faith:** This task corresponds to the natural desire to know God. The Catholic School promotes this task through daily instruction in Scripture and Tradition. Students gain knowledge of God’s revelation and His invitation to relationship. By studying the teachings of Jesus Christ, students discover the beauty and truths of the Christian life. Catechesis also includes the teaching of Catholic doctrine and the living practice of the faith.

**Promote a knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy and Sacraments:** This task teaches about the form and meaning of our sacred celebrations and prayers. Students learn about sacred signs, symbols, and actions whose meanings are rooted in the events of the Old Testament and fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. They are taught that Sunday Mass is the highest form of worship for a Catholic. Their minds, hearts and souls are prepared for the reception of First Penance, First Communion and Confirmation. First Friday and special school Masses, Eucharistic adoration and visits before the Blessed Sacrament provide opportunities for active participation in the liturgical life of the Church.

**Promote Moral Formation in Jesus Christ:** This task aims to “bring about a personal transformation and conversion” in Christ. The Catholic school educates

students about the moral teachings of Jesus Christ by incorporating the Ten Commandments, Beatitudes, and the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy into daily religion curriculum. By becoming acquainted with the lives of the saints, students are inspired to live a virtuous life.

**Teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ:** This task highlights the necessity of a personal disposition for prayer and reflection. Prayer permeates the Catholic School setting. Formal and informal prayer, whether in the classroom or church/chapel, acknowledges God’s divine majesty and presence. Students learn to turn to God, their Creator, in time of need, to ask for forgiveness or to express their thanks.

**Prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church:** This task encourages apprenticeship in a life of love and service based on the teachings of Jesus. The Catholic school encourages students to embrace a life of humility, forgiveness and mercy. Students are taught to use their God-given gifts for the good of all God’s people, especially the poor and alienated. Catholic schools regularly schedule opportunities for charitable outreach in order to put faith into action.

**Promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society:** This task prepares students to be heralds of the Good News of Jesus Christ by word and example. By studying Catholic social teaching, students learn that God, the author of all human life and dignity, calls them to reach out and build relationships based on love and justice.

As we go forward in “faith in the future,” the Catholic school remains a vital instrument in God’s plan for salvation. Catholic identity must be tangibly visible across an academically rigorous curriculum so all may proclaim:

“Let it be known to all who enter here that Jesus Christ is the reason for this school, the unseen but ever-present teacher in all its classes, the model of its faculty, and the inspiration for its students.” ❖

-Ann Menna,  
*Director of Parish Religious Education*



ARCHDIOCESE OF  
PHILADELPHIA

OFFICE OF  
CATHOLIC  
EDUCATION

*Keeping faith in mind*

## GUIDING STUDENTS THROUGH A CHANGE OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

There will be many benefits to the reorganization of our schools, including extending the longevity of Catholic education within the Archdiocese and an increase in the quality of the programs and resources available for children in the newly formed regional schools. Unfortunately, change is often initially viewed as something negative because it involves the loss of something cherished and familiar.

Within our Archdiocese we have seen firsthand that regionalization can be successful when there is collaboration as well as open and frequent communication among all stakeholders. It is important to keep in mind that the students are our most important stakeholders and can at times feel left out of the process.

While it is true that children can be resilient, change affects everyone and children process information and adjust to transitions in many different ways. Children take their cues from the behaviors and attitudes of the adults in their lives, including parents, guardians, and teachers. If you are angry or nervous, the children will sense it. Talk positively about the upcoming changes and create excitement about planning for the future.

Allow children time to get accustomed to the news and respect the fact that they need time to process and absorb information and work through their feelings. Change causes uncertainty, even when presented as something positive, and can create anxiety. Listen to your children and encourage them to share their concerns. Perhaps your child is feeling anxious about meeting new classmates and teachers or making friends. Give your child the opportunity to visit the school and attend an open house.

Children will have many questions and deserve honest and age appropriate responses. Explain that the reorganization of schools is not something being done to them, but for them. Even the youngest child can understand that when two individuals or groups come together to work toward a goal it can be easier for everyone. In their 2005 statement, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops called on educators to provide “an exceptional educational for young people- one that is truly Catholic and of highest academic quality.” Discuss the fact that the newly formed school will provide a variety of programs, including fine arts, world languages, and honors mathematics.



When a school closes, the groups in need of the greatest amount of patience and support are usually the 7th grade students in an elementary school and the juniors in a secondary school. These students will most likely mourn the loss of their school and feel angry and resentful upon first hearing the news. It will be extremely important to be sensitive to their needs and feelings and to seek their input during the planning process. These students have been looking

forward to enjoying certain privileges and participating in many beloved traditions and activities as upperclassmen. Consider ways to honor the culture of the closing school while generating excitement about planning new traditions together. When possible, seek the input of the students when making decisions about the newly formed schools, such as school uniforms, colors and mascots. When given the opportunity, children are capable of demonstrating strong leadership and organizational skills, and if they are included in the implementation process it will help to ease the transition while providing valuable lessons in collaboration and compromise. ❖

