

10.28.2015

Dear Parents:

As you are aware, the Diocese of Erie has been working on a pastoral plan that includes Catholic schools. A preliminary plan for schools has now been released. Included with this notification is a news release that will give you an overview of the plan.

Please read the release carefully. Calling the plan a “rebirth of Catholic education,” Bishop Lawrence Persico reminds us that students in northwest Pennsylvania deserve the best education and higher-education preparedness possible.

The changes in Erie are significant. Following the lead of many other areas of our diocese, Catholic schools in the Greater Erie Area will now be part of a Catholic school system with multiple PreK-5 campuses, and at least two middle school campuses for students in grades 6 to 8. The plan is expected to go into effect by the 2018/19 academic year.

A robust middle school will present multiple opportunities for Catholic middle school students such as:

- ⊗ Increased Catholic identity with age-appropriate spiritual experiences and teachers that have a specialized background in religion
- ⊗ Teachers with a specialized middle school certification
- ⊗ Specialized courses and electives
- ⊗ Science labs with a focus on STEM coursework
- ⊗ Greater intellectual exchange in the classrooms
- ⊗ Expanded opportunities for athletics
- ⊗ More diversity and increased socioeconomic and cultural tolerance in the student body
- ⊗ Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities such as band, clubs
- ⊗ Meaningful academic articulation with Catholic high schools in the city
- ⊗ Students better prepared for high school and a reduced transition period needed when entering high school.

Our Lady of Peace is among the three schools selected as possible sites to become one of the two area middle schools. The other two sites under consideration are Villa Maria

Elementary School and Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The five PreK-5 campuses are Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady's Christian School, St. George Catholic School, St. Luke Catholic School and St. James Catholic School.

Should OLP not be selected as a middle school, it will become a PreK through grade 5 campus with students in grades 6 through 8 attending one of the middle schools. While enrollment at Our Lady of Peace is currently strong, the school faces the same long-term enrollment and finance issues of many Catholic schools in our diocese.

Please take the time to visit the diocesan website at www.ErieRCD.org/planning.asp for additional information about key components of the plan. Beginning Friday, the full plan will be published on the website.

We have a great deal of work ahead. First and foremost, I know you value Catholic education. Experts, school administrators, task force members and others have worked diligently for more than a year to develop this plan to create stronger schools with outstanding programs and superior opportunities for all students.

I recognize that change is difficult and working through the emotion of the news will take time. Please know that your approach to the change will greatly influence how your children experience the news.

Bishop Persico notes that the goal from the very beginning was to raise the standard for education across the region, ensuring generations of children will have access to quality academics in a faith-based environment.

"I feel a great responsibility to the sisters and priests and families who came before us—they poured their lives into our Catholic schools," he says. "We're doing our best to honor that legacy and to make sure that future generations will have the same opportunities we have enjoyed for more than 150 years."

Let us welcome the changes together.