



Unwavering support given to Catholic schools during distance learning, exciting new model announced for Stone Oak school

An update from Marti West, Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the archdiocese

What a year 2020 has been! I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to school faculty and staff, as well as parents and students for persevering through the challenges the pandemic posed. We are proud of the swift pivot to distance learning that schools made, and the continued learning and high level of student engagement that continued. We learned a lot from that experience with distance learning and it has paved the path for planning for the future.

Distance learning

According to information provided to the Department of Catholic Schools from 20 schools, the student engagement rate during this time of online learning was an incredible 96 percent! Stories have been reported recently in local media giving figures of some public school districts coping with student engagement rates of 50 percent or so. Due to this excellent student engagement rate maintained by Catholic schools, administrators will begin instruction this fall at standard grade-level; there will be no remediation work as has already been announced for other ISDs. Additionally, in some subjects, such as math, test scores were trending in an improved manner.

Some comments from Catholic schools regarding attendance during virtual learning included:

- “Our attendance rate from March 23 to May 20 was 99.6 percent attendance.” -- Central Catholic High School
- “St. Pius X Catholic School averaged 95 percent attendance from March 23 to May 20, with middle school attending 100 percent for ELA and math. We are so proud of our students and staff.” -- St. Pius X Catholic School
- “97 percent -- hooray! Our amazing technology director was able to prepare everything. Additionally, we have not lost any family or student during this time. We are connected with every single one of our precious families.” -- St. James the Apostle Catholic School
- “Our students had over 94 percent engagement during this activity period. This included activities such as PE physical challenges, art competitions, Google slide projects, and other numerous activities. Of course, students logged in for their normal participation, regularly scheduled work, and would often have zoom meetings with fellow classmates and teachers.” -- St. Mary Magdalen Catholic School

New models and initiatives

In reflecting on what transpired this spring with the COVID-19 learning experience, the Catholic schools have been exploring innovative ways to structure the educational experience to better meet the needs of families during this unsettling time and beyond. We have witnessed students that have flourished during distance learning while at the same time observing the need to continue addressing and meeting the social and emotional needs of our students. We are experiencing a transformational shift in education for the future and our schools are embracing the challenge!

We are excited to launch an innovative micro school model at our Stone Oak campus, St. José Sánchez del Rio Catholic School. St. José will offer families a flexible and customizable academic experience, empowering young people to design their own learning. This “beyond the classroom” instructional alternative to the traditional school will foster a 21st Century Global experience while challenging students to embark on a journey to discover the joy of the Gospel and God’s calling. Students at St. José will pursue their passions through self-paced online learning, community Socratic discussions, group and individual project-based learning, and experiential learning through apprenticeships and internships.

In addition, just last month Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSPS, announced that a St. José Sanchez del Rio Church will be developed, with further plans to be made in mid-2021.

These proven models of education for small enrollments will allow Catholic schools to continue to serve its students well while ensuring sustainability and continued vitality. Accredited by the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops, students and families will have an option for flexibility and quality academic programming while continuing to remain faithful to the mission of Catholic education.

Education has been presented with unprecedented challenges during this pandemic, and Catholic schools have responded without skipping a beat. We are emerging from the spring of 2020 COVID-19 experience with our vision set firmly on preparing students for meeting the future, in whatever state that may be. We are committed to continuing the rich legacy of the religious presence in Catholic schools through the launching of the Mother Cabrini Center at Mount Sacred Heart Catholic School, creating a pathway for international religious sisters to successfully be prepared to teach in American Catholic schools. The comprehensive counseling program continues to meet the social and emotional needs of students, which has become even more critical as children are learning to navigate these unsettling times. And without question, the amazing sense of community experienced in Catholic schools offers a vital and much needed space in coming together with purpose and shared values dedicated to the mission of forming youth to be leaders of integrity and vision.

We encourage those looking for a positive academic experience, even in the face of unprecedented challenges, to find a Catholic school community that will partner with you in the spiritual, intellectual, and social growth of your children. For more information inquire at enroll@archsa.org

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