Catholic schools: promoting the love of Jesus every day

Gina Kuntz Fleming
Archdiocesan Superintendent of Catholic Schools

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis is honored to serve more than 23,000 students in 68 Catholic schools throughout central and southern Indiana. With 57 elementary schools and 11 high schools, we certainly have the privilege of seeing the love of Jesus Christ in action every single day!

Though each school serves its unique community in its own special ways, there are several commonalities that all of our Catholic schools share, which include:

• **Shared Mission and Catholic Identity**—We recognize that each person is made in the image and likeness of God. Through programming and practices, we integrate our faith, culture and life in ways that help young people attain academic and career pursuits as well as everlasting life with God. Our doors are open to all who desire a quality Catholic education regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender and socio-economic status.

• **Academic Excellence**—Our focus remains on the growth and achievement of every young person we serve. Recognizing parents as the first educators, we partner to help youth grow spiritually, socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically. With ISTEP+ scores higher than state averages at every grade level and continued excellence illustrated by other measures of performance (such as SAT and ACT college entrance exams), our students are challenged and supported as we maximize their capacity in preparation for college, careers and heaven.

• **Quality Leadership/Governance**—We value local autonomy while having the broader support of our archdiocesan offices and network of Catholic schools. We are grateful for our pastors and religious who give so generously so that we may all come to know, love and serve God more fully. With lay leaders from each community serving on school boards and commissions in an advisory capacity, our school leaders are provided supports intended to directly impact youths and families in positive ways. We are thankful for each of our board/commission members and other volunteers who readily assist in this great ministry.

• **Operational Vitality**—Committed to excellence and rigor, our Catholic schools responsibly approach personnel, financial and operational decisions in ways that put children first and fortify long-term viability for generations to come.

Our school leaders, teachers and other staff members truly set our Catholic schools apart from the rest for their dedication, professionalism and example as ministers of the faith which cannot be matched! We thank God daily for these amazing individuals and their service to our Church.

Please join me in celebrating the ministry of Catholic schools and all those who aid in their success! May God continue to bless our Church abundantly and all those we serve! †
Capital campaigns build community support for Catholic schools

By Sean Gallagher

Faith is the foundation of any effort to ensure the future of Catholic education in central and southern Indiana. The students at St. Nicholas School in Ripley County may know that better than most. When construction on a new education center began at St. Nicholas Parish last year, students placed medals of saints in gravel where the foundation of the new school would be poured.

“I believe that the dedication to prayer for this project by the school children is what has made the rough places smooth during our construction phase,” said Father Shaun Whittington, St. Nicholas’ pastor. “Taking the children onto the site under the supervision of our general contractor to bury the blessed medals was one of my favorite parts of the project so far.”

“Our parishioners have always been a very faith-filled group,” said Sherri Kirschner, St. Nicholas’ principal. “They understand that God is the center of everything. I think the opportunity to spread the good news of Jesus to even more youths of our parish and community is an opportunity that our students and parishioners have come to appreciate.”

The faith of today’s students at St. Nicholas and other schools across the archdiocese is built on the foundation of faith of generations past in central and southern Indiana. St. Nicholas Parish was founded in 1859, just two years after the establishment of the Diocese of Vincennes, which later became the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. Its school was founded in 1859.

At that time, parishioners across central and southern Indiana often came together as a community to put brick and mortar together with their own hands to start a Catholic school. Community is no less a part of construction projects today than it was generations ago.

It usually happens now through capital campaigns in which parishioners and other school supporters contribute funds for needed improvements, renovations or additions to a school’s campus.

The capital campaign at St. Nicholas that has made its new $3.2 million school building possible is its Heritage Project. The first phase of the project is the construction of the school building, which should be ready for use at the start of the next academic year. Future phases will include constructing a gymnasium and parish life center.

“Capital campaigns always build community,” said Jolinda Moore, executive director of the archdiocese’s Secretariat for Stewardship and Development. “In addition to raising money, they also raise excitement and commitment to [the school]. Engagement goes through the roof.”

Moore and other archdiocesan leaders help parish schools in the process of making a case for a capital campaign, determining what projects are possible through feasibility studies and then launching a campaign and seeing it through to completion.

Joseph Hollowell, president of Roncalli High School in Indianapolis, knows well how capital campaigns build engagement among a school’s supporters.

Serving as the president of the interparochial high school for the Indianapolis South Deanery since 1995, Hollowell has overseen several building projects and capital campaigns, including the current construction of a $6.5 million gymnasium that will seat 2,000 people and is expected to be open for use at the start of the next academic year.

“There’s a real sense of pride that comes from a community that has joined together to build a facility that is of great service to the young people there,” he said. “There’s a real sense of common ownership that builds up the body of Christ.”

Roncalli’s current capital campaign involved more than 100 volunteers who met with five to 10 other people or couples to invite support for the project.

“No one or two people can pull off a capital campaign,” Hollowell said. “Joe Hollowell, president of Roncalli

High School in Indianapolis, knows well how capital campaigns build engagement among a school’s supporters.

Serving as the president of the interparochial high school for the Indianapolis South Deanery since 1995, Hollowell has overseen several building projects and capital campaigns, including the current construction of a $6.5 million gymnasium that will seat 2,000 people and is expected to be open for use at the start of the next academic year.

“There’s a real sense of pride that comes from a community that has joined together to build a facility that is of great service to the young people there,” he said. “There’s a real sense of common ownership that builds up the body of Christ.”

Roncalli’s current capital campaign involved more than 100 volunteers who

met with five to 10 other people or couples to invite support for the project.

“No one or two people can pull off a capital campaign,” Hollowell said. “Joe Hollowell, president of Roncalli

High School in Indianapolis, knows well how capital campaigns build engagement among a school’s supporters.

Serving as the president of the interparochial high school for the Indianapolis South Deanery since 1995, Hollowell has overseen several building projects and capital campaigns, including the current construction of a $6.5 million gymnasium that will seat 2,000 people and is expected to be open for use at the start of the next academic year.

“There’s a real sense of pride that comes from a community that has joined together to build a facility that is of great service to the young people there,” he said. “There’s a real sense of common ownership that builds up the body of Christ.”

Roncalli’s current capital campaign involved more than 100 volunteers who

met with five to 10 other people or couples to invite support for the project.

“No one or two people can pull off a capital campaign,” Hollowell said. “Joe Hollowell, president of Roncalli

High School in Indianapolis, knows well how capital campaigns build engagement among a school’s supporters.

Serving as the president of the interparochial high school for the Indianapolis South Deanery since 1995, Hollowell has overseen several building projects and capital campaigns, including the current construction of a $6.5 million gymnasium that will seat 2,000 people and is expected to be open for use at the start of the next academic year.

“There’s a real sense of pride that comes from a community that has joined together to build a facility that is of great service to the young people there,” he said. “There’s a real sense of common ownership that builds up the body of Christ.”

