

Diocese of Springfield in Illinois Department for Catholic Education

Inservice Formation for Members of Catholic School Advisory Councils and Governing Boards

He said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

--Mark 9:35-37

Leadership and Service in Catholic Education

The call to contribute one's talents, time, and treasure to strengthen Catholic Education is a noble vocation. It involves a willingness to extend the mission of Christ's Church in a fallen world in order to shape minds, form hearts, and win souls for the Kingdom of God. If you have been chosen to be a part of the mission of Catholic Education for your parish or school, we are grateful for your commitment to help us form missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. You are serving the single largest ministry of the Catholic Church in a challenging era of culture and faith in America. As a Council or Board Member, you are called to exercise a discernment about your gifts and how they can best be put in the service of children and families in the Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. You are committing to place your experience, wisdom, and energy to seek and build up the true common good for your Catholic community.

I. Catholic School Councils or Boards in Springfield Diocese

A. School Advisory Councils and Governing Boards

Councils and Boards for the Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois are of two basic kinds: Advisory Councils or Governing Boards. If you serve a Catholic School that is part of a Parish in the Diocese that educates students in grades Kindergarten to 8, you are part of a School Advisory Council:

- As the title suggests, Advisory Councils provide advice and assistance to the parish pastor and school principal in the operation of a diocesan school.
- Advisory Council members are consulted by the pastor or principal on key topics that are at the core of the ethos and long-term stability of the school.
- Parish schools serving students in primary and middle school grades (K-8 or lower) have School Advisory Councils. These councils:
 - fall under the authority of the bishop, who appoints a pastor who has the administrative authority over the parish school. The pastor is ultimately responsible for hiring all personnel, appointing all council members, and authorizing all policies, working in conjunction with the principal of the school.

- review topics and provide advice to the pastor and principal that relate to the long-term goals and strength of the school.
- have no independent authority, have no direct reports among personnel, and do not set policy or procedures for the institution apart from their prudential advice to the pastor and principal.
- If you serve a Catholic High School or a Regional Catholic Elementary School (those rare K-8 institutions that are not part of a single parish) in Springfield Diocese you are part of a Governing Board:
 - As the title suggests, Governing Boards have authority and legal standing to make governing decisions for the school, which, according to your local by-laws, may include the authority to:
 - appoint school leaders
 - establish school initiatives through a majority vote of members
 - develop policy for the school
 - Although a Governing Board has authority to make direct decisions that order the affairs of the institution, it is important that they have by-laws and procedures that also protect and respect the role and authority of the President and/or Principal for directing the daily operations of a Catholic school. As a matter of best practice, a Governing Board should charge a head of school to be the chief executive, while supporting the President and/or Principal with long-range objectives to strengthen the Catholic mission and identity of the school; with strategic fundraising; with the development of a long-range plan for the school; with advice on community affairs; and suggestions for operational vitality.

B. Leadership and Authority in Catholic Schools

Leadership in our diocesan schools is exercised under the authority of the diocesan bishop, pastors of parishes, advisory councils, governing boards, and principals.

- Two kinds of authority are exercised by these school leaders and boards:
 - Discretionary authority means the person or group of persons has the authority to make binding decisions.
 - Delegated authority means the person or group of persons is allowed to make decisions under and subject to a higher authority.
- Both Advisory Councils and Governing Boards operate directly or indirectly under the diocesan bishop and the Office for Catholic Education in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. The policies of all schools must therefore be in conformity with the policies of the Diocese in order to be recognized as Catholic. Some common features of Advisory Councils and Governing Boards:
 - they have, to the extent practicable, committees consisting of board members and others who are competent to give advice in the areas of Catholic mission, academic excellence, and the operational vitality of the school.

