

Dear Parents,

As you are well aware by now, the Office of Catholic Schools and the Diocese have been seeking solutions to continue Catholic school education in the Cumberland County area.

After more than 10 months of consultations with your pastors and principals, the Diocese has come up with what we believe is a plan that can better sustain and grow Catholic education in your area.

These collaborative discussions were thoughtful and considered. The pastors and principals asked, after being unable to come to a consensus, for the Diocese to come up with a solution. They did agree that if there were to be consolidations, that it be done by closing schools rather than merging them.

Unfortunately, because of declining area enrollment and financial pressures, we will need to close three schools at the end of this academic year: Sacred Heart High School in Vineland, and two regional elementary schools, Notre Dame in Landisville/Newfield and St. Mary Magdalen, Millville. Two regional elementary schools, Bishop Schad in Vineland and St. Mary's in East Vineland, will remain open.

I have accepted these recommendations from the Office of Catholic Schools as the best response to sustain Catholic school education in the Cumberland County area.

The decision was made to deal now with long-term issues. For example: Sacred Heart, built for about 350 students, has a current enrollment of 202, of which 67 are in the senior graduating class. There also was a need to consolidate our regional elementary schools in Vineland as tuitions cannot be raised enough to keep up with costs and as parish subsidies have risen dramatically in recent years.

Still we want you to know that Catholic school education will remain available and that we are willing to assist in the transition process. Students in the two closed elementary schools who wish to transfer to another Catholic school will receive a \$1,000 tuition discount, made possible through a subsidy from their parishes. Students transferring from Sacred Heart High School will also receive a \$1,500 reduction in tuition at another diocesan high school.

The Office of Catholic Schools will also work to assist in the placement of as many teachers from the closed schools as possible. Those who cannot be placed will be offered a severance package to help them transition to new employment.

These changes were made most reluctantly. I am aware that closing schools results in disappointment, sadness and even feelings of anger. That is why this decision was made only after nearly a year of careful consultation with parish and schools' leadership.

Please be aware that the goal of these changes is to ensure a stable and, we hope, thriving Catholic school education in the Cumberland County area for the future.

We would like to thank our parents for their support of Catholic school education and our teachers who have so ably educated our students, both academically and spiritually. We appreciate your sacrifices and ask for your understanding and prayers as we continue to work together to support Catholic school education in the Cumberland County area and throughout the Diocese of Camden.

May God continue to bless you and guide you and your families.

Fraternally,

Most Rev. Joseph A. Galante, D.D., J.C.D.
Bishop of Camden