

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS  
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

*2021*  
**Impact  
Report**



# *Thank you*

Because of your faith, passion and generosity, Catholic schools are flourishing.  
You drive our mission to help make Catholic schools the best they can be for the thousands of students they serve.  
With partners like you, Catholic schools will continue onward and upward. We are proud to serve them.

## CATHOLIC SCHOOLS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

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Our mission is to enhance excellence and increase enrollment in the nearly 80 preschool–eighth grade Catholic schools in the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area.

Since 2015, we've been sharing innovative ideas, sound business practices, proven strategies and financial resources to help meet each school's individual goals.

CSCOE was established through the vision and generosity of the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation.

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On the cover: Charles K., a first grader at Epiphany Catholic School in Coon Rapids. *Photo by Saint Pio Media*

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## MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT BRIAN RAGATZ



*“The feat of the year cannot be that we’re open; it must be that we’re excellent. This was the case as we saw Catholic school enrollment rise again and academic scores take a monumental leap!”*

*Greetings from the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence,*

This year, I write the Impact Report introduction with mixed emotions. 2021 didn’t bring the certainty we had hoped for amid the pandemic. Although safety requirements moved to recommendations, thoughts of returning to normal faded. And again, differing opinions strained civility.

Through this, one of the clearest lessons the pandemic has taught me is that our future is bright because of our children. They are resilient and faithful, even during this chaotic time. They are doing what is asked of them and excelling in many ways.

A major reason why children are excelling is because of who is pushing them to realize their full potential. More than 3,000 Catholic school teachers and staff not only showed up for in-person learning, but they also stepped up every day to provide the love and support that our children need to learn and grow.

As I told Catholic school principals early last year, the feat of the year cannot be that we’re open; it must be that we’re excellent. This was the case as we saw Catholic school enrollment rise again and academic scores take a monumental leap! We should all be proud of our schools, students, staff and families for their amazing efforts and accomplishments.

Years from now, when people look back on education during this time, I hope they see the common thread between the students who thrived because they were part of a community that was always in it for them — Catholic schools.



## MESSAGE FROM BOARD MEMBER ROBERT WOLLAN



*“If the highest aim of a captain were to preserve  
his ship, he would keep it in port forever.”*

–St. Thomas Aquinas

I first encountered this quote in fourth grade in Sister Mary Clare’s class. Little did I know that it would be an ongoing reminder of how a great education prepared me to strive for greatness in Catholic schools and throughout my career.

I’m one of eight siblings to attend Catholic grade schools, starting at St. Mark’s in St. Paul and then moving east to St. Luke’s (now St. Thomas More). My wife, Carolyn, is a teacher and Catholic school alumna, so we chose to send all four of our kids to Nativity of Our Lord in St. Paul. Clearly, we believe in the power of our Catholic schools and are thankful for the foundation of a Catholic education.

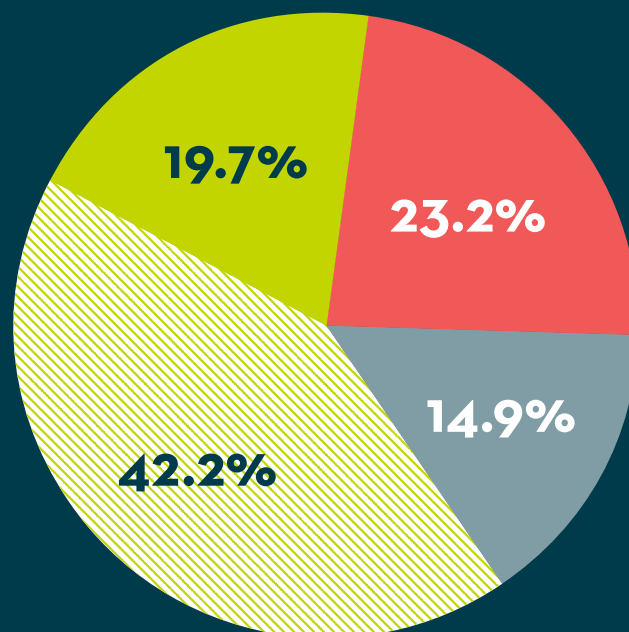
It’s no surprise that I proudly accepted the offer to join the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence Board of Directors. I’m looking forward to bringing my experience in strategy development and leveraging leading technology to further the mission of Catholic schools. Our fantastic schools deserve to have the best tools to deliver the highest-quality education, while working smarter and making an even better experience for students, parents, teachers and staff.

