

Growing DISCIPLES

Issue No. 6 | Summer 2023

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR GRADUATES

This past May, across the Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools, more than 472 students in eighth grade earned their diplomas and 366 seniors graduated from Saint Albert Catholic and Dowling Catholic High Schools. These seniors earned more than \$12 million in college scholarships and 97 percent plan to continue their education in the fall.

On behalf of the Catholic Schools Office, we want to share a heartfelt congratulations to all graduates throughout the diocese. May the peace of Christ be with you on this special occasion. We are so very proud of each of you. God bless each of you, now and always.



AN UPGRADED WEBSITE FOR SHELBY COUNTY CATHOLIC

Shelby County Catholic School unveiled a brand new school website last month. The new site features online tour scheduling and enrollment, teacher bios, high-impact student photos and more. Behind the scenes, the site offers improved search engine optimization and user-friendly site management. The bottom line - this site will help the school in its student recruitment and marketing efforts to help grow enrollment. Check out the new site at shelbycountycatholic.org.

EDUCATORS TO BE HONORED AT BISHOP'S CELEBRATION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

The Diocese of Des Moines announced it will honor educators, administrators and volunteers for their exceptional service to Catholic education during the second annual Bishop's Celebration of Catholic Schools on August 26, 2023, at St. Francis of Assisi in West Des Moines. This event unites the entire Diocese of Des Moines community in celebration of the life-changing impact our faith-centered education has provided for more than 150 years.

Three honorees from across the diocese were selected out of nearly 70 nominations for this award. Honorees were selected based on their demonstrated impact on the Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools and their commitment to faith, academic excellence, and fostering a vibrant school community. This year's honorees include:

Administrator of the Year

Misty Hade, St. Luke the Evangelist

Teacher of the Year

Ann Levine, St. Malachy

Volunteer of the Year

Katie Fitzgerald, St. Anthony

Honorary Chairs

Tom Chapman, Iowa Catholic Conference
John George and Mary Goddard, The Kremer Foundation



BISHOP'S CELEBRATION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

"All of this year's nominees are stellar examples of faith in action with a desire to promulgate the Catholic faith through strong, vibrant Catholic schools," shared Donna Bishop, Superintendent of Schools.

This year's event will also feature keynote speaker alumna Anne Nizzi Clark '87. Anne and her husband Brent chose St. Francis of Assisi and Dowling Catholic for their three children Blake '18 (Iowa State), Caitlin '20 (University of Iowa), and Colin '23 (Creighton University). Anne will share her experience with the Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools as a student and as a parent. The Clark family will discuss how Catholic education helped position each for success in the classroom and beyond.

Click [here](#) to learn more about this year's honorees, honorary chairs and event co-chairs.



DIOCESE WELCOMES NEW SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Paulette Neuhalfen-Theisen, Holy Family Catholic School

Neuhalfen-Theisen holds a Bachelor of Arts in K-12 Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance from Briar Cliff College, a Master of Science in Education from Wayne State College, and a Master of Science in Educational Leadership from Creighton University. She brings 30 years of experience in PK-12 and college education to the role. Most recently, she served as Administrator at Gross Catholic High School in Bellevue, NE, where she facilitated Professional Learning Communities, expanded dual enrollment and AP course offerings, implemented Academic Academies in Health Sciences and STREAM careers, secured funding for distance learning, began work on a dual language academy, and oversaw school improvement initiatives. Previously, she held roles as a Catholic elementary school administrator, college athletic director, development director, head volleyball coach, and admissions director. This spring she was nominated as Administrator of the Year in the Archdiocese of Omaha.

Jeffry Lynch, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School

Lynch holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education from Simpson College and a Master of Science degree in Educational Leadership from Drake University. He brings nearly three decades of expertise in education to the role and a passion for Catholic schools. He served as principal of St. Mary's High School in Independence, Missouri where he initiated a dual credit program with Rockhurst University. Before moving to Missouri, Lynch served in the Diocese of Des Moines as the Assistant Athletic Director and a social studies teacher at Dowling Catholic High School. Most recently, Lynch worked at St. Pius X High School in Kansas City, Missouri, where he served as the Social Studies Department Head and a teacher of AP Government, World History and United States History.

Lynn Ernst, St. Joseph Catholic School

Ernst holds a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Loras College, a Certificate in Catholic School Leadership, and a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from Creighton University. With nearly three decades of expertise in education and a passion for Catholic schools, Ernst has taught in the Archdiocese of Dubuque, the Diocese of Sioux City, the Archdiocese of Minneapolis/St. Paul, and has been with the Diocese of Des Moines for over 20 years. As a natural leader and collaborator, she has mentored new teachers while partnering with her peers to develop essential learnings, explore curricula, and promote growth for faculty and students.

