

Commitment for a New School Year
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Reflecting on years gone by as an elementary teacher, I recall the enjoyment experienced in teaching Social Studies. Historic times and personalities came alive in an intriguing way. Beyond the textbook, additional resources brought life to the curriculum for students and teacher alike.

A common theme that surfaces throughout history is that each age, and indeed, each life, is filled with contrast – joys, sorrows, challenges, strife, and at times, heart-wrenching circumstances that can only be adequately addressed with wisdom, courage, faith, and insight.

Each era brings challenges which also provide the invitation for growth and change. Ordeals prompt analysis and reflection on choices and actions. We learn from history. We learn each day as we invite God into our lives.

We are called to do good as we work with others for the higher good of all. It takes a village, it takes a community, and it takes the commitment and ideas of all to bring about positive change and to actualize possibilities.

Indeed, the ideas of many guided the development of *The 2013 School Sustainability Study*. This document provided the framework to guide Catholic elementary schools in terms of Catholic Identity, Governance, Academics, Finance, Marketing, and Development. In 2018, a broad audience of talented individuals provided their expertise to update and expand upon previous recommendations resulting in *The 2018 Commission Study*.

The guidance of the study takes form as a new school year unfolds. Administrators, teachers, and staff re-commit to providing faith-filled, wholesome school environments founded on the teachings of Jesus in which students are enriched by the simplicity and directness of His teaching. Academically, students will be supported by their teachers and invited to learn as they go beyond their comfort level and reach for continued growth and improvement. Resources and direction are provided for administrators, pastors, and business managers for the incorporation of best financial practices. The input of pastors and principals will provide further consideration for implementation as the economic climate is addressed. Digital marketing continues to be underscored as marketing representatives assist administrators with school websites and an array of social media forums to tell the story of Catholic education. Articles in this issue of *The Monitor*, written by members of the Department of Catholic Schools, are included to expand on initiatives that strengthen school and instructional practices.

Catholic schools exist to teach students about God and to integrate the faith in all areas of the curriculum. The faith-life of students will be supported as enhanced curriculum guidelines immerse the teachings of the Gospel into all subjects providing resources for faculty implementation. Sensitive to providing current research-based material to guide instruction, a variety of curricular areas have been modified. Updates include the English Language Arts Curriculum, the Affective Early Childhood Curriculum and the World Language Curriculum.

Growth and new learning are considerations for teachers as well as students. Enhancing initiatives begun in 2017, the summer of 2018 was one of intensive teacher training to best prepare teachers to reach students with dyslexia. It is recognized that one in five, bright, intelligent individuals experience difficulty in learning to read and write. This summer, thirty-seven teachers took part in a week of rigorous training. The learning continues throughout the school year. Twenty-five teachers will participate in the practicum leading to certification as dyslexia instructors. As life-long learners, they perfect their craft and develop strategies to help all students achieve.

Professional development for principals will likewise be organized around topics to enhance student learning. Principals will receive instruction on Assessing Gifted Learners, Digital Leadership and Building Resiliency in Students.

As instructional leaders, principals guide teachers to become facilitators for learning. Teachers utilize differentiation in expanding the talents of gifted learners, and in fact, the talents of all learners. When students' interests, needs and abilities are taken into consideration, students become active explorers. Learning becomes intriguing and driven by a desire for greater, in-depth knowledge and expression through real-life application and innovation.

Digital leadership and learning also complement changing times. A proven framework harnesses the power of digital technology for relevant, engaging and inspiring learning. Principals will be inspired as they consider the positive results that flow from digital learning - student self-directed learning, creativity and empowerment.

Teachers seek to build classroom communities based on acceptance, understanding, and kindness. They address the development of the whole child – the spiritual, behavioral, social, emotional and academic areas. Building resiliency refers to adapting to difficult and challenging life experiences in which students develop social competencies, problem-solving skills, self-discipline, self-esteem and a sense of independence. Students learn to handle stress and respond positively as they are exposed to these skill sets.

A year of learning unfolds for students, teachers, administrators, and school communities!

As the 2018 school year becomes a reality, the commitment to work for the higher good of all is made each day. This commitment is enriched by the many individuals who invest not only their personal resources but also the gifts of their energy, their ideas, and their creative thinking to solve problems. This commitment is made by all who value Catholic education. Each contributes to support tomorrow's leaders. We are blessed and strengthened by this involvement.

As citizens of the 21st century, an age with challenges like so many other periods in time, we recognize that we are all students sharing our gifts. We re-commit to a new school year. We explore new thinking and opportunities. We face challenges together. We ask God for the grace to choose wisely, to be people of courage, and always, to be guided by His love.