- they perform their duties within the context of the school’s long-term strategic plan, which must include goals for self-operation and renewal, including recruiting and forming new board members.
- Advisory Councils often provide suggestions to support the fiscal stability of the school, or give advice on proposed policy or programs that the pastor or principal may be considering for the institution. In this way, the delegated authority of Advisory Council Members is a service to the discretionary authority of the pastor and principal of the school, as the Board offers advice that informs the binding decisions of the school’s official leadership.
- Other areas where an Advisory Council might offer broad, long-term advice, as consulted by the pastor and principal are:
 - Catholic mission – what the school aims to do to strengthen its calling and reason for existing as a Catholic School.
 - School vision or statement of educational philosophy – what the school believes about human beings in regard to the educational formation of children. For Catholic schools, this means what the school believes about the proper spiritual, academic, and human formation of children.
 - Strategic planning – what the school hopes to become or achieve.
 - School policies – specific principles or rules to be followed in all the various dimensions of the school’s activities.
- Governing Boards often deliberate on:
 - Governance and management – who holds authority in what areas of school life.
 - Personnel – policies and practices regarding the adults in the employ of the school and their selection, formation, care, and evaluation. Such policies and the practices of the Catholic school must align with Church teaching and the employment policies of the Diocese.
 - Curriculum – what is taught and how.
 - Finances – budgets, including sources of revenue, how funds are spent, and accountability.
 - Admissions – the admission and retention of students
 - Development – fundraising beyond tuition through grants, events, annual giving, capital campaigns, and endowments.
 - Building and grounds – the physical environment of the school.

By these means, the discretionary authority of the Governing Board Members is a service to the authority of the bishop, sponsoring religious order (if there is one), and the Diocese, as the Board offers guidance that provides for the realization of the Catholic mission of the school and its ongoing vitality, in service to students and families.

C. *Term Limits*

In general, it is a good idea for Council or Board By-laws to make provisions for term limits for members. 5-7 years is a good outside tenure to consider, allowing an individual time to contribute to the Catholic and scholastic mission of the school.

Term limits are important to have in place so that other members of the community can share the labors and triumphs of the institution.

II. Higher Calling, Higher Standards

Higher Calling, Higher Standards is a document issued in April 2023 by Bishop Paprocki for the renewal of Catholic education in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. What follows below is a summary of the main segments of this pastoral letter. Candidates that wish to serve on an Advisor Council or School Board should read the original document, and use the sections below to check their understanding of primary points from *Higher Calling, Higher Standards*.

A. *Introduction and Historical Context*

- In the Nineteenth Century, in response to a hostile Protestant civic environment, the Catholic Church in the United States built a vast and successful Catholic school system.
- Beginning in the 1960s, however, this system declined both in the number of schools and in the total enrollment, and staffing moved from clerical and religious to overwhelmingly lay persons.
- The remaining Catholic schools [still a significant presence in American education] face a new hostile opposition, now from a secular authority and culture.
- In our diocese alone, the Catholic Church educates more than ten thousand students in thirty-six Catholic grade schools and seven Catholic high schools.

B. *New Challenges and the Urgency for Renewal of Catholic Schools*

- Bishop Paprocki is calling us to renew of the mission of our schools in light of present needs and realities.
- The opposition the Church faces is “an aggressive secularism that is increasingly anti-Christian, and particularly anti-Catholic.” It includes top-down federal and state pressure. This secularism is powerfully promoted through all the means of social media, which is also harming young people psychologically.
- About all of us: Through the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist), every member of the Catholic community is called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The practice of the faith means a way of life in which the members pursue **holiness, discipleship, and stewardship**. Briefly, these terms mean:

- **Holiness** – conforming one’s own will and actions to God’s will, only accomplished with the help of God’s grace, primarily obtained through the Sacraments.
- **Discipleship** – following Christ’s mandate to make disciples of all nations, that is, to spread the faith by our words and actions.
- **Stewardship** – taking good care of the treasures of creation God has entrusted to us, to benefit present and future persons.
- About parents specifically: Through the Sacrament of Matrimony, Catholic parents have a special calling to holiness, discipleship, and stewardship to help them form their children according to the Catholic faith.
- Yet Catholic parents need the help of their parish and school help to attain these goals. This need calls for a renewal of the mission of our diocesan schools.