Roncalli’s current capital campaign involved more than 100 volunteers who

met with five to 10 other people or couples to invite support for the project.

“No one or two people can pull off a capital campaign,” Hollowell said. “Joe Hollowell, president of Roncalli

High School in Indianapolis, knows well how capital campaigns build engagement among a school’s supporters.

Serving as the president of the interparochial high school for the Indianapolis South Deanery since 1995, Hollowell has overseen several building projects and capital campaigns, including the current construction of a $6.5 million gymnasium that will seat 2,000 people and is expected to be open for use at the start of the next academic year.

“There’s a real sense of pride that comes from a community that has joined together to build a facility that is of great service to the young people there,” he said. “There’s a real sense of common ownership that builds up the body of Christ.”

Roncalli’s current capital campaign involved more than 100 volunteers who

met with five to 10 other people or couples to invite support for the project.

“No one or two people can pull off a capital campaign,” Hollowell said. “Joe Hollowell, president of Roncalli

High School in Indianapolis, knows well how capital campaigns build engagement among a school’s supporters.

Serving as the president of the interparochial high school for the Indianapolis South Deanery since 1995, Hollowell has overseen several building projects and capital campaigns, including the current construction of a $6.5 million gymnasium that will seat 2,000 people and is expected to be open for use at the start of the next academic year.

“There’s a real sense of pride that comes from a community that has joined together to build a facility that is of great service to the young people there,” he said. “There’s a real sense of common ownership that builds up the body of Christ.”

Roncalli’s current capital campaign involved more than 100 volunteers who

met with five to 10 other people or couples to invite support for the project.

“No one or two people can pull off a capital campaign,” Hollowell said. “Joe Hollowell, president of Roncalli
Driven to lead and connect: Bishop Chatard student-athlete represents Catholic high schools in Indiana sports

By John Shaughnessy

The smile of Edreece Redmond is quick and full of light, and it flashes often during a conversation about the defining ways he represents high school student-athletes in Indiana.

The junior from Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis is one of the 18 members of the student advisory committee of the Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA)—a committee that represents more than 160,000 student-athletes from 410 high schools across the state.

One of the captains on Bishop Chatard’s basketball team, Edreece is the only member on the committee who is from a non-public school.

“It’s big—not only to represent all Catholic schools, but Chatard especially,” says Edreece, who is 17. “I’m the only African-American, too, so that’s big to represent that community.”

As he shares these two realities, he does it with a sense of humility, respect and responsibility—just some of the qualities that define him, according to those who interact with him often. In fact, they say, he represents the best of high school student-athletes, the ones who strive for success in the classroom, save their bonds with their teammates and classmates, want to make a difference in their community, and give their all to their school and their sport.

“You couldn’t ask for a better student-athlete,” says Kerrie Schluodecker, an assistant commissioner for the IHSAA who works with the student advisory committee. “He works hard, he’s coachable, and his respectfulness and his personality stand out. He’s always smiling.”

“Academically, he’s a high honor roll student, so he gets it done where it’s most important,” says Mike Ford, Bishop Chatard’s athletic director. “He’s also a very humble individual even though he’s a high achiever.”

Brian Shaughnessy has coached Edreece at the varsity level for three years. He also has him as a student in a religion class for juniors. In basketball, Edreece’s coach describes him as “incredibly determined and driven, a gifted athlete but humble.” As an example, he recalls how Edreece reacted when he had a game where he believed he didn’t live up to his personal standards. After the game that night, Edreece spent an hour in the gym working to improve.

As his teacher, Shaughnessy sees a “focused, thoughtful” student who is equally dedicated in the classroom.

For Edreece, his approach to both sports and studies comes down to a basic philosophy.

“Go as hard in the classroom as I do on the court,” he says. “On the court, I want to be the best. If I do that, I have to put my best foot forward in class, too.”

Still, Edreece’s greatest attribute may be the way he relates to other people, Shaughnessy says.

“He is all class—as respectful, supportive, trustworthy and grounded a young man as you’re likely to meet. He is good to everyone I see him interact with, all the way down to my 3-year-old daughter.

“He is an amazing leader. He is a complete advocate for his teammates. They know he cares about them, has their back, and will put himself on the line for the team.”

Known for his natural smile, Edreece’s brightest one comes when he talks about his teammates.

“We’re all really close on and off the court,” he says, noting how they often go to breakfast together after a Saturday morning practice. “I want us to feel like a brotherhood, which it is on our team. I also want them to know that if there’s anything that they’re facing off the court, we’re all here for each other.”

Edreece is working to create that same sense of inclusion in another special way through his involvement with the IHSAA committee. One of the responsibilities of the 18 members is to start a “Champions Together” program at their high school.

“It’s bringing together kids with special needs with students here, and then have them compete in activities together. I think we’ll do bowling,” Edreece says. “Courage up, we’ll have a school assembly to get students interested in working with special needs students and raising money for the events.”

He views his involvement in the “Champions Together” program as another way to develop as a leader, another way to share his gifts to make a difference in the lives of other people. They’re qualities and desires, he says, that have been enhanced through the education he has received at Bishop Chatard.

“It’s really built me up as far as who I am as a person. Just the community—how close we are. It’s put me in a position of leadership that maybe I wouldn’t have at other schools. The relationships I’ve built with teachers and friends are really close. They’re always there for you. They genuinely care for you.”

A junior at Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis, Edreece Redmond is one of the 18 members of the student advisory committee of the Indiana High School Athletic Association—a committee that represents more than 160,000 student-athletes from 410 high schools across the state. (Submitted photo)
STEM classes create a bright future for students and society

By Sean Gallagher

Joe Esposito, technology teacher and coordinator at St. Pius X School in Indianapolis, says the future is now when it comes to preparing his students for a more technologically driven workforce.

That’s why St. Pius and more Catholic schools across central and southern Indiana are introducing classes that incorporate science, technology, engineering and mathematics, commonly known as STEM.

“It’s very important for Catholic schools to put an emphasis on STEM education because the demand for STEM skills is no longer on the horizon,” Esposito said. “The world in which our students live is employing technical methods of making things faster, smarter and more efficient, and we would be doing them a disservice if we didn’t equip them with the right tools today.”

What sets apart Catholic schools in their approach to STEM classes is that they help their students learn about these fields in light of faith.

“They need to study the natural world, how it works and be able to effect change,” Esposito said. “But they also need Catholic values to give them purpose and direction in their work. I actually was telling third graders today that because God created the natural world, we can find ways to connect with him by understanding how it works.”

St. John Paul II School in Sellersburg began offering STEM classes to its middle schoolers in the 2017-18 academic year.

Karen Haas, St. John Paul’s principal, has high hopes for the possible effects these classes can have on her students and the broader society.