What I’ve learned about CSCOE is that we strive to live up to the name every day by pursuing excellence in everything we do with the Catholic schools we serve. We know that our principals and schools set sail every morning when it would be easier to stay in the port during the everyday storms they face. That is inspiring, and it just might be what Sister Mary Clare was trying to teach me all those years ago.



**Fall 2020**

**STUDENTS BY RISK CATEGORY / GRADES 1-3**



When Annunciation Catholic School in Minneapolis returned to in-person learning in September 2020, Principal Kari Zobel quickly saw the need for more reading instruction.

“We had a high percentage of second graders not reading at grade level because they had missed several months of in-person instruction during that critical first-grade year,” Zobel said. “Fortunately, our teachers are trained in Believe and Read and knew how to meet those students’ needs. Many students made phenomenal progress throughout the year.”

The Catholic Schools Center of Excellence’s Believe and Read initiative, in partnership with Groves Learning Organization and Cretin-Derham Hall, brings a structured, scientific approach to reading into K–3 Catholic school classrooms.

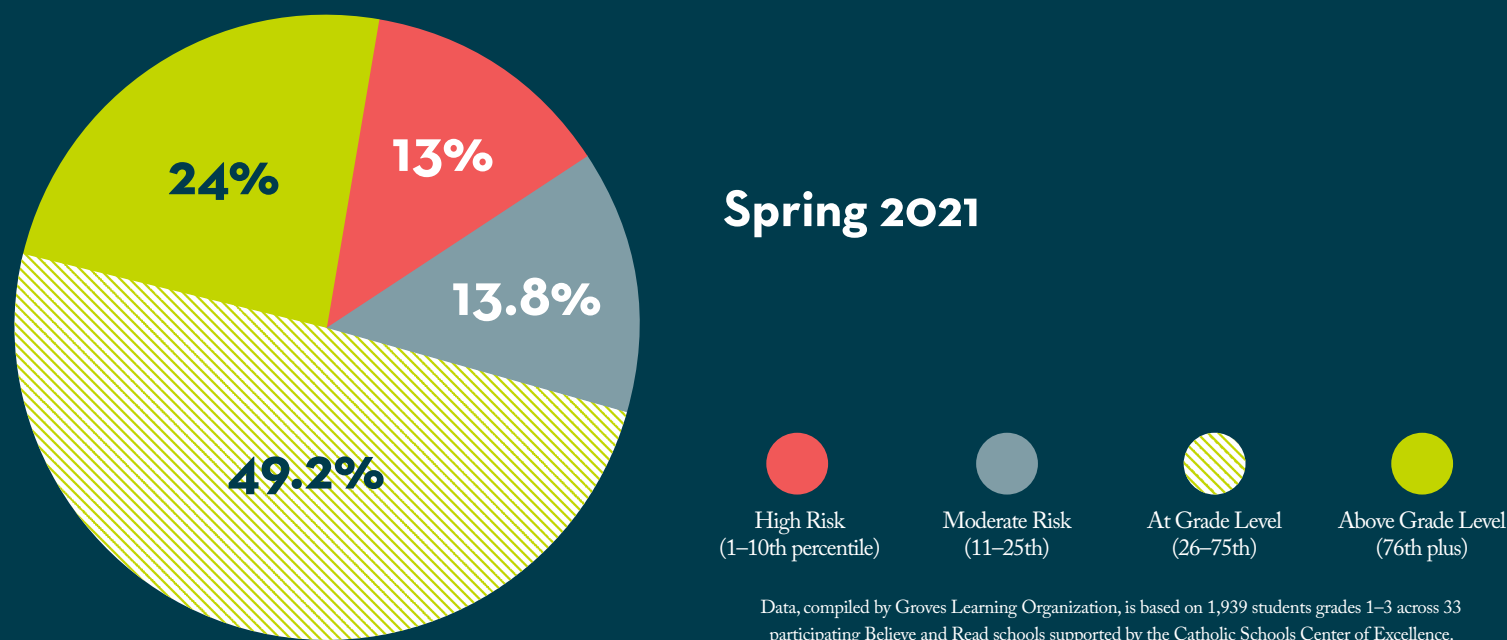
Helen Dahlman, a CSCOE excellence consultant, explained, “Believe and Read schools provide explicit instruction in phonic and phonemic awareness. They teach letters and sounds in a specific way, while using a multisensory approach, so kids who process differently can grasp the concepts.”