-Jacqueline Coccia,  
Director of Elementary Education Services

## THE VALUE OF A CATHOLIC EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

The powerful inspirational words below from famous people with learning disabilities are words to live by for the learning disabled students at the two resource room programs for secondary school students sponsored by the Office of Catholic Education (under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia). Both the Bonaventure Program at Archbishop Ryan High School and the Drexel Program at Monsignor Bonner/Archbishop Prendergast High Schools are programs for learning disabled students at the secondary level. Learning disabled students are included in the mission of the Office of Catholic Education to provide young people with an academically rigorous and doctrinally sound program of education and faith formation whereby they are incorporated into all facets of high school life. They are taught by secondary teachers who teach as Jesus did so that they become contributing members in communities of faith, of knowledge, and service. Secondary students in these programs are fully rostered into secondary classes, with the exception of one period each day. During this time, the students are scheduled into the resource room for instructional and study skills. The teacher/student ratio is approximately 1:3. The resource room teachers communicate the necessary accommodations for each student to the subject area teachers and offer consultative services. If you have any questions or to request a brochure or application, please call the Bonaventure Program at Archbishop Ryan High School at 215-637-1800 (ext. 270) or the Drexel Program at Monsignor Bonner/Archbishop Prendergast at 610-259-0280 (ext. 5004). For admission purposes, a completed application form must be submitted, along with copies of the recent report card, relevant medical or health records, and most importantly a recent full psycho-educational evaluation. ❖

### Words of Inspiration from People with a Learning Disability

**“Once we accept our limits, we go beyond them.”**

*Albert Einstein, Physicist/Mathematician*

**“Continuous effort – not strength or intelligence – is the key to unlocking your potential.”**

*Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister*

**“If a man does his best what else is there?”**

*George Patton, U.S. Army General*

**“All your dreams can come true if you have the courage to pursue them.”**

*Walt Disney, Director/Screenwriter*

## CHANGES IN REPORT CARDS AND GRADING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

At the beginning of the current school year students and teachers became engaged in implementing Common Core State Standards in their classrooms. In keeping with the implementation of the Standards, a practice that is gaining popularity nationwide is standards-based grading, which involves measuring students' proficiency on well-defined course objectives (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Although many districts adopt standards-based grading in addition to traditional grades, standards-based grading can and should replace traditional point-based grades. At this time Archdiocesan schools are using a combination in the areas that are related to the standards being used—English language arts and math.

An article published in Educational Leadership,\* listed seven solid reasons for replacing point-based grades with a standards-based system. Among them are the following:

**Grades Should Have Meaning.** Rubrics are often used in a Standards-based reporting system. For example on the Archdiocesan Primary report card, the following labels are used:

- An **O** means the student has completed proficient work on all course objectives and advanced work on some objectives.
- A **VG** means the student has completed proficient work on all course objectives.
- A **G** means the student has completed proficient work on the most important objectives, although not on all objectives. The student can continue to the next course.
- A **S** means the student has completed proficient work on at least one-half of the course objectives and still has work to do on these objectives.
- An **I** means that the student is missing some important objectives and is at significant risk of failing the next course in the sequence. The student should repeat the work or receive remedial help if it is a prerequisite for further work.
- A **U** means the student has completed proficient work on fewer than one-half of the course objectives and cannot successfully complete the next course in sequence.

In being graded on a point system, students who are clearly learning sometimes earn low grades because of missing work. On the other hand, some students actually learn very little but are good at “playing school.” Despite poor test scores, these students earn decent grades by turning in homework and doing extra credit. They often go on to struggle in later courses, while their parents watch and worry.

### Standards-based grading helps teachers to adjust instruction

Imagine two different grade books for the same set of students, as shown to the right. Which one of the two better illustrates what students know and what they still need to learn?

Traditional Grade Book			
Name	Homework Average	Quiz 1	Chapter 1 Test
Peter	90	65	70
Terri	50	75	78
Susan	110	50	62
Steven	10	90	85
Gretchen	95	100	90

Standards-Based Grade Book			
Name	Objective 1: Write an alternate ending for a story	Objective 2: Identify the elements of a story	Objective 3: Compare and contrast two stories
Peter	Partially Proficient	Proficient	Partially Proficient
Terri	Proficient	Proficient	Partially Proficient
Susan	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
Steven	Advanced	Proficient	Proficient
Gretchen	Partially Proficient	Advanced	Proficient

The standards-based grade book gives a wealth of information to help the teacher adjust instruction. Students can also see much more information about their learning. In the traditional grade book, Peter might assume he is doing well, but standards-based grading reveals that he has not mastered a crucial concept.

Students who struggle can continue to retest and use alternate assessments until they show proficiency, and they are not penalized for needing extended time.

### Standards-based grading shows what quality looks like.

In the adult world, everything is a performance assessment. Quality matters, and the ability to measure the quality of one's own work is a learned skill.

So how can we teach this essential skill? One way to teach quality is to demand it. We must create an environment where standards can and must be met and where students are not permitted to submit substandard work without being asked to revise. According to Scriffiny,

“If we base our grades on standards rather than attendance, behavior, or extra credit (which often has nothing to do with course objectives), we can actually help students grapple with the idea of quality and walk away with a higher degree of self-sufficiency. We can and should report information about student performance in areas like attendance and effort, but we can report it separately from academic achievement.” (O'Connor, 2007; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006) ❖

-Sister Edward Quinn, IHM,  
Director of Elementary Curriculum, Instruction  
and Staff Development