Those in the STEM field have the ability to solve problems,” Haas said. “They gain knowledge while focusing on real world issues and problems. Today’s STEM student may someday create a design to help the disabled, or have an impact on decreasing the impact of a natural disaster through better forecasting.

“The benefits to society are endless. God gives each student the gift of his or her abilities. What he or she does with those abilities is his or her gift to God.”

The focus in STEM classes is often on applying knowledge to specific projects that groups of students have to complete together.

For example, students at St. John Paul II were given an “egg drop challenge” in which they were given materials to create a package to hold an egg and keep it intact after being dropped to a hard surface.

In the challenge, they applied what they had previously learned about aerodynamics and impact forces.

The project was also a competition among the groups of students to see who could create the most protective package with the least materials used.

“We were able to apply in the real world things that we had already learned in class,” said Alexander LaMaster, a seventh-grader at St. John Paul II. “It was really cool!”

Shelby Arthur, St. John Paul’s STEM teacher, said she uses the natural competitiveness among children to enhance their learning.

“It really allows them to naturally work together and brainstorm multiple ideas and concepts without the students realizing that they are still performing school-related tasks,” she said. “The students enjoy the positive reinforcement and praise for winning a STEM challenge.

“They get to carry that sense of achievement around with them. That continues to motivate the students to try their best and to really try to understand the STEM concepts we are covering so that they can win the next STEM challenge.”

Some students face challenges in STEM classes. Esposito appreciates helping them overcome obstacles and achieve success.

“My eighth-graders last year were learning about [software] programming, and one student asked me if what we were learning was actually coding, and I have the privilege of popping those bubbles.

“My eighth-graders last year were learning about [software] programming, and one student asked me if what we were learning was actually coding, and when I said yes, he exclaimed that he actually understood it. You could see the empowerment on his face.”

With teachers like Esposito across the archdiocese helping students past barriers that they thought were beyond their reach, Haas is anxious to see what the future will hold.

“We envision that our students will be empowered on his face.”

Some students face challenges in STEM classes. Esposito appreciates helping them overcome obstacles and achieve success.

“It really allows them to naturally work together and brainstorm multiple ideas and concepts without the students realizing that they are still performing school-related tasks,” she said. “The students enjoy the positive reinforcement and praise for winning a STEM challenge.

“They get to carry that sense of achievement around with them. That continues to motivate the students to try their best and to really try to understand the STEM concepts we are covering so that they can win the next STEM challenge.”

Join us for Brebeuf Jesuit’s “Pre”beuf Day on March 3, 2019

brebeuf.org/admissions
Cindy Greer was on the verge of tears the first time she witnessed what the students had done.

Her appreciation has only grown five months later for the school children’s initiative, talents and faith.

“I almost cried the first week because it was so amazing,” says Greer, the principal of St. Anthony School in Indianapolis. “Their leadership and ownership have been great to see. And they’re really good.”

The special scene began at the start of the school year in early August when the school’s part-time music teacher had a commitment that wouldn’t allow her to be there for the weekly school Mass on Wednesday mornings. So seventh-grader Waldo Tapia took it upon himself to provide the music.

Waldo enlisted five of his female classmates who love to sing, and he set up a practice 45 minutes before school began that day. Then at the Mass, he strapped on his guitar and joined the girls in leading their schoolmates in songs that echoed with joy throughout the church.

The scene was so cool and contagious that fellow seventh-grader Lance Gratner brought his drums the next week, and soon sixth-grader Jennifer Cazares was playing the piano, and then students from kindergarten through the upper grades clamored to join the choir. Waldo, Lance and Jennifer welcomed them all, as long as they were willing to attend the practices.

Now, there are usually about 25 students in the choir at the school Mass, and a trombone player, a bass guitarist and two violinists have been added. The musicians have an extra practice each week.

“I was expecting a couple of kids to do it,” says Lance, who came up with the idea of expanding the choir. “I did not think we’d have this many people! A lot of the kids are little. We used to be little, too, so we understand them. We tell them, ‘OK, you have to practice.’”

Waldo nods and adds, “We created this atmosphere of being friendly because we’re all friendly here. I don’t care what grade they’re in. If they’re younger kids, they’ll eventually lead the choir. I want to give them the chance to lead.”

The three leaders of the group especially note the singing of the second-grade students, whom they view as an extra section of the choir because they sing so loud and they’re seated right near the choir at Mass.

“It gets me happy when I hear them sing,” Jennifer says, flashing a smile. Greer is also all smiles when she thinks of the group.

“They took this on themselves,” says the principal of the Notre Dame ACE Academy school. “For them to be so dedicated and committed is amazing.”

Waldo just sees it all as an extension of the faith and the music that adds so much joy to his life.

“Ever since I was a small kid, I’ve loved to go to Mass,” says Waldo, who is 13 and from a musical family, just as Lance and Jennifer are. “The music is one of the most important things at Mass for me. I always like the Mass at school because it sounds like joy. The choir sounds like angels singing for God. That’s what I hear.”
Learning days for principals help students’ lives

By Natalie Hofer

The world is changing, and so are the needs of the children living in it.
That’s part of the reason the archdiocese offers several professional days for principals of its schools.
And it is entirely the reason a recent professional day addressed the topics of social-emotional learning and cultural inclusivity.

What are these topics, what do they mean for Catholic school students, and how do principals keep up with other topics essential to their jobs? The Criterion interviewed three principals at archdiocesan schools in central and southern Indiana to learn more.

‘Not in a day, but every day, all day’

“Almost all research now is pointing to social-emotional skills as being the key to ‘Not in a day, but every day, all day’ says Kevin Gawrys, principal of St. Therese (Little Flower) School in Indianapolis. “If you don’t have those [components], you can’t process other information, you can’t do anything with it.”

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, social-emotional learning is “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

For perspective in terms of Catholic schools, Gawrys notes that “we see more and more every year how much more trauma and early child trauma kids have been through. Until you’re able to add social-emotional learning, significant, deep learning won’t take place.”

The source of trauma varies. But Janet Abdoulaye, principal of St. Susanna School in Plainfield, sees one pervasive trend.

“I think social media and technology have made [children] a little more isolated than before,” she says. “I think some of those skills they naturally learn in friendships, they don’t learn as easily these days.”

Cindy Johnson, principal of St. Michael School in Brookville, agrees.

“(Kids) know and hear so much more than what kids did 20 years ago,” she says. “We have to meet them where they are.”

Addressing students’ need for social-emotional learning “is not done in one week,” notes Gawrys. “It’s done every day, all day.”

He says one way to improve in this area is “to move away from, ‘You did something wrong so you get punished’ to ‘You did something wrong. Why? What made you do that?’”

Another example he offers is teaching children a particular value by incorporating lessons on that value in intentional ways.

For instance, he says, “Our kids in third grade build endurance with reading. So we would tell them, ‘Read for five minutes without talking.’