Now in its third year at 44 Twin Cities area Catholic schools, Believe and Read aims to ensure that every student reads at or above grade level by fourth grade. That’s the time, Dahlman emphasized, when kids move from learning to read to reading to learn.

**56% OF STUDENTS**  
at moderate risk in the fall were reading  
at or above grade level by spring.

**1 IN 5 STUDENTS**  
at grade level were reading above grade level  
(in the top 25% of the nation) by the end of the year.

**50% REDUCTION**  
of high-risk students in the spring,  
after just one year of instruction.



“Typically, we see about 20% of students in Catholic schools not reading at grade level — and that’s still too high,” said CSCOE President Brian Ragatz. In schools participating in Believe and Read, that number drops to under 9% for third-grade students whose classrooms have used the program for at least one year. “That demonstrates how impactful this program can be,” Ragatz added.

Data gathered from 33 schools during the 2020–21 school year reinforce Annunciation’s experience that Believe and Read dramatically boosts reading levels. Fifty percent of students at high risk of reading failure in fall 2020 were found to no longer be in that category by spring 2021; they had already moved on to reading at or above grade level.

Also in fall 2020, 58% of new students to the program were reading at or above grade level. By the following spring, proficient readers had increased to 71%.

“You might wonder, ‘Are the data real?’ Yes, they’re real,” confirmed Beth Sable, a first-grade teacher at Annunciation who is becoming certified as the school’s reading coach.

Allison Klint believes Sable’s training through Believe and Read contributed to early intervention for her second-grade son, who has been diagnosed with dyslexia. “The teachers are able to really see where kids are, where they are struggling and can flag concerns sooner,” Klint said. “I don’t think my son would be where he is today without Believe and Read.”



Ryan Pajak, principal of Nativity of Mary Catholic School in Bloomington, poses with students. Photo by Robert Cunningham



## *Increasing Enrollment*

### **CATHOLIC SCHOOLS SEE SECOND STRAIGHT YEAR OF GROWTH**

Recent enrollment growth and impressive retention continue in the nearly 80 preschool to eighth-grade Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, resulting in an increase of more than 1,200 students in the 2021-22 school year.

“This trend is reflective of the satisfaction families have in their school choice,” said Kelly Refsnider, director of enrollment for the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence. “Academic excellence, just-right class sizes, transformational opportunities and staff members joyfully dedicated to their vocation have attracted interest that hasn’t been seen in decades.”

Student enrollment at Nativity of Mary Catholic School in Bloomington has increased more than 15% in the past three years.

“When I started as principal in the 2019-20 school year, our enrollment was 323 students,” said Ryan Pajak, principal at Nativity of Mary. “In 2020-21, our enrollment was 352, and this year it’s at 383.”

Pajak noted that a major factor last year was the school’s commitment to in-person learning. “Once we had people here, they stayed,” he said. “Our new families resoundingly cited the community we have at Nativity as a major factor in their satisfaction.”



