



DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

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## PRESS RELEASE

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

METUCHEN – For Catholic schools in New Jersey, one of the highlights of the summer came on July 4 when Governor Chris Christie approved and signed the FY18 state budget, which now includes a much needed and long anticipated increase in funding for nonpublic schools in the areas of transportation, security, nursing and technology.

“After months of letter writing, emailing, calling and meeting in person with elected officials, the approved budget validates the collective efforts put forth by New Jersey’s Catholic school communities and their supporters,” said Ellen Ayoub, Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Metuchen.

“This hard-earned outcome is a major win for our Catholic schools – particularly in the area of increased student transportation funding – and we simply couldn’t wait until September to share the great news with those families who have chosen or are considering a Catholic school education for their children,” Ayoub said.

The superintendent noted it had been a decade since the per-pupil cap on allotted funds for transportation last was raised for students attending a nonpublic school in New Jersey.

According to Ayoub, she and her counterparts across the state 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, much to the benefit of current and prospective Catholic school students.

She added, “There is more good news.” Restored and increased funds for nursing services will enable nonpublic schools to better afford nursing staff. With money allotted for technology and security, schools will be in a better position to consistently update technology and add or maintain safety features to help keep students harm free.

Bishop James F. Checchio has been advocating vigorously for increased funding for nonpublic schools – particularly in the area of student transportation – since he was ordained and installed as the fifth bishop of Metuchen last year, on May 3.

A month after his arrival, Bishop Checchio invited local legislators to the St. John Neumann Pastoral Center in Piscataway to introduce himself as the chief shepherd of the four county diocese, comprised of Middlesex Somerset Hunterdon and Warren counties.

At that June gathering, legislators seemed to listen intently as the bishop shared with them his deep concerns regarding insufficient or non-existing funding for nonpublic schools in key areas such as transportation, security, nursing and technology.

In his spoken remarks, he encouraged continued dialogue on these key issues and asked the legislators for their help in addressing the shortfall so that all public and nonpublic school students in their respective legislative districts would be treated in a fair and just manner moving forward.

In a recent letter to the editor about the increased funding for nonpublic schools, Ayoub expressed public thanks to the many people who worked together to advocate for the good of all Catholic school communities. It read, in part:

“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 the New Jersey Catholic Conference, which advocates on our behalf in legislative matters, as well as the many legislators who listened to our serious concerns and, ultimately, whose bipartisan efforts yielded a fair and just outcome for nonpublic students and their families.”

In the same correspondence, the superintendent expressed the need for continued efforts and dialogue with legislators and public school districts about nonpublic school funding, stating:

“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.

“In the days ahead, we are committed to engaging in a continued partnership with the various public school districts, 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.”

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