

## **Catholic Schools Statement**

Good morning, Sr. Carla, Sr. Barbara, Sr. Marcelle, City Councilman Haass, my brothers and sisters in Christ. This is my first opportunity to celebrate Catholic Schools Week here in the Archdiocese of San Antonio. Since my arrival, Catholic Schools have been one of my top priorities because their ministry is at the heart of the work of the Church.

I am here to invite you all to join in this celebration of the lives of more than 14,000 young people who represent the future of our church, our neighborhoods and our families, and truly are our greatest treasures.

Today we also begin a celebration of our dedicated administrators and teachers in 47 elementary schools and high schools who help to shape the minds and the spirits of our children.

Our celebration of Catholic Schools Week spills beyond an acknowledgement of academic excellence. In its statement in support of Catholic Schools, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reflects this year's theme, "Character, Compassion, Values", when it states, "These Catholic Schools afford the fullest and best opportunity to realize the fourfold purpose of Christian education, namely to provide an atmosphere in which the Gospel message is proclaimed, community in Christ is experienced, service to our sisters and brothers is the norm, and thanksgiving and worship of our God is cultivated."

There is no denying the earned reputation of consistently high academic achievement by Catholic school Students. The most recent national statistics from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops shows Catholic Schools have a

graduation rate of 98.1%. Eighty percent (80%) of Catholic high school graduates go on to a four year college and 14% go to community colleges.

This commitment to excellence certainly is represented by our “*No Child Left Behind— Blue Ribbon Schools*” who are represented here with us today: **Atonement Academy and St. Prince of the Apostles School**. I salute you for your hard work and commitment to continuing the rich legacy of Catholic Education in the archdiocese. I ask you to also join me in applauding Incarnate Word High School as they celebrate their 125<sup>th</sup> year of sharing our Catholic Values with the students of our community. I ask you to join me in applauding them and all 47 Catholic Schools throughout the Archdiocese for the way that they educate the whole person, guiding them with Catholic Moral Standards.

But most importantly we celebrate this week because these schools are Catholic. They are places where our children are taught to experience a loving God through Scripture and the tradition of the Catholic Church. The mission of Catholic Education is to lead the students on a quest for truth. As Pope John Paul II said in Denver in 1993: “Truth is not the fruit of each individual’s imagination. God gave you intelligence to know the truth and your will to achieve what is morally good” (JPII, Denver 1993).

Our Catholic Schools integrate Catholic values with each of the subjects and disciplines our students study. Integrating faith and truth...faith and life...faith and work....faith and society. Once again, in the U.S. Bishop’s document on Catholic Schools, we read that, “This unique Catholic identity makes our Catholic elementary and secondary institutions, “schools for the human person” and allows them to fill a critical role in the future life of our Church, our country, and our world” We need only look around our own community to find evidence of these

leaders among us whose character and sense of service were rooted in their Catholic school experience.

We also celebrate our Catholic School parents, as the first teachers of their children. They have unselfishly made a Catholic Education an important priority in their lives. This provides a powerful witness of their faith to their children and to all of us. We are grateful for this testimony to their faith and the concrete support they give to the values their children are learning in school.

We live in a time when parents are looking for a safe, yet intellectually stimulating place in which their children can learn. Parents also are searching for a school that will teach moral values while encouraging respect and responsibility. These are defining qualities that we celebrate in Catholic Schools this week.

In the past year, I have been blessed to visit many of our Catholic Schools. I've talked and prayed with our students, and experienced a joyful spirit of youth, energized by the faith of teachers, parents and volunteers. A faith that helps each child to see his or her own dignity and worth, knowing that it comes from a loving God.

Catholic Schools provide a reason for the whole community to celebrate. While we celebrate, I also recognize our responsibility to ensure that they continue to flourish in the future. That our mission will always be about the truth that will give our children the faith, freedom, and education to respond to the voice of God in their lives, as they take their rightful place in the world. We remain committed to providing an education of academic excellence formed by a Catholic Identity that they will carry throughout their lives to build a society of faith, justice, and a culture of life.