



OFFICE OF EDUCATION

February 17, 2016

Dear Parents,

Today the Diocese of Erie unveiled *Building in Truth and Love*, the highly anticipated final plan for Catholic schools throughout the 13-county diocese. The blueprint is part of the most comprehensive pastoral planning effort the diocese has undergone in several decades. I join Bishop Persico in believing parents in the Erie area will be very happy with the final plan. It is built on data, but also incorporates imagination and inspiration.

Bishop Persico and the Catholic Schools Office are deeply committed to system-wide, age-appropriate opportunities for middle school students. We are designing a more focused approach for students in grades six to eight, increasing academic rigor, emphasizing high school preparedness and expanding offerings ranging from faith formation to international languages.

We asked for feedback from the community, and the community responded with great passion. In light of the deep desire voiced by so many people who value the PreK-8 system, ultimately, we felt we could accomplish our goals of academic excellence in a faith-based environment while keeping all our students in PreK-8 buildings. We know it will take a multi-million dollar effort, and we are prepared to reach out and see what we can do to raise the funds necessary to make sure each campus in the new system has what it needs to create a distinct middle school within its building.

The final plan calls for the creation of the Erie Catholic School System which will replace the current array of independent, parish-based schools. The Erie Catholic School System will be similar to the approach already successfully established in three areas of the diocese—DuBois, the Shenango Valley and Elk County.

The new system will comprise six campuses: **Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady of Peace, Our Lady's Christian, St. George, St. James and St. Luke** and is expected to open in August 2017. Two other schools, **Our Lady of Mount Carmel School** and **St. Boniface School**, will close after the 2016-17 academic year. Opportunities to develop **Holy Family School** into a separately incorporated diocesan school with philanthropic support from the wider community are being explored.

St. Gregory in North East will remain open, but participate in a new diocesan collaborative for parish-based schools (PBS). Eleven grade schools not connected to systems in the diocese will belong to the PBS Diocesan Collaborative, designed to strengthen and support the parish-based schools in smaller communities. In addition, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania have said they will continue to operate **Villa Maria Elementary** as a sponsored ministry.

Since October, the Catholic Schools Office of the Diocese has been listening to feedback and conducting additional research. We learned that people are passionate about our schools, as they should be. We will depend on your commitment and interest as we begin to implement this exciting plan. How fortunate we are to live in a region offering an outstanding Catholic education from PreK through high school!

You will find a link to *Building in Truth and Love* in its entirety, along with a news release about the plan, at **ChooseCatholicSchools.com**. In his letter at the beginning of the plan, Bishop Persico notes it is the fruit of intensive prayer, study, feedback and collaboration by parents, educators and pastors. "We now have a roadmap for faith-based academic excellence which is supported by our parishes and affordable for our families," he wrote, acknowledging there is still much work to do.

As a parent, you want the best for your children, especially in their education. I am confident that we are building a system of schools in which you will have great trust and pride. Over the coming months, we will continue to communicate with you and ask your help. Together, we can build remarkable Catholic schools.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Nicholas J. Rouch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "R".

The Reverend Nicholas J. Rouch, S.T.D.
Vicar for Education