“But we never told the kids, ‘You’re learning how to be persistent.’ Now we’re saying, ‘Here’s the skill you’re learning, instead of hoping they know what skill they’re learning.’”

Abdoulaye says with the “Leader in Me” method that her school started a few years ago, they began implementing social-emotional learning practices.

“The speaker showed a slide about how students need help with self-management,” she says. “That’s one of the first steps [of the ‘Leader in Me’] — You are responsible for yourself.”

Johnson was so taken with the social-emotional learning concept that she personally bought 20 copies of a book related to the method for her staff, even the cooks. She notes with a laugh that she has seen one classroom aide walking for exercise—while reading the book.

Understanding differences

The second topic, cultural inclusivity, “goes hand in hand with social-emotional learning,” says Gawrys. “Part of social-emotional learning is learning how to deal with people who aren’t just like you, don’t think like you, come from a different background, don’t want the same things as you.”

Abdoulaye notes that cultural inclusivity “is more and more important because we are becoming more and more divided as a society. So understanding differences and different points of view and different perspectives is really important.”

“At Little Flower, diversity is not just a catchphrase—it’s a reality.”

Whereas the student body was predominantly Caucasian and Catholic when he started there 20 years ago, Gawrys says it is now one-third non-Caucasian and 50 percent Catholic.

“We have kids with nannies in the summer, and kids whose parents have no job,” he says. “We run the gamut economically, racially, religiously, culturally. Inclusivity is the training of how we deal with other people, of how we go beyond tolerance to embracing the other person and realizing that differences make us stronger.”

“We all have to be lifetime learners,” Abdoulaye, Gawrys and Johnson each expressed gratitude and enthusiasm for the ability to regularly meet with their principal peers.

“If I need help, I have colleagues I can call on—friends I can rely on,” Abdoulaye says.

Johnson agrees: “It’s priceless to talk with other principals. No one can help you the way other principals can. I look forward to those days. We all get to talk and brainstorm. It’s awesome.”

Bottom line, says Gawrys, “Kids want to do a good job. And we want to help them do that. The professional days are invaluable.”

First graders’ faith reflects teacher’s plan to ‘put God first’

By John Shaughnessy

One of Lindsey Morris’ favorite moments as a teacher involves non-Catholic, first-grade boy who always wanted to know more about the Catholic faith.

“I was answering non-stop questions for a whole year,” notes Morris, a first-grade teacher at St. Mary School in North Vernon. “I would see a spark in his eyes for the love of God and Catholicism.

“This young boy received his first Communion, confirmation and confirmation all by himself. He is the only one in his family. He doesn’t mass a Sunday Mass, and his love for the faith still grows. His testimony for this faith is something that will forever have a place in my heart.”

The joy that Morris has in sharing that story reflects her major goal as a teacher.

“I pride myself on making sure I have a relationship with every student,” says Morris, who was a finalist for the 2018 Saint Theodora Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor for a Catholic educator in the archdiocese.

“I know my students’ interests, needs and wants. I am constantly engaged with my students even after they leave my classroom. One example is in the way I lead our aftercare program after school. I love this because it allows me to reconnect with former students of mine.”

She also continues that connection by serving as the faculty advisor for the school’s student council and by leading the parish’s high school youth group.

“Witnessing my students grow in their faith from first grade up is astounding.”

That feeling is matched by being able to share her love of God and her faith with her students.

“Putting God first is the first thing that comes to mind when I think of my daily planning. I want my students to walk away from school every day and know that in every action and every conversation, we put God first.”

Kevin Gawrys

Janet Abdoulaye

Cindy Johnson

Lindsay Morris

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS
FOR 2019-2020

“A” rated by the Indiana Department of Education

Contact Miriam Medina,
Director of Enrollment Management,
at mmedina@scocina.org or 317.352.3287

Scecina Memorial High School
5000 Nowland Avenue,
Indianapolis, IN 46201
scocina.org/admissions

Discover Opportunities
at a great Catholic high school

Lumen Christi Catholic School

Offering PreK through High School
Daily Mass, Classical Curriculum, Small Classes
Lumen Christi is the only school in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis currently recognized by the Cardinal Newman Society on the Catholic Education Honor Roll.

Visit us in downtown Indianapolis at 508 Stevens Street! LumenChristiSchool.org 317-632-3174
Alumni relish teaching at schools they once attended

By Natalie Hoefer

In terms of school, “homecoming” is an event when alumni gather from their scattered locations and return to their alma mater.

For many teachers in the archdiocese, every day is “homecoming” as they walk through the doors of the elementary, junior high or high school they once attended as students.

Below are the thoughts of a few of those alumni—educators at Catholic schools in central and southern Indiana. Among the aspects they value teaching at their alma mater, there is one constant—their ability to openly discuss, share and practice their Catholic faith.

“The Lord called me to be here”

Unlike most who seek jobs after college, Lindsey Scott cast a very small net—more of a lasso really.

“I couldn’t see myself working anywhere else, so I only applied here,” says the 24-year-old special education teacher at St. Monica School in Indianapolis. “I felt God call me to come back here.”

The lifetime member of the parish attended Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., to study deaf and hard-of-hearing education. One course required for the degree changed her focus.

“I fell in love with special education,” she says. “It’s where I felt the most confident in my abilities, and the most joy.”

But Scott finds joy in Christ and her Catholic faith as well. She spent her first two years after college as a missionary in Ireland and Scotland sharing the Catholic faith and Gospel message with youths for National Evangelization Teams.

Toward the end of her second missionary year, Scott says she “asked the Lord where he needed me to go next. [St. Monica] is the only place I felt him need me. There were no issues, it was an easy process, and I felt such peace. It was a clear sign that the Lord called me to be here.”

Having spent time in a public school as a student-teacher, Scott appreciates now being able to “share with students my relationship with God, and how amazing it is to have one. I love working in an environment where I can pray, and the fact that we go to Mass every week as a school.”

Other than “calling my former teachers by their first name and getting away with it,” Scott says she feels no awkwardness in teaching where she herself had been a student.

“St. Monica is such a family community,” she says. “It’s my parish, my home. I can’t imagine doing anything else or being anywhere else. This is where I’m meant to be.”

“I always dreamed of going back”

Jane Noel, 61, taught for eight years in public schools, and owned and operated a day care and kindergarten with a friend for 17 years. But in the back of her mind, she had a secret desire.

“I always loved my job,” she says. “But I always had a dream of going back to St. Lawrence and just giving back.”

For 10 years now, the lifetime member of St. Lawrence Parish in Lawrenceburg has been living that dream as a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher at the faith community’s school she herself attended.

“I wanted to be able to teach the kids how to pray, and that you can pray anytime, anywhere,” she says, “and to share my love of Jesus no matter what subject I taught. So she has, not just for the few years she taught religion, but also in her primary subject, language arts.