C. Clarity of Mission & Renewal

- **Mission:** According to HCHS, our schools have a two-fold mission:
 - First, they need to be places for the formation of our Catholic children in the faith, in human virtues, and in academics.
 - Second, our schools should be communities that assist parents in raising their children to be faithful, effective Catholics.
 - These two objectives are our schools’ “higher calling,” higher than that of public education.
- **Mistaken missions (usually unstated):**
 - Our schools exist to exist and survive because it is better to exist than cease to be.
 - Our schools exist to grow because they used to be larger and more numerous or because bigger is better.
 - Our schools exist to shield our children from the worst parts of contemporary culture, and should therefore be just more orderly, respectful, and functional alternatives to area public schools.
- **Our renewed and true mission: Our schools exist to form the children of parents who practice the faith.**
 - The children in families that practice the faith are the core constituency of our schools. Who are they? Look around our parish Masses on Saturday evening and Sunday. See the parents with school-age children. Our schools exist for them, for those parents and those children.
 - Thus, the core mission of our schools is “to form the next generation of Catholic disciples of Christ.” To do this we need “authentically Catholic and vibrant schools to serve the families committed to our mission.” Thus, “fewer, smaller” schools are preferable to preserving or just growing the enrollment and number of schools we have now.
 - This is a huge point because it brings great clarity to a school’s mission. It is also very sobering, when we consider the problem of families who insist they are “Catholic” while not practicing the faith.

- Formation extends to the selection and training of board members, like we are doing in this in-service.
- Formation also means in-school personnel. These persons, called to be exemplars of Christian discipleship, must be recruited, formed, and supported in their ministerial roles as Catholic educators.
 - The renewal of formation of Catholic school personnel has already begun through the establishment of the *Evermode Institute*. Norbertine monks have begun a multi-year doctrinal and spiritual formation of all diocesan teachers and administrators and parish catechists in the fundamentals of the Catholic faith and the Catholic vision.
- Because of the general, nation-wide shortage of teachers and administrators, the diocese will help schools recruit, train, and care for teachers and administrators, including overcoming the lack of proper formation teacher candidates may have received. This care could include salary, benefits, and even housing.
- In regard to the mission for students, the goal is for them to become “Catholic, Christian disciples,” which is why they need “intellectual, spiritual, and human formation.” They are to be prepared for human flourishing in this life and eternal life with Christ. This requires them knowing “who God created them to be” and “how to understand and engage with the world God created for them to steward.”
- The school and parish should be a community that helps parents, the first teachers of the faith, be formed in virtue, love of God, and neighborly service.

D. The Seven Essential Characteristics of Catholic Education

These seven areas are the bases of HCHS’ “higher standards.”

1. **Supernatural vision** – Most fundamental is the faith that our schools are to have a supernatural vision and aspiration. We recognize that each person is created by God and called to live accordingly, with our ultimate destiny, if we achieve it, to participate in the Beatific Vision of the Most Blessed Trinity in heaven. Public schools are currently required to be secular and are even pressured to be atheistic and hostile to religious faith. Our schools put each person, the Church, and God at the center.
2. **A Catholic worldview** – Our Catholic tradition sees two “books” we “read” to understand our world, the book of Divine Revelation (Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition) and the book of creation (what reason reveals about the natural world). A Catholic school is not a public school plus some theology added to its curriculum. We seek to help our students see the unity of the Creator with creation. As HCHS puts it:

