

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Issue Date: July 31, 2017

FY18 budget increases are ‘a major win’ for N.J. Catholic schools

While the unfortunate delay in passing the FY18 state budget certainly held our collective attention for several days this summer and caused concern for many, the final budget approved and signed by Governor Christie on July 4 was well worth the wait for Catholic schools, here in the Diocese of Metuchen and throughout New Jersey.

After months of letter writing, emailing, calling and meeting in person with our elected officials, the approved budget includes a much needed and long anticipated increase in funding for non-public schools in the areas of transportation, security, nursing and technology. By working together and advocating for the good of all Catholic school communities, we have earned a major win.

In the area of transportation, we are very optimistic that the long-overdue increase from \$884 to \$1000 per student allowance will improve access to bus transportation this academic year and in the future. Restored and increased funds for nursing services will enable our schools to better afford nursing staff. With money allotted for technology and security, our schools will be in a better position to consistently update technology in our schools and add or maintain safety features to help keep students harm free.

On behalf of Bishop James F. Checchio and the diocesan Office of Schools, I would like publically to extend our sincerest thanks to all pastors and principals, who oversee our 23 elementary and four Catholic high schools, for their tireless efforts to coordinate and mobilize a grassroots effort in their respective school communities. I also extend heartfelt gratitude to all of our Catholic school students, their families and other supporters for doing their part to ensure that our voices were heard and positive change was enacted that will benefit thousands of nonpublic school students across the state. Our appreciation further extends to New Jersey Catholic Conference, who advocates on our behalf in legislative matters, as well as the many legislators who listened to our serious concerns and, ultimately, whose bi-partisan efforts yielded a fair and just outcome for nonpublic students and their families.

As we enjoy this moment of victory, we also remain keenly aware of the need to continue in our ongoing education, advocacy and outreach efforts, so that our state lawmakers and fellow resident taxpayers know that families who choose to send their child or children to a nonpublic school save the State of New Jersey over \$1.8 billion annually. These families pay federal, state and local taxes which support their local education system. Most rely on the same essential non-academic services provided by their state, county and resident school districts that are afforded to their public school counterparts.

Today, we are busy gearing up for back-to-school activities and this is great news for those families who have chosen or are considering a Catholic school education for their children.

In the days ahead, we are committed to engaging in a continued partnership with the various public school districts in Middlesex, Somerset, Hunterdon and Warren counties, which serve the many public *and* nonpublic school students of the Diocese of Metuchen. Together, we will work to ensure the provision of student transportation for our Catholic school students remains in place during the upcoming academic year and in years to come.

Ellen Ayoub
Superintendent of Schools
Diocese of Metuchen

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