“Whatever the topic of the story they’re reading [for the class], there’s always a way to include the faith,” she says.

Noel even created “WOW God Wednesdays,” where she tells “a story about how God worked a miracle in someone’s life,” she explains. “They are true stories that leave the kids saying, ‘Wow!’ Sometimes the junior high kids will even stop in to hear a story.”

And Noel has been able to fulfill her desire to “pray at any given moment on any given subject. We pray every day at certain times, or any time. We’ve seen many prayers answered.”

Some of those prayers are “for our abortion-minded women,” says Noel, who serves as president of the board of directors for the Southeast Indiana Pregnancy Center in Lawrenceburg.

Getting to practice and share her faith at the school she once attended has been a wish come true for Noel.

“It’s all I dreamed it would be,” she says.

A “special, unique school” with “the feeling of family”

When Stephen Sims, 34, speaks of his alma mater, Father Michael Shawe Memorial Jr./Sr. High School in Madison, his love for the school is obvious.

“Shawe is a special, unique place, very small,” he says. “Our class had 25 [students], and they’re all my best friends.”

But Scott finds joy in Christ and her Catholic faith as well. She spent her first two years after college as a missionary in Ireland and Scotland sharing the Catholic faith and Gospel message with youths for National Evangelization Teams.

Toward the end of her second missionary year, Scott says she “asked the Lord where he needed me to go next. [St. Monica] is the only place I felt him need me. There were no issues, it was an easy process, and I felt such peace. It was a clear sign that the Lord called me to be here.”

Having spent time in a public school as a student-teacher, Scott appreciates now being able to “share with students my relationship with God, and how amazing it is to have one. I love working in an environment where I can pray, and the fact that we go to Mass every week as a school.”

Other than “calling my former teachers by their first name and getting away with it,” Scott says she feels no awkwardness in teaching where she herself had been a student.

“St. Monica is such a family community,” she says. “It’s my parish, my home. I can’t imagine doing anything else or being anywhere else. This is where I’m meant to be.”

“I always dreamed of going back”

Jane Noel, 61, taught for eight years in public schools, and owned and operated a day care and kindergarten with a friend for 17 years. But in the back of her mind, she had a secret desire.

“I always loved my job,” she says. “But I always had a dream of going back to St. Lawrence and just giving back.”

For 10 years now, the lifetime member of St. Lawrence Parish in Lawrenceburg has been living that dream as a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher at the faith community’s school she herself attended.

“I wanted to be able to teach the kids how to pray, and that you can pray anytime, anywhere,” she says, “and to share my love of Jesus no matter what subject I taught. So she has, not just for the few years she taught religion, but also in her primary subject, language arts.

“Whatever the topic of the story they’re reading [for the class], there’s always a way to include the faith,” she says.

Noel even created “WOW God Wednesdays,” where she tells “a story about how God worked a miracle in someone’s life,” she explains. “They are true stories that leave the kids saying, ‘Wow!’ Sometimes the junior high kids will even stop in to hear a story.”

And Noel has been able to fulfill her desire to “pray at any given moment on any given subject. We pray every day at certain times, or any time. We’ve seen many prayers answered.”

Some of those prayers are “for our abortion-minded women,” says Noel, who serves as president of the board of directors for the Southeast Indiana Pregnancy Center in Lawrenceburg.

Getting to practice and share her faith at the school she once attended has been a wish come true for Noel.

“It’s all I dreamed it would be,” she says.

A “special, unique school” with “the feeling of family”

When Stephen Sims, 34, speaks of his alma mater, Father Michael Shawe Memorial Jr./Sr. High School in Madison, his love for the school is obvious.

“Shawe is a special, unique place, very small,” he says. “Our class had 25 [students], and they’re all my best friends.”

But Scott finds joy in Christ and her Catholic faith as well. She spent her first two years after college as a missionary in Ireland and Scotland sharing the Catholic faith and Gospel message with youths for National Evangelization Teams.

Toward the end of her second missionary year, Scott says she “asked the Lord where he needed me to go next. [St. Monica] is the only place I felt him need me. There were no issues, it was an easy process, and I felt such peace. It was a clear sign that the Lord called me to be here.”

Having spent time in a public school as a student-teacher, Scott appreciates now being able to “share with students my relationship with God, and how amazing it is to have one. I love working in an environment where I can pray, and the fact that we go to Mass every week as a school.”

With Notre Dame Cathedral in the background, Aline Cambon poses with her students Caroline Warner, second from left, Skip Maas, Hannah Storm and Miles Hesse during a trip she led to France. Cambone has been a French teacher at her alma mater, Father Michael Shawe Memorial Jr./Sr. High School in Madison, for 40 years. (Submitted photo)

The faith that unites the students and staff, combined with the school’s small size, creates “a more intimate environment,” Sims says.

“The staff knows every kid and what they need,” he notes. “They spend time with the kids. They know their strengths and weaknesses and their backgrounds, what’s going on in their families, so they can help them out better. Our teachers are supportive of the kids.”

French teacher Aline Cambon was working at the school when Sims attended Shawe—her son was one of his classmates.

But Cambon’s ties to the school go even further back. She has not only been teaching French at the school for 40 years—she, like Sims, is also a graduate of Shawe and Pope John XXIII School.

We moved here from France when I was 11,” she says, “and I always dreamed of going back.”

She says the school has always had “the feeling of family. I like the support and love you feel from the students as well as their families.”

But what she most likes about teaching at Shawe is practicing her Catholic faith.

“If you see a student is down or having a difficult time at home, you can pray before class,” she says.

She teaches her students to pray the Hail Mary in French, and “they love to pray it,” she says. “They ask to pray it before tests. Once in the hall, they were practicing for an oral part of the test, and they asked, ‘Can we pray right now?’ And we held hands and prayed. It was so touching.”

The support, love and faith of the community shined through in a profound way after Cambon gave birth to her second son.

“I was in the hospital in a coma,” she recalls. “You wouldn’t believe the support they gave me—it was amazing. … When I came back, the [Pope John XXIII] elementary kids made cards for me.”

Just this year, Cambon’s grandson started preschool at Pope John XXIII.

“To me, it’s like a dream come true to teach at Shawe,” she says. “I don’t feel like I’m going to work. I feel like I’m with my own family.”"
Catholic Schools are …

- Centered in the person of Jesus Christ
- Contributing to the evangelizing mission of the Church
- Distinguished by excellence
- Commited to educate the whole child
- 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

(“Defining Characteristics of Catholic Schools”; National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools)

Research Says …

- Catholic schools tend to operate as communities rather than bureaucracies, which links to higher levels of teacher commitment, student engagement and student achievement (Marks, 2009).
- In Catholic schools, the student achievement gap is smaller than in public schools (Jeynes, 2007; Marks & Lee, 1989).
- Latino and African American students in Catholic schools are more likely to graduate from high school and college (Grogger & Neal, 2000).
- Graduates of Catholic high schools are more likely to earn higher wages (Neal, 1997).
- Catholic schools tend to produce graduates who are more civically engaged, more tolerant of diverse views, and more committed to service as adults (Campbell, 2001; Wolf, Greene, Kleitz, & Thalhammer, 2001).
- When a Catholic school closes, neighborhood disorder increases (Brinig & Garnett, 2009).