A LIVING SYMBOL OF FAITH AT ST. PIUS X

This Spring, St. Pius X Catholic School added a living symbol of Catholic faith to its campus. The Rosary and Mary gardens offer an interactive, outdoor, prayer space with a quiet sitting area for reflective prayer and a path to walk the entire rosary.

After completing a large construction project, the parish and school were left with lots of lovely green space, but this space lacked "personality" according to Alex Baranosky, school principal. "This prayer space provides a visual representation of our Catholic identity while being a beautiful addition to our campus," said Baranosky. "The project was supported by parents and parishioners as part of our annual gala, highlighting their commitment to the development of prayer spaces on campus."

The prayer gardens are open to the school, parish, and members of the community.



A PERSPECTIVE ON CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

By Father Ken Halbur

Within the Catholic Church we have had a long tradition of educating children as well as adults. The title often used for Jesus was Rabbi, which means teacher and one of the things that He did was to teach us about the Father. This has been a mission of the Catholic Church for two thousand years with formal Catholic schools for many hundreds of years.

Currently there are over 1.9 million students in a Catholic Elementary School in the United States and over 32 million worldwide. To put that number in perspective, that means 17 percent of all students in the world go to a Catholic school, and in less developed countries, the percentage of Catholic educated children is much higher.

The first Catholic school in the United States was opened in 1606 by Franciscan missionaries. Education has been the mission of the Church ever since Jesus walked the earth. Click [here](#) to read more.

THE BENEFITS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early childhood education is a continuum of programs, services, and classes designed to support brain development, cognitive function and the social-emotional growth of children ages 3-5 (before they begin kindergarten).

Mounting research supports the importance of early childhood education. The human brain rapidly develops from birth through age five - more so than at any other time in a child's development. Additionally, between ages 3-5, the brain maximizes efficiency by determining which connections to keep and which to eliminate.

"Recognizing that the earliest years of a child's life are some of the most formative, the Diocese of Des Moines believes children should have access to high-quality educational opportunities as early as possible," says Donna Bishop, Superintendent of Schools. "Research suggests that when provided with stimulating classroom environments and supportive relationships, children-especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds-experience better academic outcomes and improved social-emotional development. Providing the necessary age appropriate skill sets is a crucial step in closing the persistent achievement gap and setting children on a path toward success."

In order to ensure that the developmental gains from high-quality early learning are maintained and that children can build on a solid foundation, children must have consistent access to effective instruction. Increasingly, researchers recognize the



importance of creating alignment across educational policies and instructional practices from Preschool to third grade to ensure the transition from learning to read and reading to learn.

Harvard University Center on the Developing Child says, "The emotional and physical health, social skills, and cognitive-linguistic capacities that emerge in the early years are all important prerequisites for success in school and later in the workplace and community," (Harvard, 2020).

Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools provide a Christ-centered instructional curriculum to teach children the values and morals of our Catholic faith. The curriculum also emphasizes fundamental, school-ready principles and basic social skills while developing daily functional skills. Students can participate in extra-curricular activities such as music, P.E., Library, art and STEM.

Want to give your little one a jump start? Click [here](#) to find a Diocese of Des Moines school near you.

AN INNOVATIVE SOLUTION TO TEACHER RECRUITMENT

In the current environment, a shortage of teachers coupled with historic numbers of open teaching positions means educators have many choices regarding where to teach, and the factors influencing those choices are changing. As of March 2022, the Diocese of Des Moines had over 40 open postings for educators, administrators, and support staff. The diocese sought out and was awarded a \$10,000 Cornerstone Grant from the Catholic Foundation of Southwest Iowa to implement a marketing campaign targeting prospective educators during the 2022-2023 school year.

The diocese was determined to build its teacher candidate pipeline by enacting digital marketing strategies designed to address the teacher shortage and influence the employment decisions of new educators. To meet this goal, the Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools Office partnered with EG Integrated to implement a digital marketing campaign to highlight the value of working at its schools, ultimately increasing the prospective pool of candidates.



A digital campaign was not only budget-friendly, but digital advertising helped the diocese better reach prospective employees where they live — online. According to Frontline Education, online searches are the number one way teachers search for open jobs in education. These interactive and engaging digital ads allowed prospective employees to request more information through lead ads or by directing them to a landing page on the CSO website to complete a short interest form. Ads for this campaign focused on values-centered employment with key messages promoting how Catholic schools offer both new and experienced educators mentorship, opportunities, and meaning.

