

DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL

From the desk of the Superintendent



Greetings from 901 Orange Grove Road! Reflecting on the past six months have been a tremendous blessing to me. As I stepped into my role as superintendent here in the Diocese of Charleston, in many ways, I felt like a brand new student on the first day of school. God has been so good to me and has provided abundant grace as I adjust to new faces and places here in Charleston. I've been blessed by the tremendous support of Bishop Fabre, many priests, colleagues and the faculty, staff and parents in our schools. I am truly grateful.

My hardworking colleagues in the Catholic Schools Office have joined me for weekly staff meetings as well as bimonthly days of reflection and planning. We are beginning to collaborate as a team to ensure the best use of our time and talent in order to support the staff in our schools who so beautifully have answered God's call to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19). As several schools are preparing for their internal review for the upcoming accreditation process, we too are conducting a mini internal review of all the resources we provide to leaders and teachers. First and foremost, we are ensuring that everything we endorse and promote is mission aligned and consistent with Christian anthropology which is the foundation of an authentic Catholic education. Mindful that each of us is called to witness to the Catholic faith, we hold dear our sacred duty and obligation to uphold the Church's teachings in all that we say and do.

As we remain steadfast to our mission, we are excited for the first year of Bishop Fabre's five-year plan (*Via Fidelis*): Evangelization! Catholic schools don't mirror public education but instead are set apart with the primary mission to form saints for Heaven. In doing so, it is our responsibility and great blessing to evangelize the young souls whom God and parents have entrusted to our care.

As we enter this new year, I look forward to visiting many more schools and meeting many new people. These visits bring great joy to my heart as I see God's truth, goodness and beauty in the face of every student eager to grow and learn and in every faculty member dedicated to leading these little souls to Heaven.

With a grateful heart, I wish you a peaceful and blessed start to the New Year!

Colleen M. Donohoe

SUPERINTENDENT



Our *Mission Statement*

Taking to heart the call to 'make disciples of all nations' (Mt 28:19), Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Charleston offer families of all backgrounds the richness of a quality Catholic education rooted in a dynamic encounter with Jesus Christ. His living presence suffuses a relevant, rigorous and competitive curriculum, inspires the great ideal of Catholic education, and empowers all to respond to the challenge of sharing the Gospel of salvation in word and loving action.

JOIN US ONLINE!



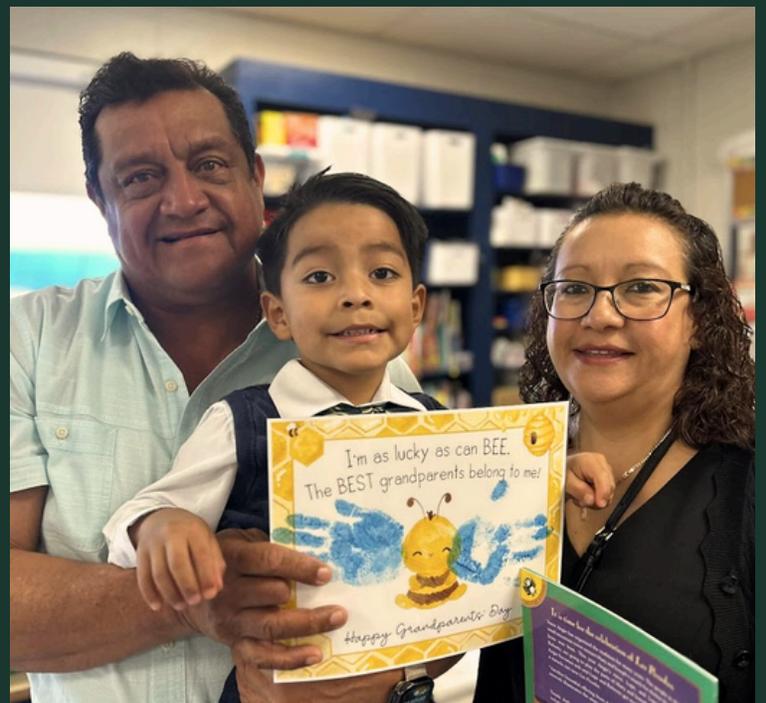
www.facebook.com/diocesefcharlestoncathschools



[@diocesefcharlestoncathschools](https://www.instagram.com/diocesefcharlestoncathschools)



charlestondiocese.org/schools



UPSTATE HIGHLIGHTS

St. Joseph School, Anderson

BISHOP JACQUES PAYS A VISIT

St. Joseph School in Anderson had a special visit from Bishop Jacques! He celebrated our school Mass, visited classrooms, and showed off some of his soccer skills with the students. The students were thrilled to spend time with him and ask questions.



LOWCOUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS

*St. Francis School,
Hilton Head*

GRANDPARENTS DAY

Grandparents Day 2024, “An Americana Salute” was held Nov. 11 at St. Francis School with over 225 grandparents, “grandfriends” and family in attendance. Participants attended in a special Mass and a welcome breakfast, watched a school-wide musical performance, visited class-rooms and toured the campus.

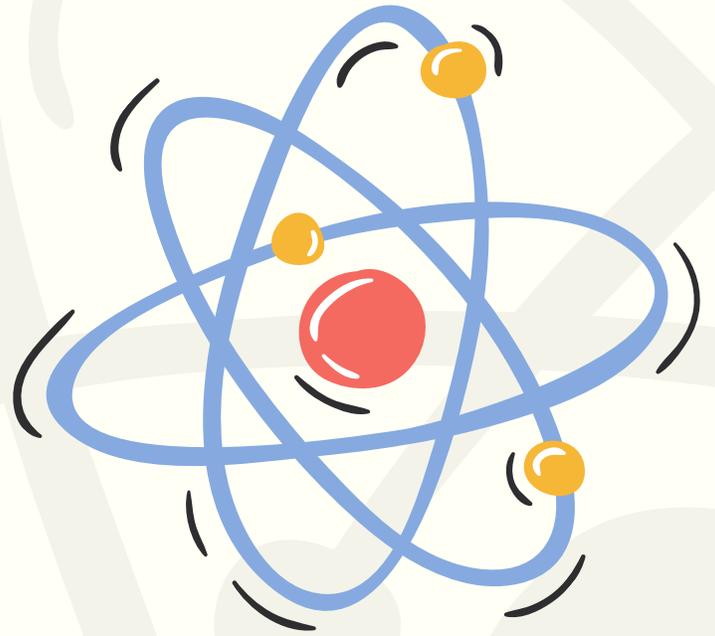


PEE DEE HIGHLIGHTS

*St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School,
Myrtle Beach*

A NEW SCIENCE INITIATIVE

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School is instituting a Health Sciences program in January 2025. This program is in conjunction with HOSA of S.C., as well as McLeod Health Systems. The new administration at Seton Catholic strongly believes in providing career planning programs and insights that invite and equip students to prepare for life after school all while following God's unique plan for their lives.



MIDLANDS HIGHLIGHTS

St. Joseph, St. John Neumann & St. Anthony Schools

ST. JOSEPH - Columbia

On Aug. 30, St. Joseph School became the first nonpublic school in South Carolina to earn the prestigious Purple Star designation for its exceptional support of military families. Principal Donovan Yarnall highlighted the school's dedication, emphasizing its role in providing love and peace of mind to military-connected students. Mayor Daniel Rickenmann and Diocese of Charleston Superintendent Colleen Donohoe commended the achievement.

ST. JOHN NEUMANN - Columbia

On Nov. 12, St. John Neumann School received the same honor during a patriotic ceremony with veterans, students wearing red, white and blue, and performances of patriotic songs. Guests included Donohoe and S.C. State Rep. Heather Bauer. Under Principal Ron Poles and the Purple Star Committee, the school supports military families through Veterans' Day celebrations and "Purple Up" events. These schools are two of only four in the state to receive this distinction.