**11.4%**  
**STUDENT  
INCREASE**

**St. Ambrose Catholic School,  
Woodbury**

“Thanks to CSCOE’s marketing grant support and targeted ideas to suit our demographic, we have a more professional admissions and enrollment presence. With helpful feedback from CSCOE, we polished an existing prospective kindergarten event, incorporating a meal for parents and children as well as St. Ambrose Catholic School swag. We have a wonderful story to tell, and we are better at telling our story as a result of CSCOE’s investment in us.”

**-Principal Betsy Osterhaus Hand**

**20.1%**  
**STUDENT  
INCREASE**

**St. Hubert Catholic School,  
Chanhassen**

“CSCOE’s marketing grant has helped our efforts to continue attracting new students. St. Hubert is welcoming more and more families, including Latino families with help from CSCOE’s Latino enrollment team. As a result, St. Hubert’s total enrollment from preschool to eighth grade is the highest it’s been in over 10 years!”

**-Principal David Sorkin**

**27.7%**  
**STUDENT  
INCREASE**

**St. John the Baptist  
Catholic School, Vermillion**

“Two years ago, we ended the year with 84 students, and this year we started with 120. One of the biggest contributions from CSCOE was their investment in the growth of our preschool. This year, 80% of our graduating preschoolers chose to sign up for kindergarten. By getting these students in the door through our preschool, CSCOE helped us to show more families how great our school is.”

**-Principal Paul Dieltz**

CSCOE significantly helped Nativity of Mary attract and retain new students. CSCOE encouraged and supported the hiring of an admissions coordinator to help welcome new families. She outlines marketing strategies, helps streamline the admissions process and keeps new families engaged.

Pajak cited the value of CSCOE’s quarterly Admissions & Marketing Squad meetings to connect with other Catholic schools and share

recruitment and retention ideas. CSCOE’s Latino enrollment team is also instrumental in reaching families.

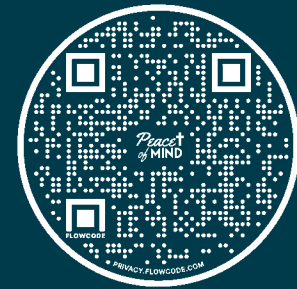
Pajak takes pride in nurturing personal faith lives, holding high academic standards and providing extracurricular opportunities, which have been cornerstones at Nativity of Mary.

“I was told when I started here that Nativity was Bloomington’s best-kept secret,” he said. “We are hoping to change that by cultivating a

# Peace<sup>+</sup> of MIND

Our mental health and wellness initiative provides support for everyone in Catholic school communities. Last year, more than 5,000 people joined our educator and parent webinars, which we continue to provide through our partner, Dr. Jules Nolan and her team at Twin Cities-based Phoenix School Counseling. In fall 2021, 10 Catholic schools joined our new Peace of Mind Partner School Initiative to receive more direct support and resources. KARE11 and KSTP covered the training we hosted for schools last summer.

*Watch some of the coverage and learn more about Peace of Mind:*



## Your Generosity

# 87%

### **Rising test scores**

Catholic school students are growing and achieving. 87% of CSCOE schools demonstrated high achievement in reading, and 85% demonstrated high achievement in math. These schools saw the majority of their students meet or exceed their growth goals.



# 1,200+



## Enrollment increase

For the second straight year, Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis have grown enrollment by **more than 1,200 students**. It's been **40 years** since our archdiocese has experienced back-to-back increases.

*Read more on page 8.*



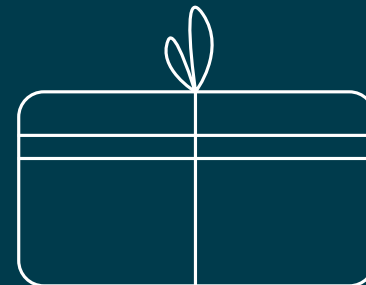
## Direct financial support

In 2021 alone, CSCOE will have distributed around \$4.9 million to schools to enhance excellence and increase enrollment. This includes direct school support, and centralized efforts that benefit all schools, such as leadership development and marketing.