University of Notre Dame. For more information, log onto ace.nd.edu/resources/catholic-schools-research/defining-characteristics-of-catholic-schools/
Students learn to share their greatest gift in honors program

By John Shaughnessy

Parents long for their child to have a teacher who cares for him or her—and then strives to bring out the best in their child.

It’s a longing that may be even stronger for parents whose child struggles with a disability.

So the letter that a parent wrote in support of Jennifer Fisher Kelly says so much about the student teacher service teacher at St. Anthony of Padua School in Clarksville.

“(Our son) is dyslexic. He is far behind his peers in reading,” noted the mom in her letter. “Most kids in his position have given up. I credit his hard work and willingness to go to school, even though it seemed impossible some days, to Jennifer Kelly. We could never repay her for the time she dedicated to our son.”

Teachers and students, to see all the people with disabilities. He excelled in college and where he took advantage of support services and teachers.

“When I was tutoring this one girl, and after we were done, she hugged me and said, ‘Thank you! You’ve been so helpful.’ She was in the third grade. That let me know I was sharing my gifts.”

That’s the primary goal of the honor society’s approach, says its advisor.

“They’re in charge. I let them take the lead.”

Mary Leverton, the school’s fifth-grade teacher, “They’ve really shined. They’re doing things they’ve never done before in offering their abilities and their gifts to help others.”

Helping children with disabilities reflects teacher’s focus on faith

By John Shaughnessy

Parents long for their child to have a teacher who cares for him or her—and then strives to bring out the best in their child.

It’s a longing that may be even stronger for parents whose child struggles with a disability.

So the letter that a parent wrote in support of Jennifer Fisher Kelly says so much about the student teacher service teacher at St. Anthony of Padua School in Clarksville.

“(Our son) is dyslexic. He is far behind his peers in reading,” noted the mom in her letter. “Most kids in his position have given up. I credit his hard work and willingness to go to school, even though it seemed impossible some days, to Jennifer Kelly. We could never repay her for the time she dedicated to our son.”

Teachers and students, to see all the people with disabilities. He excelled in college and where he took advantage of support services and teachers.

“When I was tutoring this one girl, and after we were done, she hugged me and said, ‘Thank you! You’ve been so helpful.’ She was in the third grade. That let me know I was sharing my gifts.”

That’s the primary goal of the honor society’s approach, says its advisor.

“They’re in charge. I let them take the lead.”

Mary Leverton, the school’s fifth-grade teacher, “They’ve really shined. They’re doing things they’ve never done before in offering their abilities and their gifts to help others.”

Catholic Schools
Communities of Faith, Knowledge, and Service

EAST DEANERY SCHOOLS

Holy Cross Central
125 N Oriental St
317.638.9068
holycrossschoolindy.org
A NOTRE DAME ACADEMY

Holy Spirit
7241 E 10th St
317.352.1243
school.holyspirit-indy.org

Little Flower
1401 N Bosart Ave
317.353.2282
litleflowerparish.org

Our Lady of Lourdes
30 S Downey Ave
317.357.3316
ollindy.org

Sceicina Memorial High School
5000 Nowland Ave
317.356.6377
sceicina.org

St. Michael
515 Jefferson Blvd
Greenfield
317.462.6380
school-stmichaelgrifld.org

St. Philip Neri
545 N Eastern Ave
317.636.0134
stphilipindy.org
A NOTRE DAME ACADEMY

CHECK OUT OUR SCHOOLS DURING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK JANUARY 27-FEBRUARY 2.
All the right ingredients make Soup Day a special tradition at Providence

By John Shaughnessy

Catholic Schools Week Supplement Page 13B

The cafeteria staff at Our Lady of Providence High School in Clarksville are instrumental in continuing the school’s tradition of Soup Day, an effort to help the poor and the homeless. Staff members include Lindsey Rutherford, left, Karen Hennessey, Penny Schroeder, Maria Agtuca, Donna Burke, Aggie Kiesler, Elisa Bary and Sarah Gahagen. [Submitted photo]

The couple had a child. And as her friend upheld her promise, Reed started Soup Day at Providence to help her. As part of Soup Day, she served a simple meal of soup to the students, with all the profits from the day going to her friend’s efforts. Reed also asked Providence students to bring canned goods and staple food items to the cafeteria, to help feed the homeless, too.

“Mary Ann Reed started it, and it’s meant so much to all of us,” says Karen Hennessey, who worked with Reed for 16 years before Reed died in 2015. “She was special. She would always make you laugh, and her smile was contagious. She had cancer the last two years she worked here. She died two years after she left the school.”

Now the cafeteria manager, Hennessey and the other members of the lunchroom staff continue the tradition, partly in Reed’s honor and partly as a way of teaching students about the challenges of homelessness and hunger.

While soup is served during lunch, Hennessey and other members of the cafeteria staff talk to the students about how these challenges even can affect their classmates.

“We want them to know what it is like to wait in line, to maybe not eat everything you like to eat—to know that a bowl of soup might be all a kid gets each day,” Hennessey says. “They may be your neighbor or someone who sits next to you in class.”

In response to the pre-Thanksgiving effort in 2018, Soup Day raised about $1,500 that was donated to two groups that help the needy: Haven House Homeless Shelter in Jeffersonville, and In Heaven’s Eyes in New Albany. Staples were also distributed between Haven House and The Center for Lay Ministries in Jeffersonville.

“Every year when we do this, it’s more special,” Hennessey says. “We want the kids to know life is about community and giving back.”

There is also a year-round, under-the-radar quality to the cafeteria staff’s efforts to help people who are hungry—namely some students at Providence.

While some students benefit from a federally subsidized, free-lunch program, there are still students who deal with hunger at times. In response, teachers, staff and members of the cafeteria team at Providence have quietly contributed to the lunch accounts of such students.

“We had a boy who was eating a bologna sandwich for lunch and dinner each day,” she says. “We put money in his account so he could get what he needed to eat. The fact that we have teachers and staff members who are willing to contribute to help kids and keep their names out of it says a lot about our school.”

When money is added to a student’s account, Hennessey sends an e-mail note to the parents of the child, letting them know that extra funds have been added by “a guardian angel.”

Hennessey recalls one mother being so thankful because otherwise, she said, she would have had to choose between adding money to her child’s lunch account or paying an electric bill when her electricity was about to be turned off.

