

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S CHRONICLE

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A quarterly newsletter provided by Catapult Learning, The *Superintendent's Chronicle* offers Catholic school leaders at the chancery-level current insights, ideas, and information about the landscape of Catholic schools and helpful tools for addressing emerging challenges.



The beginning of a new school year is always a time of excitement coupled with some anxiety, along with joy and a touch of sadness. While the relaxing and often idle days of summer wane, new horizons appear and new possibilities open as the new school year dawns. Though you may be returning to a familiar workplace and a regular routine, there is something new in every fresh beginning. Last year, for good or for ill, is over, and a new year of grace has begun.

Recent Changes Among Superintendents and Central Office Leaders for Catholic Education

Congratulations and best wishes to the following recently appointed (arch)diocesan superintendents:

Cindy Ryals	Diocese of Baton Rouge
Robin Perry	Diocese of Cheyenne
Amy Vaccarella	Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux
Sarah Lanhan	Diocese of Belleville
Miranda Chaplin	Diocese of Lexington
Ana Gomez	Diocese of Brownsville
Jim Murray	Diocese of Sioux City
Erin Vader	Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas
Randal Peters	Archdiocese of Santa Fe
Deacon Mike McGinty	Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis

We honor and celebrate the years of service, witness, and formation provided by superintendents who recently left their positions or have announced up their upcoming transition, including:

Rev. Michael Caruso, SJ	Diocese of Belleville
Kyle Lee	Diocese of Lexington
Cormac Lynn	Diocese of Saginaw
Donna Illerbrun	Archdiocese of Santa Fe

Readers are welcome to send any updates to Fr. Ron Nuzzi ron.nuzzi@catapultlearning.com or at 330.652.7944.

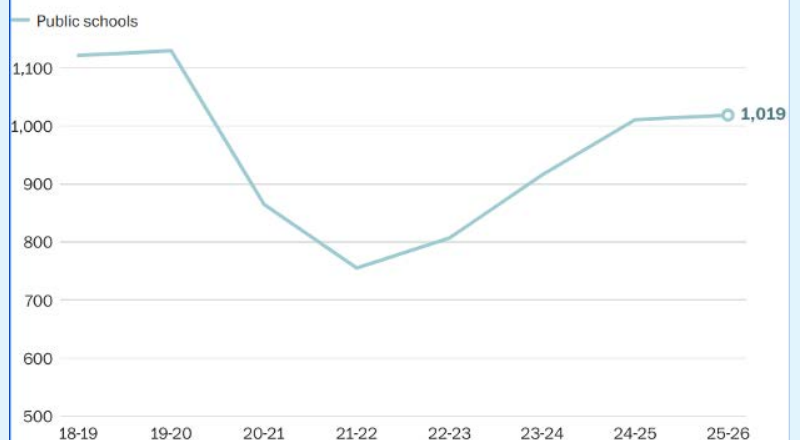
Shrinking Population Causes Spike in Public School Closures

Demographers are calling it “the big shrink,” as they witness a stunning thirty-five percent increase in public school closures during the last four years. The population of school-age youth has been declining for years, so this proverbial demographic cliff was not entirely unexpected. But the ending of COVID-relief funding added a complication that many leaders were simply not prepared to address.

Districts closed more than 1,000 schools in 2025-26, compared with 755 in 2021-22. And more closures are planned, including districts in Houston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Broward County in Florida. School closures slowed significantly during the pandemic years, as school leaders worked to manage multiple challenges during a very unusual and unprecedented crisis. Federal relief funds helped to support those efforts, but now that those dollars are spent, many districts are struggling to meet budget and realize that buildings must be closed.

School closures have risen since 2021-22

Number of public elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. that have closed each year.



Excludes schools in U.S. territories, overseas military schools, those focused on adult education and schools that were listed in the prior year as inactive, closed or planned for the future. 2025-26 data is preliminary.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Difficulties often arise if closing certain schools create transportation challenges for parents, or disproportionately impact racial and ethnic minorities. Add the competition provided in many states from robust school choice programs such as vouchers and tax credits, and a crisis situation can soon materialize.