# Fuels Our Mission

## ✚ BELIEVE AND READ

44 schools and nearly 5,000 students participate in this best-in-class literacy initiative, which helps more young students read at or above grade level by fourth grade. From fall 2020 to spring 2021, there was a **50% reduction in students identified as high risk** of reading failure. *Read more on page 6.*



## Thank you, teachers and staff

Because of our generous friends at Tierney and Catholic United Financial, and donors of the CSCOE Bash, we were able to give \$50 gift cards to all 3,000 Catholic school teachers and staff members across the greater Twin Cities metro area to thank them for their passion, innovation and dedication to students and families. CSCOE President Brian Ragatz delivered the gift cards and thank-you notes to all the schools.



Billboard photo courtesy Clear Channel Outdoor

Bridget D. from St. Timothy Catholic School in Maple Lake won first place in the for the Big Bang Catholic STEM Fair. She's pictured with CSCOE President Brian Ragatz and FOX9 Meteorologist Jennifer McDermid. *CSCOE photo*



## CSCOE'S TOP 5 OF 2021

### ① SHINE ON: A SHOWCASE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL TALENT

In partnership with Lundstrum Performing Arts, we hosted our third annual Shine On Showcase of Catholic School Talent for fourth- through eighth-grade students March 7 at Visitation School in Mendota Heights. Twenty-four students performed for a small live audience, and artwork from the 16 visual arts finalists was displayed throughout the program, which was streamed. CSCOE awarded the top finishers in both categories a monetary prize and provided a grant to the winners' schools for their arts programs.

### ② BIG BANG CATHOLIC STEM FAIR

More than 60 students in grades 3–8 from 22 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis showcased their research and experiments at our fourth annual Big Bang Catholic STEM Fair April 10 at St. Agnes School in St. Paul. Members of the Society of Catholic Scientists, as well as Col. Mike Hopkins, who was on a mission on the International Space Station, congratulated the students via videos. FOX9 meteorologist Jennifer McDermid presented student awards with CSCOE President Brian Ragatz.

Winners received family memberships to local museums, and the first-place winners in the third- to fifth-grade and sixth- to eighth-grade age brackets each won a trip to the Vatican Observatory in Arizona, as well as a \$500 grant to their schools' STEM programs, all provided by CSCOE.



From left: Ava R. from St. Peter Catholic School in North St. Paul (first place); emcee Matt Birk; Kate B. from Providence Academy in Plymouth (second place); Brian Ragatz, CSCOE president; Meredith K. from Frassati Catholic Academy in White Bear Lake (third-place tie); and siblings Delvin, Mason and Nora T. of Highland Catholic School in St. Paul (third-place tie) display their trophies after the Shine On talent show. *Photo by Robert Cunningham*



### ③ VIP LEADERSHIP UN-CONFERENCE

Responding to Catholic school principals' need to recharge, we turned our annual leadership conference into a two-day "Very Important Principal Leadership Un-Conference," with the goals of thanking them, inspiring them and filling their cups. Guest speakers facilitated laughter and learning while unpacking the lessons of leading in turbulent times.

**"You have no idea how much I needed this. In fact, I didn't know I needed this. But I know one thing for sure – I'm leaving a better leader and person than I was when I came. THANK YOU, CSCOE! You get it!" -Catholic school principal**

### ④ NEW LATINO ENROLLMENT OFFICE

We opened a new Latino enrollment office in Richfield, where our three Spanish-speaking team members meet individually with families to help them find a Catholic-school home. Father James Peterson, pastor of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and School in Columbia Heights, blessed the new office in June.