“Never once have I not received a thank you from the parents,” she says. Then there are the moments when students become the teachers. “One student who was on the federal-assisted lunch program brought in 40 to 50 cans in two huge bags for Soup Day. It warmed my heart that she and her mother did that because money is tight for them.”

They’re all ingredients in what makes Soup Day a special tradition at Providence, Hennessey says. “I appreciate the feeling of just knowing you’re making a difference in someone’s life.”

The Criterion Friday, January 25, 2019

NEW ALBANY DEANERY SCHOOLS

Our Lady of Providence H.S., Clarksville
Our Lady of Perpetual Help School, New Albany
St. Anthony of Padua School, Clarksville
Sacred Heart Catholic School, Jeffersonville

Southern Indiana Catholic Education

Pre-Kindergarten through 12th Grade

Holy Family School, New Albany
St. Joseph Catholic School, Corydon
St. John Paul II Catholic School, Sellersburg
St. Mary of the Knobs Catholic School, Floyds Knobs

Celebrating Catholic Schools Week 2019
Small parish makes big news in starting a school

By Jennifer Lindberg

BRASIL—A small parish community has shown that hope can outmeasure any label. While Brazil was named the poorest town in Indiana from the United States Census Bureau, Annunciation Parish in that community took action to make a better distinction: opening a new school.

“With material poverty, there tends to be more drugs, crime, etcetera,” said Father Hollowell, pastor of Annunciation Parish. “A lot of people, if you knocked on their door and invited them to Mass, wouldn’t dare come. But if you say, ‘We’d like to offer a really amazing, safe, holistic, education for your child,’ people are very much impressed and ready to listen.”

Annunciation Parish was listening so well that after four parish dinners in December of 2017 to solicit private funds, they received $75,000 just three months later from parishioners, alumni of the previous parish school and from friends of parishioners. The school sparked an interest in an endeavor seeking to bring the light of Christ into some of the darkest corners through education. The new school also secured grants from The Froedermann Foundation in Terre Haute and an early learning grant from the State of Indiana.

“Only the Lord could have brought all the pieces together,” said Father Hollowell, the director of Annunciation Montessori School and the director of religious education for Annunciation Parish. “One of our goals is certainly to evangelize and bring new families with children to Annunciation Church.”

The new school, opening with a preschool for 3- to 6-year-olds, has plans to expand per archdiocesan approval each year. It can now accept The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) vouchers that help low-income families obtain child care and has a scholarship fund, Dohmen said. As the school adds elementary grades, it will be eligible for other state vouchers.

Mary McCoy, assistant superintendent for the archdiocesan Office of Catholic Schools, worked closely with Dohmen and Father Hollowell on plans for the school.

“We are very blessed to have [Dohmen] down here with Father Hollowell too,” McCoy said. “I am so excited to see where this goes, and I hope they can sustain it.”

McCoy said that it is in the poorest areas that Catholic education sees a big impact. She was impressed with the vision that the school would evangelize Catholics and non-Catholics alike in the community.

“It’s beautiful,” McCoy said. “We believe that we educate not because someone is [or isn’t] Catholic, but because we are Catholic.”

Dohmen first met Father Hollowell when she was studying in Rome more than 10 years ago. A former chemical engineer for Eli Lilly & Co. in Indianapolis, Dohmen began to feel a different call, one that led to graduating with a theology degree from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome and a master’s degree in Montessori Education from Loyola University Maryland before becoming principal of a Catholic Montessori school in Ohio. She was also a teacher in various Montessori schools.

Even with all these successes, Dohmen felt the Lord asking something more of her.

“The mission of a Catholic Montessori school was placed on my heart for vulnerable children in lower economic circumstances,” Dohmen said.

When she learned Father Hollowell was opening to start a new school, Dohmen felt that the cycle of poverty in Brazil and the surrounding area could be broken, and that children at the parish would be given another avenue to come closer to Jesus.

“Providing a Catholic Montessori experience to children with the idea of 3 years old likely can be necessary component for a generation change in this low-income, at-risk community,” Dohmen said.

But the school is also about growing Annunciation Parish by bringing younger families to an already aging population, Dohmen said. The Montessori approach, developed in the early 20th century by Dr. Maria Montessori, a devout Catholic, means the child’s education uses manipulatives that are hands-on, self-paced, collaborative and joyful, Dohmen said.

Students not only learn reading, writing and math, but also self-care. They learn to prepare snacks, basic sewing and how to care for their small environment that has child-size rugs, lamps and tables.

The school also has a full-time religious education component called Catechesis of the Good Shepherd that was created by Montessori. The program uses miniature items of the altar and Mass that students see at church, as well as other materials to help the child learn about the Bible and prayer. The setting is called an atrium, hearkening back to the place where, in the early days of the Church, catechumens were prepared for reception of the sacraments. For the child, the atrium is a place to help prepare them for full participation in the life of the Church, Dohmen said.

“That Catholic or non-Catholic, being able to live the Catholic faith daily in the atrium and providing a faith community for the family to be a part of, we are supporting and nurturing the religious need within each child,” Dohmen said.

Dr. Kristen Walton, who is not Catholic, said she is grateful that her daughter, Lillian, 4, is getting “a spiritual education alongside the Montessori education.”

“We want our daughter to have the best education possible in a healthy environment,” Walton said. “In this part of Indiana, Annunciation is the only preschool we found that respects parents’ health decisions, genuinely cares about the child’s environment and provides research-based education.

“Lilly loves helping prepare her own snacks and other activities like sewing and playing the bells. Many of the activities she loves are not things we previously thought a 4-year-old capable of.”

Jewt Wools knew what a Montessori education was and wanted that for his grandson, Ian Schobee, 4, Wools, a member of Annunciation Parish, said he has seen marked improvement in his grandson during the time he has been at the school. Before, Ian was shy and didn’t speak much, Wools said.

“Now he has advanced,” he said. “He interacts with other kids a lot better, and it has all been very positive.”

Father Hollowell said opening a school is a lot of hard work, and this one has taken a lot of effort, from a major renovation project to securing funds and volunteers. He insists that the opportunity to share the faith makes it all the efforts worthwhile.

“I feel like Catholic schools are such a wonderful way to bring the good news of the Gospel to the world.”

(Jennifer Lindberg is a freelance writer and a member of St. Joseph Parish in Shelbyville.)

Hard work spells success at state level for small school

By John Shaughnessy

Considering the success of the Spell Bowl team from St. Roch School in Indianapolis, the team members wouldn’t have any difficulty spelling the word, “dynasty.”

For the third straight year, the team of sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders from St. Roch won the Indiana state championship in spelling at the Class 4 level.

In fact, in the past seven years, the team has won six state championships in the Academic Spell Bowl. The one team that hasn’t won finished second, losing on a tiebreaker.

The latest state championship came on Nov. 10 at Purdue University in West Lafayette—a championship that produced the same reactions as when a sports team wins a title.

