

## Vision for Catholic Schools Diocese of Grand Rapids

### Summary of Additional Comments

The purpose of this summary paper is to identify prevalent themes that were identified in the “Additional Comments” section of the Vision for Catholic Schools survey. The survey included 46 pages of open comments made by the survey respondents. During the reading of each comment, great care was taken to clarify the content of each comment and to identify general themes. Some of the comments could be interpreted in different ways; therefore, this summary of additional comments may not reflect 100% accuracy of the questionnaire respondent’s intended content. This being said, several strong themes emerged from the comments. These themes will be utilized to inform future diocesan planning sessions and addressed accordingly in future action plans.

One of the strongest themes present in the comments focused on the importance of Catholic education for all children. Many statements advocated for the inclusion of all students so that Catholic schools would have a diverse population. Several respondents talked about adding to the diversity of our schools by including children of other faiths. Several statements expressed concern that Catholic schools should not be only for high academic achievers but should also meet the needs of “average” and special needs children. The words “elite” and “status schools” were used. Several comments focused on financially challenged families who may be able to give more of their time and talents rather than their limited treasures. Some respondents expressed concern that 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were denied a Catholic high school education due to the new entrance criteria.

Another theme that ran through the comments focused on the importance of Catholic education and its impact on living life as a Catholic. Respondents identified their experiences in the Catholic school environment as a fundamental part of living a Catholic life. Comments included the importance of passing on their Catholic education and faith to others. A similar theme identified the need for Catholic schools to be “Catholic” in all academic/athletic/social activities; ensuring that Catholicism is nurturing body, mind, and spiritual development. A few respondents stated that all teachers in Catholic schools should be of the Catholic faith.

Tuition was also discussed. Several comments focused on the need to ensure affordable tuition so that Catholic schools continue to be a viable option for families rather than parents placing their children in public schools. Comments advocated for affordable tuition for families, including multi-student discounts, however, other comments discussed the need for tuition to be set at a level that will support the school and staff. Suggestions included providing more financial aid funded through individual school’s Education Foundations or Bishop’s Scholarship grants. Scholarships based on need were encouraged, scholarships based on athletics were discouraged.

Collaboration between schools generated many comments. Most statements identified the importance of collaboration within the Catholic schools, especially in light of diminished or limited resources. Statements discussed stewardship and living the gospel by sharing with those schools that have less. One comment suggested that schools with greater resources “sister” or partner with another school that has fewer resources. However, there were a few comments that asked if collaboration between schools was a realistic expectation and that collaboration should not be done at the expense of higher achieving schools.

Several respondents advocated for their school and expressed appreciation for the things that make their school unique. There was concern that too many changes would result in schools losing their individuality and identity.

Class size was also discussed. Most comments indicated that classes should be limited to 20 students. Generally, there was support for small classes but not much support for multi-grade classes.

Involvement of the Diocese was also identified. Comments ranged from strong support for the Office of Catholic Schools and the new work that is being done, to comments stating that the Diocese is taking too much control and “micro-managing” schools. Several comments expressed frustration that the Diocese did not place enough emphasis on financial support towards Catholic schools.

The comments generated by this survey demonstrate a deep commitment to Catholic education. While some comments were very short, other comments went into great detail. There were many comments that did not fit into a theme but have value as the respondent took time to express his/her thoughts. This summary is intended to be a brief overview of the additional comments from the Vision for Catholic Schools survey questionnaire. All board members and interested parties are encouraged to take the time to read the comments in detail.