For more on the big shrink click [here](#). State by state closure data from 2018-2025 can be found [here](#).

Catholic Leadership Summit (CLS) in Grand Rapids

Registration is open for the NCEA's annual Catholic Leadership Summit, being held this year in Grand Rapids, MI, October 18-21, 2026. Click [here](#) for additional information.



The University of Notre Dame's ACE Leadership Conference

Registration is ongoing for Notre Dame's annual ACE Leadership Conference, being held on campus in South Bend, IN November 8-10, 2026. Click [here](#) for more information.

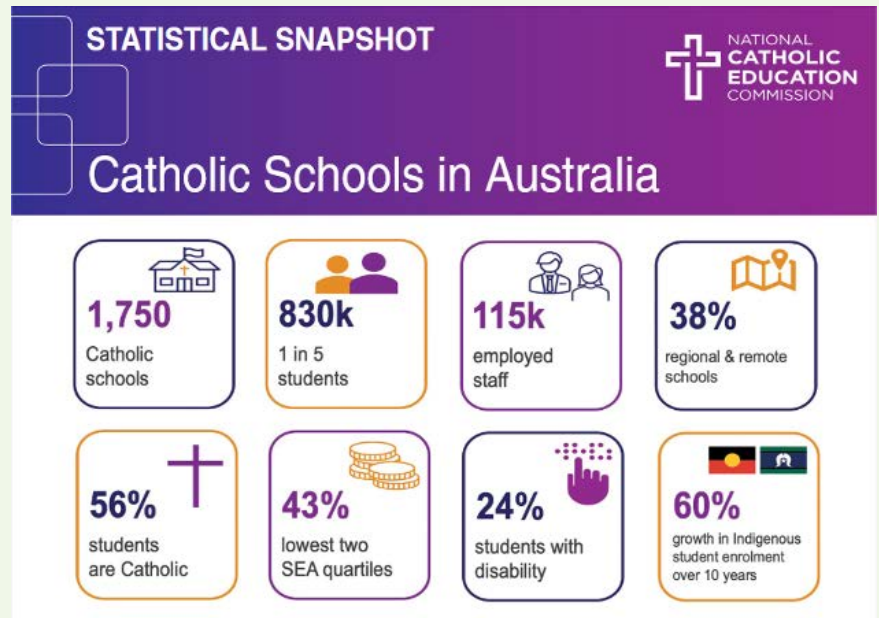


Annual NCEA Convention in Indianapolis

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis will serve as host for the annual NCEA Convention. The event, held annually during the octave of Easter, comes a bit early in 2027 and will be in downtown Indianapolis March 30 to April 1, 2027. In April 2028, the NCEA Convention is scheduled to be in Anaheim, CA.

Catholic Schools Exceeding Expectations in Australia

K-12 Catholic schools in Australia have long been the recipients of public funding, dating back to the early 1960s and the Goulburn School Strike (<https://www.robertmenziesinstitute.org.au/on-this-day/goulburn-catholic-school-strike-3/>). Inspired by a government mandate to remodel a Catholic school building, two thousand students showed up at the local government school asking to be enrolled, instantly overwhelming the public sector and clearly making the case for government support of private education.



Catholic schools have come a long way in Australia ever since, succeeding, growing, and expanding their reach. In addition to ongoing government support, many schools charge additional fees for a variety of costs, and enrollment continues to grow.

Recent research has taken to criticizing the success of Catholic schools and the commitment of parents to them by highlighting that the exodus from government schools means less funding for them and, *a fortiori*, more for Catholic schools. In fact, some argue that chronic underfunding is driving the exodus to private schools. The Australia Institute's recent report can be found [here](#).