“There were big smiles, loud cheers and pumping of fists,” recalls Mary Ann Chamberlin, the team’s head coach who also teaches religion and social studies at the school. “There’s a real sense of accomplishment because it’s hard, and they’ve worked hard.”

St. Roch team members practiced five days a week from the beginning of the school year in August until early November, striving to master the spelling of the more than 1,600 words that are the foundation of the competition.

Spell Bowl is a team competition, requiring eight team members to take their individual turn at trying to correctly spell—in writing—nine words. A person pronounces each word and uses it in a sentence. Participants then have 15 seconds to spell the word. The team that spells the most words correctly wins the competition.

“Just like in sports, they learn the value of teamwork, that they’re only as strong as their weakest link,” Chamberlin says. “They also learn the value of putting time into this. They practice at home, too. There’s that personal self-discipline that, I’ve got to spell this word.”

They’re “old-school” values from a teacher who considers herself “old school” about the importance of spelling.

“I think spelling is becoming a lost art,” says the mother of four and the grandmother of eight. “And I appreciate that these kids are willing to spend their time learning to spell. I think being accurate in your writing, your spelling and your grammar is very important.”

Chamberlin also savors the impact that the team’s success has on the students and the school where she has taught for 35 of her 37 years as a Catholic educator.

“Hard work spells success at state level for small school.”

“‘It’s nice for our little school to be recognized. I’m just so proud of the work the kids do.’”
How to help more students experience benefits of a Catholic education

(Phil Gonzalez / The Criterion) The Catholic School Choice: Understanding a market research study titled, “The Catholic School Choice” study was written by Phil Gonzalez, coordinator of Latino outreach for the archdiocese’s Office of Catholic Schools.)

The National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) recently released a market research study titled, “The Catholic School Choice: Understanding the Perspectives of Parents and Opportunities for More Engagement.” The purpose of this study was to measure opinions and perceptions of Catholic schools nationwide. To do so, NCEA conducted an online survey of 1,403 adult Americans from across the country.

A major finding of the survey was a disparity between parent perceptions of Catholic schools and their willingness to enroll their children in a Catholic school. While 63 percent of respondents had a favorable impression of Catholic schools, only 51 percent were willing to consider enrolling their child in one. Survey results identified the two primary causes of this disparity to be “Parents’ concerns [or misperceptions] about the product as well as a lack of confidence they can afford the cost of tuition.”

The perception that Catholic schools are financially inaccessible is a concern for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, even as Indiana has instituted perhaps the most robust school choice legislation in the United States. In addition to financial assistance that individual Catholic schools offer, families in Indiana may also be eligible to receive financial assistance through Tax Credit scholarships and Indiana Choice scholarships, commonly known as vouchers.

The Tax Credit and Indiana Choice scholarships were instituted by Indiana to give greater educational choice to all Indiana families by offsetting tuition costs at participating schools. During the 2017-18 school year, 35,458 students across Indiana took advantage of the Choice Scholarship Program, an increase of 1,159 students from the prior school year.

Unique to Indiana, the Tax Credit and Indiana Choice scholarships are structured to benefit middle-income as well as low-income families. For example, in the 2018-19 school year a family of four with an annual income of $92,870 was eligible to receive a Tax Credit scholarship. Additionally, an eligible family of four with an annual income of $69,653 could receive a 50 percent Choice scholarship, an award that carried a value of $2,720-$3,771 per student depending on the school corporation in which the family resided.

Awareness of these tuition assistance programs needs to be increased. A 2017 survey of Indiana parents sponsored by EdChoice, a nonprofit advocate for greater school choice, found that approximately one-third of respondents to their survey had never heard of the Tax Credit and Indiana Choice scholarships.

Awareness of these programs is critical to enrollment efforts. Parents who are aware of tuition assistance programs and who believe they can afford Catholic school tuition are more likely to consider a Catholic education for their children. Sixty-seven percent of parents in the NCEA survey said they would be “somewhat more” or “much more” likely to consider a Catholic school if their children “qualified to receive subsidized or discounted tuition.”

By John Shaughnessy

Pam Wells isn’t shy about the ambitious goal that she has for each of the girls and boys that she teaches in her middle school classes.

“Enabling our students to be leaders and innovators in a global society, while sharing their gifts to know, love and serve God.”

That combined goal has guided Wells in her 24 years of teaching in a Catholic school, including her current role as a teacher of middle school social studies and eighth-grade religion at SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi School in Greenwood.

“Integrating the Catholic faith into our daily life at school goes beyond prayer and religion class,” says Wells, a finalist for the 2018 St. Joseph Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor for a Catholic educator in the archdiocese.

“It is literally impossible to teach social studies without using our faith as a catalyst or a comparison. When we study other civilizations, we are always drawing parallels with their religion and our own.”

She uses that same approach as she leads her students in discussing current events that have included right-to-life issues, the platforms of political candidates and the treatment of women in different areas of the world.

“I have implemented 21st century philosophies into Catholic education: creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking as a means of educating children to prepare them to be successful adults in our communities in the future,” says Wells, who sometimes dresses in costume to portray historical figures.

“Thousands of adolescents have walked through my door, and I believe that when they walked out for the last time, they were critical thinkers ready to make a difference in the world through their faith.”

The National Merit Scholars

2018 All-State Cross Country

National Hispanic Recognition Program

Vouchers for greater school choice can use to increase awareness of their school and tuition assistance programs that make them more accessible. Some strategies include:

• Hosting “Coffee with the Principal” meetings in the parish

• Increasing the visibility of information about tuition assistance programs on the school and parish websites, school social media accounts, school publications and parish bulletins.

• Engaging parents, parishioners and community leaders as “Share Partners” who share information about the school and tuition assistance programs in meetings with families and via school-created brochures and social media posts.

A concerted and coordinated effort by school and parish communities can address and overcome the perception that Catholic schools are financially inaccessible. Such an effort can especially lead to these two important outcomes: to allow even more students to experience the academic and spiritual benefits of a Catholic education, and to further the evangelical mission of the Catholic Church.

Teacher’s goal: building leaders who know, love and serve God and others

Pam Wells of Roncalli in Indianapolis, co-founder of an initiative called “Invisible Religious Education” (IRE) which averages over 205 hours per senior.

Thousands of adolescents have walked through my door, and I believe that when they walked out for the last time, they were critical thinkers ready to make a difference in the world through their faith.”

Despite these challenges, Wells feels that Catholic education is a powerful tool in preparing today’s youth to be successful adults in society.

“Thousands of adolescents have walked through my door, and I believe that when they walked out for the last time, they were critical thinkers ready to make a difference in the world through their faith.”

The Catholic Schools Week Supplement Page 15B

The Criterion Friday, January 25, 2019

Catholic Schools Week Supplement Page 15B
Cathedral transforms a diverse group of students spiritually, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically to have the competence to see and the courage to act.