

Archdiocesan Catholic Schools, Central Office Receive Full Accreditation; Strategic Plan Commended As Enrollment Decline Is Cut In Half From Last Year

A team of educators spent several days in the Archdiocese of Baltimore last week conducting the final phase of its accreditation review of the archdiocesan Catholic school system. Archbishop Edwin O'Brien announced Saturday that the team from AdvancEd recommended full accreditation for the Archdiocese's more than 60 Catholic schools and for its central offices.

AdvanceEd is the accreditation division of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement, the world's largest accrediting and school improvement organization.

In its final report, the team issued three commendations:

Catholic Identity—"The schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore...reflect and model their rich heritage of Catholic identity at every level of school life."

Leadership—"The dedication and commitment of Archbishop O'Brien, system level leadership, school principals, and key stakeholders provide motivational support for the system wide strategic direction and the ongoing success of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese."

Strategic Direction—"The Strategic Plan for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore provides focus and direction for archdiocesan and school level leadership."

The Strategic Plan, which was developed by the Blue Ribbon Committee on Catholic Schools and announced in June 2010, made 56 recommendations in four key areas:

Academic Excellence, Catholic Identity, Governance, and Stewardship. It called for the creation of several new academic programs, additional sources of funding, a new hybrid model of school governance and heavily emphasized accountability and strong school leadership.

With half of the action items associated with these recommendations already implemented, the school system has begun to see positive results. The Archdiocese reports that it saw the smallest decline in enrollment (4.3%) in the past four years and a 50% improvement from last year's drop (9%).

"We are very encouraged that the trend in declining enrollment has begun to turn around because this means we are able to provide a quality, Catholic education to more children," Archbishop O'Brien said. "The accreditation is an objective affirmation of the direction our schools are headed in and a resounding endorsement of the quality of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Baltimore."

AdvancEd's report also found that, "Dedicated and committed administrators, principals, and staff ensure a student learning environment permeated by high expectations, academic excellence, and Catholic values enabling them to reach their personal and professional potential."