Australia Catholic schools are highly successful and, therefore, highly desirable. The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC), Australia's version of our NCEA, publishes their own statistical overview annually. In addition to the brief snapshot above, the full report can be found [here](#).

The Latest on KRAs: Kindergarten Readiness Assessments

Minnesota is piloting a new approach to kindergarten assessment that shifts the focus away from testing children and toward understanding how schools can best support them. Rather than giving young students a traditional one-on-one test, teachers observe children naturally during everyday classroom activities. The goal is not to label children as "ready" or "not ready," but to build a developmental profile that helps teachers, families, and schools respond to each child's strengths and needs.

The assessment reflects a broader philosophy: children's success depends not only on what they know when they enter school, but also on the quality of the systems that support them. In addition to early literacy and math, the assessment looks at curiosity, problem-solving, communication, and social-emotional development—recognizing that these foundational skills are just as important for long-term academic success.

For more information of this new and emerging KRA, click [here](#).

Measles on the Rise

The United States has recorded 2,318 measles cases in 2026, already exceeding the 2,289 cases reported during all of 2025, making this the worst measles year since 1991. Major outbreaks in South Carolina, Utah, and Arizona have driven the surge, with public health officials warning that the true number of infections is likely much higher because many people never get tested or reported. The resurgence comes as childhood vaccination rates have fallen below the 95% threshold needed to prevent widespread outbreaks, dropping to 92.5% among kindergarteners.

Researchers believe official case counts significantly underestimate the size of outbreaks. Modeling suggests Utah's outbreak may be three to four times larger than reported, while Texas researchers estimate the state's 2025 outbreak may have been nearly twice as large as confirmed cases indicated. Public health experts stress that declining vaccination rates leave communities vulnerable, particularly infants, immunocompromised individuals, and others who cannot be fully protected by vaccination. They emphasize that vaccination is not only a personal choice but also a critical measure to protect the broader community.

For up to date information on outbreaks, state by state counts, and ongoing efforts to maintain an adequate vaccination level, click [here](#).



Part of the Solution to Social Emotional Immaturity: Looping

An old educational idea is gaining new momentum as a strategy for supporting the social and emotional needs of young learners. Many early educators report that today's students are entering preschool less prepared to learn than their predecessors, especially from a social-emotional perspective. This is where the benefits of looping can play an important role.

Looping is not a recent innovation. Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian philosopher, scientist and educator born in 1861, developed the Waldorf method, a child-centric approach to learning that emphasized high quality student-teacher relationships and recommended looping, especially in the early years. As teachers head back to their classroom to begin the new school year, they encounter a variety of familiar, necessary tasks: learning the names of their students, establishing daily routines, setting goals and expectations, and eventually ascertaining the strengths and weaknesses of each student. For those practicing looping, these challenges are considerably simplified because students are well known to one another and to their teachers.

While some estimates indicate that only 12% of schools practice looping, ongoing research has noted positive outcomes in academic growth, attendance, and behavior. For the latest on looping in the Pre-K years, click [here](#).

Life After the Superintendency

In an earlier age, aspiring educational leaders rose through the ranks—classroom teacher, department chair, assistant principal, principal, associate superintendent, superintendent—and might have capped off a career in education with a stint at a college or university, teaching and mentoring the next generation.

Today, movement through the proverbial career ladder goes much more quickly, and superintendents can be much younger. Being a diocesan superintendent does not necessarily signify the last stop on one's vocation journey, as evidenced by the following former superintendents who, having left office, are succeeding in consulting and speaking careers in support of Catholic education. Be welcome to reach out to any of them for more information about a potential engagement.



Henry Fortier—former superintendent in the Diocese of Orlando, and with extensive experience in the archdioceses of Baltimore and New York. Henry now leads Equitable Educational Services and is available to help educate school leaders about all types of federal programs and troubleshoot problem areas. Click [here](#) or email Henry at henry.fortier.essa@gmail.com.