### ⑤ CATHOLIC SCHOOL MARKETING CAMPAIGN BLITZ

We keep spreading the great word about Catholic schools as they continue to welcome more students. Our Catholic school commercials aired on Cities 97.1, MPR News and KFAN FM 100.3, and we'll continue our KOOL108 Christmas commercials. As part of this back-to-school campaign, we also streamed commercials on iHeartRadio, produced digital ads, launched four billboards across the Twin Cities and staffed a booth at the Minnesota State Fair. Families know they can #CountOnCatholicSchools.

# SMALL-TOWN SCHOOL REALIZES BIG-TIME DREAM

St. John the Baptist in  
Jordan adds middle school

Even through the COVID-19 pandemic, Catholic schools are finding creative ways to thrive. St. John the Baptist Catholic School in Jordan is one of them. Next fall, it will open a middle school for seventh- and eighth-grade students.



“We take good risks,” said Father Neil Bakker, pastor of St. John the Baptist. “It’s a disciple’s mentality. We trust in the Lord’s providence and take one step at a time.”

## **‘Always the dream’**

Not long ago, enrollment was declining at the preschool through sixth grade Catholic school. The public middle school started in fifth grade, so many families were leaving after fourth grade.

“We knew we needed to do something drastic,” Father Bakker said.

A middle school expansion was always the dream. Fortunately, the school had an unused second-floor space from an educational facility built in 2003. Since then, the St. John the Baptist community had been paying off debt and praying for the right opportunity to grow again.

But finishing the space to accommodate middle school classrooms would cost more than \$2 million — a high price to fund in a small community amid the uncertainty of a pandemic. Father Bakker called together his “dream team” of parish and school leadership, including a long-time school parent, to explore the school’s growth. Everyone was on board.

“Over the past 20 years, so many dedicated educators, parents and parishioners gave their all to keep the dream alive,” said middle school teacher Suzanne Colling.

In fall 2020, Father Bakker met with an architect and builder, the project received approval, and fundraising began in March 2021. By April, the funds were secured thanks to many parishioners and one donor’s generous contribution that propelled the expansion.

Construction began at the end of the 2020–21 academic year when the school’s 111 students began summer break. This fall, the school welcomed





Father Neil Bakker, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church and School in Jordan, speaks to fifth-grade students in the newly renovated middle school space.  
*Photo by Robert Cunningham*

156 students — including the sixth-grade students who will comprise the first eighth-grade graduating class two years from now.

### **Enhanced excellence, increased enrollment**

Father Bakker said the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence has been a key partner in St. John the Baptist's growth, including its middle school expansion.

"CSCOE saw that we were implementing good plans for growth, and their support helped to slingshot us in the right direction," Father Bakker said of its significant investment over the years.

In addition to providing matching grants to support the school's fundraising efforts, CSCOE funding has supported teacher retention and academic excellence. Because the school has access to educational resources through the C-STEM Lending Library, provided by CSCOE

and the University of St. Thomas School of Engineering, school donors felt confident they could support the middle school expansion project rather than specific STEM initiatives.

To grow the community, Father Bakker proactively wrote personalized letters inviting people to join their school, purchased a bus to improve access, and worked directly with CSCOE to provide resources and support to welcome more Latino families.

Members of the school community also knew the importance of reaching out to new families, as well as existing families, to share about the school's strength and vibrance. Dream Team member Jason Schmit's daughter, Annie, will be among the first students to attend through eighth grade.

"We feel so blessed and proud ... especially for the leadership of Father Neil," Schmit said.



# CSCOE SUPPORTERS

## Lisa Anderson

**"For kids, this is *the* time to reach them, *the* time to let them know that they are lovable and capable and a child of God."**

Lisa Anderson has always been an advocate for Catholic education and at-risk children. Her heart for both is what drove her to become a champion of the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence.

Raised in Omaha, Nebraska, Anderson credits her childhood parish and Catholic school, in addition to her parents, with giving her a solid footing to build a successful life. "For me, supporting and working in Catholic education is cellular — it runs through me," Anderson said.

It was CSCOE connections that led to Anderson's position as director of schools for the Healey Education Foundation, where she coaches Catholic school leaders on how to maintain sustainability and achieve growth by creating effective school boards. In addition to Anderson's work, her eight nieces and nephews, who all attend Catholic schools, keep Catholic education front and center.