ST. ANTHONY - Florence

This fall, for the second year in a row, St. Anthony School won the Post & Courier's Pee Dee Readers' Choice awards for:

- Best Private School
- Best Preschool
- Best Afterschool Program



COASTAL HIGHLIGHTS

Come & See Retreat Youth Activation Council Summit

The six Catholic elementary schools in the Coastal Region — Blessed Sacrament, Christ our King-Stella Maris, Divine Redeemer, Nativity, Summerville Catholic and the Charleston Catholic — collaborated to bring together over 90 students for an eighth grade retreat. Led by Mike Sylvester, with music by Fernando Cartegena, the day consisted of fellowship, Mass, small group reflection and talks that focused on encountering Jesus. The region hopes to make this an annual event.

Bishop England High School Students from the Options Program and Options Scholars participated in the Youth Activation Council (YAC) Summit. Students from the Lowcountry came together to build leadership skills, connect and collaborate on ways to grow the Unified Champion program in South Carolina.

YAC students develop leadership skills while creating more inclusive schools and communities in South Carolina.



ESTF FUND UPDATE

Providing Emergency Financial Assistance to Our Families

On May 5, 2023, Gov. Henry McMaster signed the Education Scholarship Trust Fund Act into law. The program allowed qualifying South Carolina parents to apply for a scholarship worth \$6,000 annually per student. Unfortunately, on Sept. 11, 2024, the S.C. Supreme Court ruled that the use of ESTF for tuition at nonpublic schools was unconstitutional. This left over 190 students in our schools without access to assistance for the rest of the school year.

We are grateful to announce that the diocesan Stewardship & Mission Advancement team immediately began collaborating with Catholic school leadership to ensure that all students in need would continue to receive a Catholic education in South Carolina. The establishment of the St. Rita Relief Fund has been a tremendous blessing. Through the generosity of donors, plus an out-of-state benefactor and philanthropist, the second quarter tuition was covered for all ESTF students statewide.

We give thanks to God, and we are grateful for all who sacrificed so generously on behalf of our children and families. We are truly blessed to have donors who believe deeply in the mission of Catholic education.



IGNITED BY FAITH - UNITED IN LEARNING

Strategic Plan Update

Through ongoing focused collaboration and strategic planning among stakeholders, we have accomplished many critical initiatives.

In the Diocese of Charleston, these initiatives drive improvement, align resources with mission-driven goals, and foster a culture of excellence across all four pillars of the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS).



Strategic Plan

CRITICAL INITIATIVES

Through on-going focused strategic planning, DSAC has accomplished the following:



MISSION & CATHOLIC IDENTITY

We are thrilled to share exciting updates in our mission to expand access to Catholic education across the Diocese of Charleston, encompassing early childhood through grade 12.

EXPANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION — To advance the development of preschools throughout the state, we are delighted to welcome Faith Rummelsburg as Director of Preschool Development & Academic Success. Faith has already made significant strides by identifying locations in underserved areas of the state where new preschools can assist families seeking faith-filled early education. With a goal of opening four new preschools by August 2025, Faith is actively recruiting faith-filled Catholic preschool directors and teachers to bring the bishop's vision to life.

FAITH IN ACTION — Chaplains, campus ministers, faculty and students from Cardinal Newman, St. John Paul II and Bishop England schools are putting their faith into action by participating in a **Youth Pilgrimage for Life** to Washington, D.C. Accompanied by Superintendent Colleen Donohoe and other CSO staff, they will join thousands of young people from across the nation at the **National March for Life**, which is held annually. They will prayerfully advocate for the dignity and sanctity of every human life.

These initiatives underscore our commitment to providing authentic Catholic education and forming young people as witnesses to the faith.



GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP

STRATEGIC PLANNING — The initiative to develop local school strategic plans aligned with the accreditation process is a vital component of quality Catholic education. Accreditation serves as a benchmark, ensuring that schools meet rigorous standards for delivering an academically strong Catholic education while promoting continuous improvement.

Schools align their operational goals with the broader diocesan strategic vision — “Ignited by Faith, United in Learning,” the framework for all 32 Catholic schools in the diocese — by engaging in strategic planning. Focusing on intentional planning and leveraging resources efficiently means our schools maximize their educational impact, continually adapt to their unique community needs, and strengthen their commitment to providing a Christ-centered Catholic education.