George Valadie—former superintendent in the Diocese of Knoxville and a veteran Catholic teacher and principal with 40+ years of experience. George is at his best with keynote talks at diocesan gatherings, retreats, and other professional development activities for teachers and administrators. He is also a published author and regular columnist. Read some of his work [here](#). George can be reached at gvaladie@dioknox.org



Dave Faber, former superintendent in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, and his wife Sarah, have started a consulting firm, [Seek First](#), for advancing and supporting Catholic school leadership.

Melanie Palmisano, former superintendent in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, specializes in leadership coaching and school improvement services with her firm, InspirED. Click [here](#) for more information.



Dan Baillargeon, former superintendent in the Diocese of Springfield, MA, with his wife Megan, operate [Mission Driven Catholic](#), a consulting firm dedicated to Catholic school renewal.

High Impact Tutoring Driving Academic Success

High-Impact Tutoring (HIT) has emerged as one of the most effective strategies for accelerating learning and addressing learning gaps exacerbated by recent disruptions. Key research, including findings from the National Student Support Accelerator (NSSA) and the Annenberg Institute's EdResearch for Recovery design principles, highlights why intensive tutoring consistently yields significant academic gains for students who need support. The fundamental design elements that make tutoring "high-impact" include frequent sessions, small group sizes, highly-trained and consistent tutors, data-driven instruction, and alignment with school curricula.

For a detailed report and summary on the impact of high impact tutoring, click [here](#).

Profession Learning Community (PLC) for Superintendents

Boston College's Roche Center for Catholic Education and Catapult Learning continue to sponsor a PLC for diocesan superintendents and other Catholic school system leaders. In addition to monthly Zoom meetings, the PLC meets twice during the year in person for retreats and professional development. The fall 2026 retreat, immediately prior to the NCEA CLS gathering, will be held in South Haven, MI on October 16-18, 2026. The March Lenten retreat will be held at Manresa Jesuit Retreat Center in Dublin, Ireland.

For information about joining the PLC, contact Melodie Wyttenbach (wyttenba@bc.edu) or Fr. Ron Nuzzi (ron.nuzzi@catapultlearning.com).



Previous issues of The Superintendent's Chronicle dating back to Summer 2023 can be found [here](#).

PRAYER FOR THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR

At Summer's Turning

Gracious and Loving God,
Summer bows with a grateful smile,
its long, sunlit days
folded now into memory.

We thank You
for mornings that welcomed us
gently,
without the summons of an alarm;
for evenings that lingered beneath
painted skies;
for laughter that spilled across
backyards,
campfires,
vacation trails,
and family tables.

Thank You for journeys
that widened our eyes
and awakened our wonder;
for places both near and far
that reminded us
how vast is Your world
and how marvelous are Your works.
Now the school bells call again.

We come with hearts
holding two seasons at once—
a little sadness
to leave behind the freedom of
summer,
and great joy
to gather again with classmates and
friends.

Bless this new beginning.
May every classroom
become a place of discovery,
where curiosity is cherished,
truth is sought,
questions are welcomed,
and wisdom grows quietly,
day by day.
May our laughter echo through
these halls.

May our minds be challenged,
our gifts be awakened,
our hearts be strengthened,
and our faith shine brightly
in all we say and do.

Teach us to be kind
before we are clever,
generous
before we seek recognition,
and faithful
before we seek success.
Help us to see Christ
in every teacher who guides us,
every friend who walks beside us,
and every person
who needs our welcome and our
love.

We thank You
for the priceless gift
of a Catholic education,
where faith seeks understanding,
learning becomes an act of hope,
and every lesson
draws us closer
to the One who is
the Way,
the Truth,
and the Life.

As one season yields to another,
may we step forward with joyful
hearts,
ready to learn,
ready to serve,
ready to love.
And when this school year,
too,
becomes a cherished memory,
may we look back with gratitude,
knowing that in every ordinary day,
You were walking beside us.
Amen.