



Updates from the CSO

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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE NEWSLETTER

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Contact us:

We want to hear from you! Tell us what's noteworthy in your school or system.

Send a short story or description of your event or program to Molly Bean at: mbean@ErieRCD.org



Greetings Partners in Catholic Education,

One of my goals for the upcoming year is to improve communications from the Catholic Schools Office and increase awareness on important initiatives related to living out our collective mission of Catholic education. As such, I am excited to share the first edition of our *Updates from the CSO* newsletter with you. The plan is to publish at least two newsletters a year and provide you with a concise overview of key initiatives and projects designed to support your administrators and teachers in strengthening our Catholic schools. I will do my best to keep this information relevant and timely, with the hope that it will assist you in your efforts to promote your schools with current and prospective families. Please feel free to talk about these initiatives and share the information with your teachers and families as you deem appropriate.

As always, I am grateful for our shared mission and partnership in Catholic education. God Bless your work.

Sincerely,

Superintendent

Middle States Accreditation

Catholic schools in northwest Pennsylvania received outstanding news this spring. The Middle States Association (MSA), an international leader in accrediting schools and school systems, announced that the large contingent of Catholic schools that coordinated an effort to seek accreditation through the Catholic Schools Office this spring, had been successful. Twenty-five Catholic schools in the diocese chose to participate in the effort, while another five chose to approach the process independently.

The significant effort involved the collection of school and diocesan level data, surveying students, parents and teachers, and creating a multi-year strategic plan at each school.



The seven-year strategic plan for the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie is three-pronged:

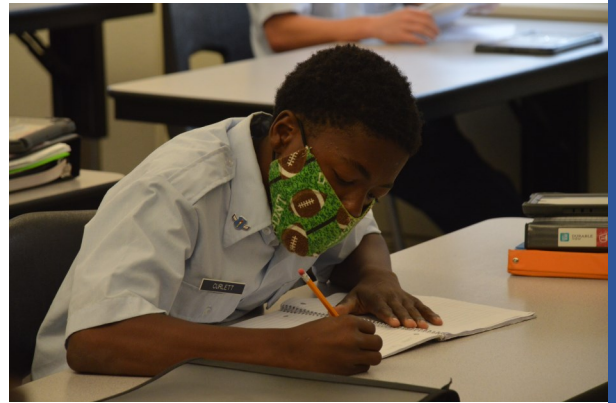
1. **A focus on mathematics:** At a minimum, students will make a full year's progress in mathematics or be at a benchmark for their grade level through each school's mathematics program.
2. **A focus on assessments:** There will be a culture in all schools that values and uses assessments as an interwoven component of the educational program along with curriculum and instruction.
3. **A focus on governance:** The governance and leadership in the Catholic Schools Office and at all schools within the diocese will provide consistent and effective school operations that are mission driven.



The visiting team of educators from the Middle States Association consisted of former administrators, a superintendent and MSA staff. The team participated in in-person or virtual visits to each school and met with a variety of educators, as well as Catholic Schools Office staff, the week of September 21. After a final review of finances, policies and strategic plans, the Commission on Elementary Schools gave the final approval for accrediting the schools on April 16, 2021.

Highlights from the MSA visiting team report

The Diocese of Erie did an outstanding job in organizing and completing a comprehensive self-study. The study, together with visits to the component schools and interviews with diverse groups of stakeholders, provided the visiting team with a clear picture of the system and its engagement on a process for continuous improvement. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, most of the visits were done virtually. The only exceptions were some visits to component schools and these were done with the agreement of the school administrator and the visitor.



Based on what we heard and read, we identified the following strengths of the system:

- The system is clearly mission driven. It is the guiding factor in decision-making at the central office. It is a well-crafted statement, alive throughout this very diverse system.
- Collaborative processes are used at all levels. There is a sense of ownership for the initiatives that only can be achieved when stakeholders feel that they have been included in the process.
- The office and school level staff is qualified, competent and dedicated.
- An outstanding effort was made at all levels in response to the opening of schools during the COVID-19 health crisis. The planning process was intense and the central office and schools, working together, developed comprehensive Return to School plans to meet the needs of schools with diverse populations and in areas with wide-ranging infection rates.

In addition to the strengths, we noted the following areas for recommendations:

- Formalize a succession plan for those in key roles in the implementation phase, from membership on planning teams to those in key roles at the central office level.
- Be intentional, yet judicious, in implementing the significant amount of professional development included in the action plans so that it is not overwhelming.
- Implement a diocesan-wide student information management system.
- Use the Return to School planning process for future health and safety initiatives.

“I am deeply grateful to everyone involved, from the planning team to local administrators as well as staff in the Catholic Schools Office,” said Jim Gallagher, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Erie. “This is an enormous undertaking — at a time when we were also navigating the challenges of COVID. I am proud of what they accomplished.”



Some of the action items that fall under the strategic plan are already well underway. A multi-step professional development program for teachers of mathematics has been initiated this spring and will continue for several years. Job descriptions and a job appraisal process is also being implemented for lead administrators, as well as a newly written set of policies. In addition, this summer’s Catholic Schools Leadership Conference will strengthen schools’ use of data to drive instruction through school-level data teams.

Standards for Mathematical Practice

The Catholic Schools Office sets the course for success in meeting Middle States goals

The Catholic Schools Office (CSO) has been busy working through the Middle States accreditation process with schools in the Diocese of Erie. Now that the accreditation process has been approved, the CSO staff has already begun working toward meeting the goals identified by the planning teams from the schools that participated in the Middle States process.

One need identified by the planning team was strengthening mathematics curriculum standards. The goal is to include more opportunities for students to engage in deep mathematical thinking activities that will lead to an enduring understanding of mathematical content.



As a result of the planning teams' efforts, the CSO decided to adopt the Standards for Mathematical Practice (SMPs) which will work hand-in-hand with current mathematical content standards. The SMPs describe the "thinking habits" mathematics teachers at all levels should seek to develop in their students. They are designed to advance students' thinking about mathematics beyond merely memorizing rules and procedures. Rather, they help students understand why they are applying a rule or procedure, and when a rule or procedure can be applied in another content area or to real-life situations. The SMPs describe how students should increasingly engage with the mathematical content as they progress through the elementary, middle, and high school years.

The preschool through eighth-grade spring professional development day held on April 30, offered grade-level workshops on the Standards of Mathematical Practice facilitated by national consultants. They provided workshop participants with ideas about how to incorporate the SMPs into their daily instruction with the goal of having students realize they are mathematicians.