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION — Creating a Recruitment and Retention Framework is crucial for sustaining the quality and mission-driven purpose of Catholic schools. This initiative addresses the challenge of attracting and retaining faithfully Catholic, mission-minded educators and leaders.

The collaborative efforts of the Office of Human Resources at the Chancery, including the addition of new recruiters, represents an exciting step in this direction. They will assist our schools in identifying and attracting Catholic educators and leaders who are competent and deeply supportive of the vision and mission of Catholic education.

Father Andrew Fryml has been appointed Coordinator of Pastoral Care, and he brings a valuable layer of support. By acting as a liaison between school pastors, principals and the Catholic Schools Office, Father Fryml will help strengthen relationships and pastoral connections within schools.



Strategic Plan

CRITICAL INITIATIVES

Through on-going focused strategic planning, DSAC has accomplished the following:



OPERATIONAL VITALITY

In the area of advancement, the president-principal model is now implemented in each diocesan high school. This beneficial structure allows for a clear division of responsibilities that can enhance the spiritual and operational success of a school. Allowing each person to focus on his/her strengths and areas of expertise, schools can foster a vibrant, mission-driven educational environment that is spiritually enriching and operationally efficient. This collaborative approach allows the president and principal to address the unique needs of their Catholic school.

We are excited to enhance the pipeline for future Catholic school educators by continuing to welcome young teaching fellows, including Annie Griffin (Summerville Catholic), Mike Sobol (Bishop England), Grace Mayo (Blessed Sacrament), and Alex Pawlica (Nativity) to the Diocese of Charleston. These educators from Notre Dame's Ace Teaching Fellowship have committed to two years working in our schools while pursuing master's degrees in education through Notre Dame.



ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Teachers who believe in their ability to positively impact learning create classrooms filled with purpose, setting a tone that promotes both academic and spiritual growth. Recognizing the importance of collaboration in teacher efficacy, the Catholic Schools Office (CSO) has introduced two diocesan-wide Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): the Testing Coordinators and the Learning Support Coordinators. This fall, these groups had the valuable opportunity to meet in person, engaging in professional growth and exchanging insights to refine their practices.

Looking ahead, the CSO is hopeful that more PLCs will form to allow additional grade-level teams and subject departments to share expertise, develop best practices, and continue their own learning, ultimately enhancing the quality of education across the diocese. Additionally, we are blessed to welcome consultant Steven Rummelsburg who serves as Director of Leader & Teacher Formation. Steven provides invaluable mentoring and support to new teachers and leaders as well as teachers who may be struggling in the classroom and who need a little extra one-on-one support.



For the fourth summer in a row, a team of teachers and principals gathered for a week-long project to review science standards and build curriculum guides to support them. This annual summer initiative focused on thoughtful integration of faith and learning, showing how Catholicism can uniquely engage with science while upholding Christian anthropology. The team reviewed and refined the standards, ensuring they align with best practices in science while also discovering cross-curricula connections to the Catholic faith. The inclusion of "Saints in Science" offers a powerful way to connect students with real-life examples of men and women who have harmonized faith and scientific inquiry — like St. Albert the Great, patron saint of scientists, or St. Hildegard of Bingen, a polymath known for her contributions to natural science and medicine. These figures serve as inspiring role models who demonstrate that scientific exploration and religious belief are compatible and enrich one another.

Implementing Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching (FFT) is a key initiative to foster a culture of sustained professional growth for teachers. It places teacher formation at the heart of the evaluation process. Research confirms that a structured framework for teaching positively impacts instructional quality, which is why after two years of careful deliberation, the Academic Excellence team recommended the Danielson model for our Catholic schools. Before the start of the academic year, teachers and principals participated in a day-long training session titled "A Vision for Excellence." The training established a shared understanding of best practices for instruction and the characteristics of effective student engagement in classrooms. Principals then took part in a two-day training program, "Growth Observation & Feedback," to refine their observation and evaluation techniques. Equipped with these enhanced skills, principals are better prepared to support teachers' growth in actionable and impactful ways.