

## Catholic Schools Week 2019

# Catholic Schools – Places to Learn, Serve, Lead, Succeed

▲ by Dr. Thomas Chadzutko

As we begin to celebrate Catholic Schools Week on Jan. 27, the theme: “Catholic Schools: Learn, Serve, Lead, Succeed” definitely applies to the academies and parish schools within the Diocese of Brooklyn.

Today, the evangelistic mission of Catholic education incorporates many priorities in addition to strengthening the Catholic Identity within the academies and parish schools.

The priorities of Catholic education include: academic excellence, building enrollment and class capacity, sustaining the academy governance model, seeking new ways of funding the academies and parish school finances and ensuring that the academies and parish schools are preparing their students for future leadership throughout the area.

Moreover, academies and parish schools within the Diocese of Brooklyn continue to prioritize strong support for the New Evangelization.

### Catholic Identity

Catholic Identity in our academies and parish schools is always a priority here within the Diocese of Brooklyn. The centrality of the faith guides Catholic educators every day as they diligently educate the children of God who have been entrusted to our academies and parish schools by their parents.

Catholic academies and parish school communities live the faith through daily prayer and life in the sacraments. Through the pastoral assistance plan, all pastors within the Diocese of Brooklyn are involved in the mission of Catholic education through their presence at liturgies, prayer services and by teaching religion classes.

Our Catholic faith is unlike other classroom subjects because it is not purely academic. Our faith is infused into all academic areas and our faith forms us. Pope Francis recognizes this when he notes that “Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the

explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture.” (EG. 134).

Throughout my years, I have met many leaders within our diocese who have been formed by the faith through Catholic education. There is great hope and promise for the future as Catholic school children become the future leaders of our Church and country.

I firmly believe that “faith” is part of our Catholic academy and parish school culture, and is lived each day in the work done by our priests, principals, faculty, staff, parents and students.

Catholic academies and parish schools within the Diocese of Brooklyn have a great commitment to academic excellence that is rooted in the faith-based mission of Catholic education. Over the past number of years, we have continued our quest for academic excellence and 21st-century learning.

### Academic Excellence

Without diminishing Catholic Identity, pursuit of academic excellence has been a major priority. Through the implementation of the New York State Common Core Learning Standards and participation in the New York State Assessments for ELA and Math, we have prepared our students for the educational challenges that they will face in secondary school and college.

Over the next couple of years, the academies and parish schools will adopt the Next Generation Standards in English language arts and math. With the support of our local Catholic colleges and universities, we will guarantee that our principals and teachers will be prepared to integrate these standards into their learning environments.

Our principals and teachers have dedicated themselves to professional development opportunities to ensure that they have an understanding of the necessary tools and resources to meet the educational needs of all our students.

Through the generous support of the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Trust, 35 academies and parish schools have state-of-the-art STEM Labs. These STEM Labs (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) provide students in kindergarten

through grade eight with opportunities to engage in hands-on activities to support the curriculum.

The Artists in Residency Program in 40 academies and parish schools provides students in fourth, sixth and eighth grades with educational opportunities to participate in the fine arts.

Many academies are in the process of attaining accreditation through AdvancED. This process allows the academy community to assess its learning environment and be evaluated by an outside group of educators. The rigor of the accreditation process further allows academy communities to be schools of excellence.

### Technology Initiatives

We must continue to provide students with the basic tools necessary to be successful in this time of ever-changing technology. Through effective partnerships with DeSales Media Corporation, academies and parish schools have been provided with a number of technology initiatives that have greatly enhanced their technology infrastructure.

We have 35 directors of technology integration in our Catholic academies and parish schools. The directors of technology further assist teachers with the integration of technology across all curriculum areas.

Through various programs and effective local planning by the academy boards, principals have been able to provide students with: iPads, laptops, SMARTBoards, SMARTTables and impressive multimedia labs. The goal is to continue to ensure that academies and parish schools are equipped with the technology that will allow students to be successful in the future.

DeSales Media Corporation continues to support our efforts in funding various technology initiatives including iPads to students and the opportunity to participate in the Apple Distinguished Schools Program.

Through the ongoing generosity of the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Trust, we are able to provide students with innovative programs that enhance the academic program.

### Financial Assistance

In addition, Futures in Education is essential to the support of Catholic education within the Diocese of Brooklyn. Through Futures’ generous support, over \$7 million is given to more than 5,000 students for need-based scholarships.

Our parents make the sacrifice each day to enroll their children in the academies and parish schools within the Diocese of Brooklyn. We recognize all of their efforts to support Catholic education and their desire to ensure that their children are prepared for the future. As the primary educators, parents play a vital role

in the partnership among parish, academy/parish school and the home.

Pursuit of academic excellence and knowledge is a priority. Through partnerships with various agencies, collaboration with secondary schools, colleges and universities, and the guidance of the Office of the Superintendent ~ Catholic School Support Services staff, we are in a position to continue our efforts toward achieving goals associated with academic excellence.

### Servant of All

Service to others is a key tenet of our Catholic faith, for Christ tells us that “if anyone wishes to be first, he shall be last of all and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35).

Just as our parishes do a great deal of service work within their communities, our academies and parish schools are partners in this important work.

Also of important service is the work accomplished by the Boards of Directors in our academies. This ministry for lay leadership is essential to the success of the mission of Catholic education. Through their time, talent and expertise, they provide service to our academy governance model. Their work continues to build our communities of learning and their efforts are advancing the mission of Catholic education.

As we look at Catholic education within the Diocese of Brooklyn, I would like to highlight some final reflections:

- We offer an education that combines Catholic faith and teachings with academic excellence.
- We partner with parents in the faith formation of their children.
- We set high standards for student achievement and help them succeed.
- We provide a balanced academic program integrating faith, culture and life.
- We use technology to effectively enhance education.
- We instill in students the value of service to others.
- We prepare students to be productive citizens and future leaders.
- We cultivate a faculty and staff of people who are dedicated, caring and effective.

### Schedule a Visit

This Catholic Schools Week, I ask readers to schedule a visit to one of the excellent parish schools and academies within the Diocese of Brooklyn to witness and experience how they truly are communities of faith, knowledge and service.

May they continue to grow and flourish all the more, and may God bless their work so that it is realized in the lives of students and families throughout this great city.

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