

## **‘Thankful for Today, Thriving Tomorrow,’ initiative raising awareness of value and needs of Catholic schools in archdiocese as well as nationally**

“Thankful for Today, Thriving Tomorrow,” was the theme of a gathering held in person and virtually by all 38 Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of San Antonio on October 7 that launched a campaign to raise awareness of the value and needs of Catholic schools.

These events were focused toward school families, prospective families, potential donors, and others in the community, in other words, open to all. It highlighted current goings-on at the schools -- particularly new developments this fall -- as well as future plans.

Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS, said, “I am so grateful for all the Catholic school administrators and teachers as well as the parents and students who are moving forward in faith.”

He noted that Catholic schools have served the communities of the Archdiocese of San Antonio faithfully and steadfastly for more than a century-and-a-half. “They have introduced children to a world of learning that is both academic and very spiritual,” he said. “Our Catholic schools must continue to educate children so they can shape and change our culture.”

The archbishop emphasized what Catholic schools are all about: To form men and women who are children of God to become people of faith; to help them to see that there is a reason for life, that we all are called to love God; to learn about the dignity of the human person from conception to natural death; and to strive for justice and peace in the world. “It is a way of life that includes using the intellect and the will to learn,” he explained.

Since his appointment as archbishop of San Antonio a decade ago, Catholic schools have been and are still among the top priorities of Archbishop Gustavo. “I know we need a fresh, creative approach to build a bright future for our schools,” he acknowledged.

The Missionary of the Holy Spirit continued, “We are asking everyone to step forward and accept responsibility for our schools at this critical moment. Catholic schools are a great treasure for our Church, and their value is immeasurable. They are needed in order to give a more solid spiritual and educational foundation to our students. We ask everyone to partner with our Catholic schools on their mission to prepare their students to tackle tomorrow’s challenges.”

The San Antonio prelate stressed that, as Catholic schools pursue new opportunities, thanks are given to the Lord for the blessings received in years past and in asking for God’s grace to face new challenges with faith and tremendous enthusiasm. “May God continue to bless each one of you and your families.”

The agendas for the recent meetings were to give thanks to the parent/school community for their commitment to their school through all of the challenges regarding the re-opening of school campuses; to celebrate the successes of on-campus instruction and the return of students the past several weeks; to recognize and show gratitude for the role teachers/support staff and parents have had in the success and the tremendous effort this required of everyone; to recognize the numerous

changes needed in how to do new things necessitated by COVID; to bring each school community into the conversation about the impact of COVID-19 on the Catholic school system in the archdiocese; to discuss specifically how each school is doing in the midst of this crisis; and to invite all families to participate in an awareness campaign that will strengthen not only their communities, but all Catholic schools throughout the archdiocese.

In the weeks leading up to the re-opening of schools, the messaging from the public officials and health authorities regarding COVID-19 cases and school safety during the pandemic created an atmosphere of uncertainty for many parents as to whether or not to re-open schools at all.

Public school districts have reported that 20 percent of their students are “missing,” and there are many reports of parents choosing to take a “gap” year in education -- keeping students at home, as employers shifted into a work-at-home mode for many employees.

As a result of COVID-19, at least 150 Catholic schools have closed across the nation because of the financial impact due to loss of enrollment, change in financial status of parents, and additional expenses related to COVID-19.

Marti West, superintendent of Catholic Schools for the archdiocese, stated, “We are very pleased with the success our schools have had in welcoming students safely back to campus.” She detailed how summer planning and preparation to ensure quality academics in-person, remote, and hybrid -- while following CDC guidelines for mitigating the spread of the virus -- has yielded a smooth re-opening of schools in this unprecedented time.

The “Rediscover Catholic Schools” campaign is in response to what San Antonio Catholic school leaders have observed happening in the educational landscape. “We have a responsibility to ensure all children have access to quality education. All those committed to educating our youth would agree that children are most successful when they are actively engaged in the classroom and with their peers,” West said. “With so many students unable to return to a more traditional classroom environment due to the sheer number of students in larger districts, we want to highlight what our smaller schools have to offer and invite families not familiar with Catholic schools to come see what we are about.”

Research studies have shown the value of a Catholic education and this campaign will make more visible to the greater San Antonio community the reasons why making an investment in a child’s education in a Catholic school is good not only for the child but for the community, as Catholic school graduates are civically engaged, tolerant of diverse views, and more committed to service as adults.

The national landscape and the number of Catholic schools that have been forced to close as a result of this pandemic has been the motivation to launch “Rediscover Catholic Schools.” Superintendent West described how operating in a state that does not provide school choice for faith-based schools puts a tremendous strain on financial resources, especially in those communities that have many families impacted by job loss and financial hardships. “We want each of our schools to

emerge from this pandemic as thriving school communities,” she said. “Reaching out to invite others to join us in this effort will allow Catholic schools to weather this COVID storm intact and will bring many more students and families to come to know the value of a Catholic school.”

Those taking part in the gatherings heard specific messaging customized for each campus regarding enrollment and budget impacts due to COVID-19 expenses as well as a call to action for a “Rediscover Catholic Schools” campaign to pro-actively strengthen schools and support all Catholic schools.

“Rediscover Catholic Schools” is an initiative by all 38 Catholic schools in the archdiocese to raise awareness of the COVID-19 impact on Catholic schools; raise awareness of the value of investing in a Catholic school education, and include a campaign to increase enrollment. It is also an invitation for others outside the current parent and current donor community to support Catholic schools through their testimony, tuition assistance, spreading the word, and supporting new development efforts.

It is a local tie-in that Catholic schools all around the Archdiocese of San Antonio are holding at that time in connection with an upcoming effort from the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA).

National Catholic Schools Week (CSW) is an annual celebration of Catholic education in the United States. Now entering its 47th anniversary year, CSW has traditionally been held the last week in January.

This year, there is a second week for Catholic schools to highlight their good news in a national initiative: “Discover Catholic Schools Week.” Later this fall, “Discover Catholic Schools Week” will be held November 8 to 14 and is designated to help schools connect with prospective families, donors, educators and other community members.

Then, from January 31 to February 6, 2021, schools will still host the traditional “Celebrate Catholic Schools Week.” Schools typically observe the week with Masses, assemblies and other activities for students, families, parishioners and community members to celebrate and congratulate.

For more information, see the new archdiocesan Catholic Schools website at <https://satxcatholic.org>

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