- “In teaching math and science, we reveal the intelligibility, and goodness of creation, which points back to the intelligence and goodness of the Creator.
 - “In art and music, we reveal the transcendentals of truth, beauty, and goodness that point us back to the source of all that is true, beautiful, and good.
 - “In literature and history, we explore the human soul and moral life in relation to God, and the drama of the human response to God’s loving plan and the providence and active presence of God in the unfolding of human life.”
3. **Christian anthropology** – Anthropology is the study of the human being. Christian anthropology means our schools see human nature correctly – that is, as it really is. We are rational animals, either male or female, created good by God and crowned with rational intelligence and free will. We are wounded by original sin and have the inclination to sin called concupiscence. We are redeemed by Christ and need God’s grace and human virtues. We are undergoing a life-long transformation of our inner selves through cooperation with grace. We have the earthly task of using creation for the good of humanity now and preserving it for the benefit of future human beings. We are called to live morally good lives perfected by loving one another the way Christ loves us.
 4. **Animated by a Spirit of Community and Communion** – our parishes and schools together are to be a “place” where parents, their children’s primary educators, form a community where Catholic families can live and raise their families together. Isolation has been a big problem. Parishes and schools should be strong communities, as they once were and could be again.
 5. **Sustained by Gospel Witness** – every adult person in the school community has a prophetic vocation, that is, the divine call to bear witness to the truth by their lives. Administrators, teachers, staff, and coaches are ministers of the faith and teachers of our youth. Parents too, are called to live according to the truths of our Faith. “Our students are called to bear witness inside and outside of school in how they treat others, in their concern for the poor and marginalized, and in their upright living in harmony with the Gospel.”
 6. **Accessible, Affordable, Stable.** As discussed above, the schools are to be supported by the Catholic community of which that they are a part. To not charge tuition to educate the children of parents who practice their faith will require stewardship on the part of the whole Catholic community of faith.
 7. **Organized and Governed from the Heart of the Church** – our Catholic schools, however locally governed, ultimately come under the authority of the diocesan bishop, a successor of the apostles. Our church is hierarchical in authority. The intellectual and moral truths of the Catholic faith are safeguarded by the Magisterium or teaching office of the Church, whose representative is the diocesan bishop.

E. *Strategic Plan*

- **Formation:** The renewal of formation for school personnel in what we believe and why has been underway for a year through the *Evermode Institute*. This formation is in all the dimensions necessary to be an effective “minister” to youth: the relationship between faith and reason, evangelization, apologetics, and personal spiritual formation, including prayer, devotion, and relationship with Jesus Christ.
- **Catholic Culture, Identity, and Standards:** The diocese will move away from secular ISBE recognition to an accreditation body and process that reflects what our schools aspire to be.

We should evaluate ourselves based on “clear standards for curriculum and culture in schools based in an authentically Catholic philosophy of education.” In addition, “Efforts will be undertaken to increase the practice of devotionals and sacramental life in our schools, including more frequent Masses, more opportunities for the sacrament of reconciliation, more opportunities for Eucharistic adoration, incorporating more spiritual pilgrimages and retreats, and similar practices.”
- **Policy Refresh and Family Discipleship Commitment:**
 - *Policy Refresh* means reforming our “standards of conduct, expectations, and discipline in our schools and among our faculty and staff” in line with this reformed vision.
 - *Family Discipleship Commitment* mean the Family School Agreement will reflect the distinction between “active parishioner” and “non-parishioner.” Active parishioners will receive many benefits but are also undertaking great responsibilities. “Non-parishioners” will not be subsidized by the parish.
- **Talent:** The new Department of Catholic Education will oversee both the Office for Catholic Education and the Office of Catechesis. The diocese will “recruit and ‘grow our own’ pipeline of Catholic school teachers by promoting the special vocation to teaching, creating alternate pathways for the formation and licensing of teachers that reduce the burden of cost, and creative solutions for housing and community to help new teachers get established in their careers.”
- **Financial Stability, Structure, Governance, and Operations:** “Each Catholic school or community Catholic school district, as they may be formed, will be responsible for developing an economic and pastoral plan to phase out tuition and transition to parish support.”

F. *Summary*

Our schools are a key part of our obligation to make disciples of all nations, and are therefore to be “a safe haven for families to help their children grow, develop, and flourish.”

