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Diocese of Palm Beach

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Dear Catholic School Families,

We are looking forward to another great school year. I hope you have enjoyed some family time this summer. Many of our administrators, teachers and staff have been attending workshops and seminars. They have been spending time preparing for the new school year as they welcome your children back to their classrooms.

The 2013-14 school year was very busy with many outstanding accomplishments. As you know, two years ago we developed a *Strategic Vision 2020: Charting a Course for Excellence*, which is based on the National Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools. The Strategic Vision and the National Benchmarks guide us in four key areas: 1) Catholic Identity and Mission, 2) Academic Excellence, 3) Governance and Leadership, and 4) Operational Vitality. The amount of work already done on the plan is remarkable. To review the *Strategic Vision 2020* or the update on progress, *Faith Inspiring Excellence*, please cut and paste into your browser:

www.diocesepb.org/StrategicVision

We have two main goals in the Office of Catholic Schools (OCS):

1. Our schools must be Mission-driven, focusing on our Catholic Faith
2. Catholic schools Promote Academic Excellence within a Safe Environment

Of interest to many of our school families is our position on the Common Core State Standards. **The Diocese of Palm Beach is not adopting the Common Core State Standards for Math and English/Language Arts.** As it has been done in the past, the OCS will work with subject area Curriculum Coordinators from each of our Catholic schools to develop Diocesan Curriculum Guidelines. The purpose is to provide our students with an exemplary Catholic curriculum. The Diocesan Curriculum Guidelines will reflect current best practices from other Catholic dioceses, as well as other respected academic resources. Initial draft guidelines for Math and English/Language Arts were developed in 2013-14. Revisions will be made over the course of the 2014-15 school year. A final draft should be available for implementation by 2015-16.

There is a blogger in the diocese, who although well-intentioned, has erroneously reported “There will be **NO TRACE OF COMMON CORE** in anything that has to do with our Catholic schools in the Diocese of Palm Beach.” This error was also reported on a national website. **This is simply not true.** Given that over 80% of the education market is geared to Common Core, publishers have no choice but to move in that direction. I suspect that in our schools we will have textbooks and resource materials that will be stamped or marked as “Common Core Compatible” or some similar notation. Many of the resources our teachers have been using for years are now being redistributed by publishers with the Common Core brand. In most instances, these are the same books our teachers used before the Common Core was developed. In other cases the texts may have been developed for the Common Core curriculum, but could also meet our needs. Textbooks are a tool we use, not the curriculum we teach. For years our teachers have been teaching a rigorous curriculum which includes the use of higher-order thinking skills. This is what the Common Core is trying to emulate. **The Common Core lacks the key component that has made our schools successful - all that we teach and do in our schools is rooted in our Catholic faith.** Our administrators and teachers have always, and will continue to, carefully and prayerfully select the best resources possible to educate our children. We will be providing your child with an education rooted in the Catholic faith that prepares them not just for college and the world, but for a faith-filled life and the reward of Heaven!

We hope to support you in your decision to provide your child with a Catholic education where *Faith Inspires Excellence!*

Yours in Christ,

Gary Gelo
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