Anderson believes fervently in CSCOE's ability to address important issues facing young Catholic school students through impactful programs like Believe and Read, and Peace of Mind. Anderson generously supports both financially.

Believe and Read, which seeks to ensure students are reading at or

above grade level by the fourth grade, dovetails with her longtime interest in literacy advocacy. Her mother instilled a love of reading in her at a young age.

"Reading opens you up to so many possibilities," Anderson said. "Once you can read, then learning becomes that much easier. And the enjoyment of reading makes you a stronger learner."

This love of reading inspired her to become one of the first people to sponsor Believe and Read in a Catholic school. (*Read more about Believe and Read on page 6.*)

The mental health and wellness resources offered through Peace of Mind also appeal to her because of an early life lesson from her father about the importance of a supportive family and community. Since then, she's been passionate about helping children who lack those support networks, which Catholic schools provide.

"I can't think of any kids who are more at risk than those without a faith life," Anderson said. "For kids, this is *the* time to reach them, *the* time to let them know that they are lovable and capable and a child of God. That's why I support Catholic education."





Sister Maria Ivana, principal of St. Croix Catholic School in Stillwater, distributes Communion to a student during a school Mass. *Photo by Robert Cunningham*

# Catholic school communities inspire families to join the Church

By Sister Maria Ivana, O.P.  
Principal, St. Croix Catholic School, Stillwater

The 2020–21 school year brought a notable increase in new students to St. Croix Catholic School (SCCS). We’ve also been blessed that many of those families have joined the Catholic Church.

Like all schools in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, SCCS welcomes Catholic and non-Catholic families. All are invested in who we are as a Catholic school — the key is openness and support. Our partnership with families is grounded in a willingness to dialogue and the acknowledgment that we are all on a journey and that we’re in it together.

In spring 2021, we were overjoyed when six of our children from second through sixth grade, as well as several parents, joined the Church at varying stages.

“The teachers at St. Croix Catholic welcomed me and made me feel so comfortable,” said seventh-grade student Alli Dombrovski, who began attending SCCS in the 2020–21 school year. “I was inspired to receive First Communion because my religion teacher said I could be closer to Jesus.”

The welcoming spirit at all Catholic schools encourages students to jump in with both feet and enter fully into who they are. Faith is at the root of all that we do — everything begins and ends with the Lord. Catholic schools form our children, through a Catholic worldview and approach, to think deeply whether in math and science or religion class. This means seeking the truth in all things, which leads us to Jesus, who is the Truth.

It is a gift to be on this journey together and to witness SCCS students and families, along with others in the archdiocese, draw closer to the Lord, and in many cases, join our Catholic faith. How pleased the Lord must be by all our efforts to draw others to him and to love him more and more!

# CSCOE TEAM



Brian Ragatz,  
President



Mike Halloran,  
Vice President of  
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Ben Tierney,  
Director of Excellence



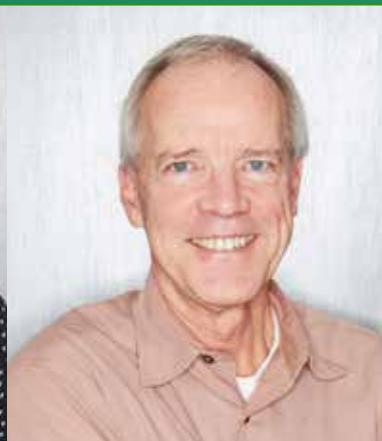
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# *A look to* **2022**

## **SHINE ON!**

**March 6**



**April 9**

## **CSCOE** *Bash*

**May 7**

## **CSCOE** **OPEN**

**August 22**

*Catholic Schools*  
**SUMMIT OF EXCELLENCE**

**October 19**

### **CATHOLIC SCHOOLS** **CENTER OF EXCELLENCE**

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