III. Advisory Council and Governing Board Members' Responsibility for Implementing *Higher Calling, Higher Standards*

If you are an aspiring Advisory Council or Governing Board Member, you have now had an opportunity to read and reflect on *Higher Calling, Higher Standards*. If selected to serve on a Council or Board, how will you fulfill your responsibilities in light of this pastoral letter? The first step is for Councils and Boards to collectively read, study, and reflect on the entire document, evaluate their schools based on it, and form plans to reform their schools as necessary.

Where do we go from here?

Here are some overarching questions councils and boards should consider in the context of *Higher Calling, Higher Standards*:

- What is a Catholic culture? Is an authentic Catholic culture present in our school community?
 - Are our Catholic education principles clear and correct?
 - Does our mission statement articulate what a Catholic school like ours should do?
- Do our school policies reflect proper standards for the adults and students?
- What will be the impact on our budget and enrollment if we implement the “active parishioner” vs. “non-parishioner” distinction?
 - Can the parish or parishes we draw from support the education of our active parish families?
 - Can our non-parish families afford the true cost of the education of their children?
- What can we do to foster more of a community among our school families?
- Are there any little things we could do right away to foster the renewal of our own school?

IV. Discernment Scenarios: What is the Duty of a Council or Board Member?

The following scenarios and questions are designed to help Council or Board Members view their roles and contributions within the context of the call to serve Christ and His Church under the authority of the school's administrative leadership or that of the bishop.

1. A fellow Governing Board Member pulls you aside after Mass and goes on a long tirade about a teacher at the school who gave a student a low score on a research paper for asserting that abortion is a moral good. Your fellow Board Member says that the school should not be promoting Church doctrine or

assessing student projects on the basis of it. In the context of *Higher Calling*, *Higher Standards*, and your service as a Council Member, how do you proceed?

2. A parent in the school calls you to ask the Advisory Council to look into an issue, saying that there are rumors that a 2nd Grade teacher who was not offered a contract for the next school year, is allegedly a bigamist. The parent says that the private life of teachers is no business of the school and should have nothing to do with hiring or retention decisions. In the context of *Higher Calling*, *Higher Standards*, and your service as a Council Member, how do you proceed?

3. Your daughter comes home excited about auditions for the school musical. She says that they will perform, "Hairspray." In the context of *Higher Calling*, *Higher Standards*, and your service as a Board Member, how do you proceed?

4. You are a member of an Advisory Council and a friend of yours serves as the School Secretary. Your friend gives you an account of an incident where a teacher proceeded to yell at and berate the Principal. She tells you that the Advisory Council needs to intervene in this matter directly and immediately. In the context of serving as an Advisory Council member, how do you proceed?

5. You are a member of a Governing Board. The President calls you up and mentions that he would like to hire his niece, whom you know to be a self-professed Agnostic who dabbles in Astrology and Tarot Card readings, to serve as the coordinator for Catholic Mission and Identity in the School. In the context of your service as a Governing Board member, how do you proceed?

6. You have served as a Board Member for three years and recall that a certain gift was provided to the school by a donor for curriculum materials for science, but has never been allocated. The teachers that assist the Principal with school programming have decided that those funds would be better spent on Catholic literature and reading skills development for students. In the context of your service as a Board member, how do you proceed?

7. The pastor of your school convenes the Advisory Council and informs all of you that the Badminton Coach has been cursing at the girls and saying demeaning things to them in their struggles to master the game. He wants the Advisory Council to vote to terminate the Coach. In the context of serving as an Advisory Council member, how do you proceed?

8. When you pick up your fourth-grade son after school, he tells you that he received a zero from the teacher on his science project for talking out of turn in class, but he insists that it was his friend who sits next to him that was the guilty party. He says that he tried to get his teacher to understand, but says that she

would not believe him, and yelled at him to “be quiet and stop arguing” in front of the class. You are furious, and the next Advisory Council Meeting is this evening. In the context of serving as an Advisory Council member, how do you proceed?