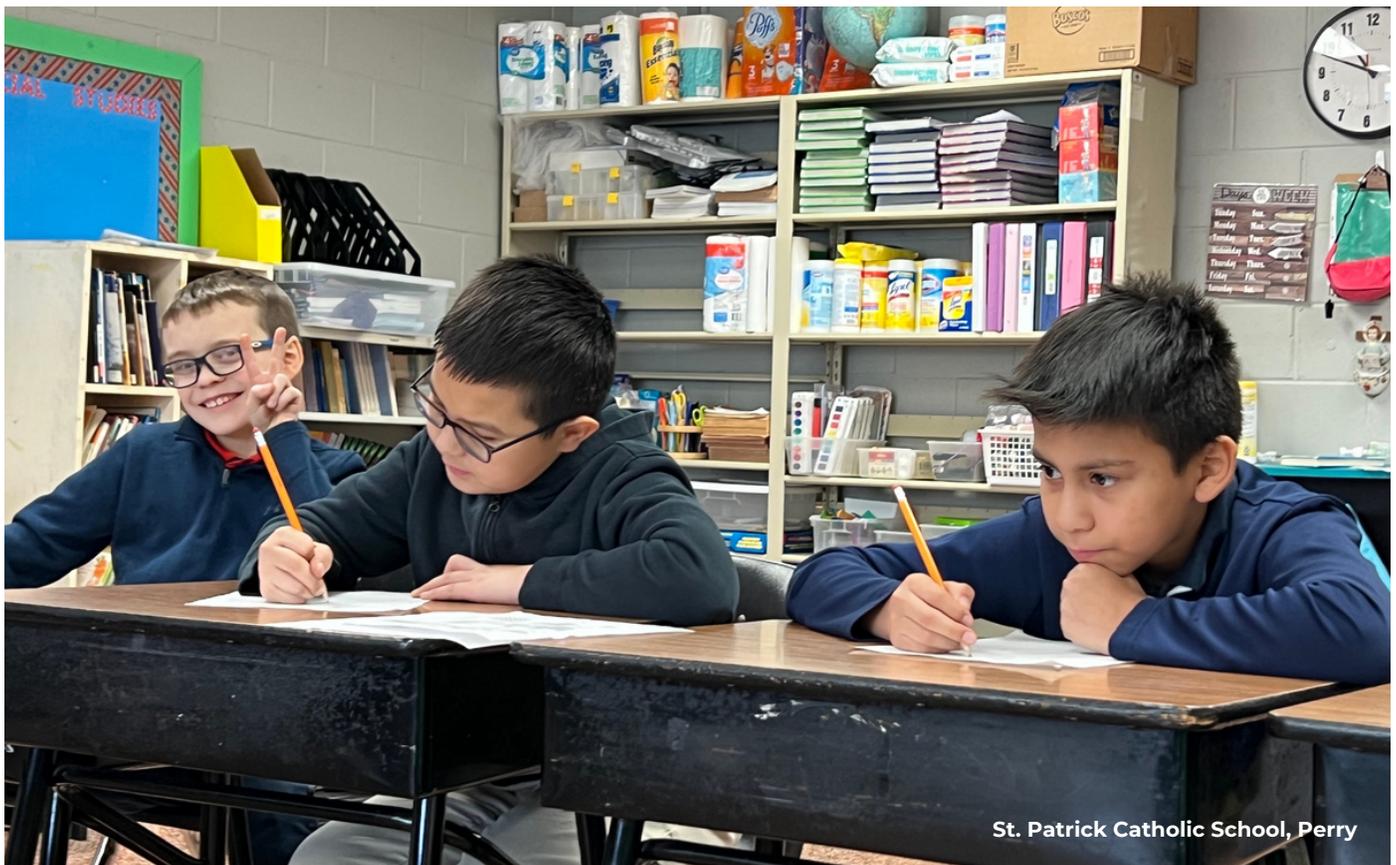
The campaign launched in January 2023. The diocese received more than 50 high-quality leads through the completion of the online form. Additionally, dozens of other candidates saw the ads and responded by contacting the superintendent of schools directly to submit their resumes and letters of recommendation. This heightened awareness of the Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools ultimately led to nearly all open positions being filled within the first six weeks of the campaign.



DIOCESE OF DES MOINES CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

The Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools includes 16 schools serving 23 counties in central and southwest Iowa. Catholic schools in the Des Moines Diocese build Christ-centered, collaborative, inclusive partnerships with parents, students, and parishes to provide innovative academic excellence and inspirational faith formation. To learn more about the Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools, visit dmdiocese.org/catholic-schools or email grow@dmdiocese.org.

Growing Disciples is a quarterly publication of the Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools Office. Content may not be reproduced without the expressed written consent from the Diocese of Des Moines. To submit a story idea, email grow@dmdiocese.org.



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