

# First day for three Catholic schools includes Archbishop Lori, other visitors

On the first day of their school year, students gathered outside St. Joan of Arc School in Aberdeen Sept. 4. Students chattered about their summers, which of their classmates had acquired braces and what they anticipated, from homework to field trips.

Making his way through the crowd, Archbishop William E. Lori joined the conversations.

Joined by James B. Sellinger, chancellor of education, and Dr. Donna Hargens, Ed.D., superintendent of Catholic schools, the archbishop mingled with students and families at St. Joan of Arc, then visited The John Carroll School in Bel Air and St. Stephen School in Bradshaw.

With proximity to Aberdeen Proving Grounds, a handful of St. Joan of Arc parents, such as Nick Boisvert, wore military uniforms as they dropped off their children. Boisvert's daughter, Alana, was beginning pre-K.

"We wanted a good, positive first school experience for her," said Boisvert, who was joined by his wife Tiana, who carried their toddler, Nico, on her hip.

A faith-based education, the couple agreed, made the school all the more appealing.

In a short prayer service, Archbishop Lori asked the students to give a round of applause to their parents.

"You get to go to this wonderful school because of the sacrifices your moms and dads make," he said.

As he wandered the school's halls on a tour led by eighth-graders, the archbishop stopped by the kindergarten room. Mary Beth Nocket, kindergarten teaching

assistant, stressed the importance of starting students early in a positive learning environment.

“They’re babies, and this is their time to be happy,” said Nocket, adding that the classroom is designed to be colorful, happy and relaxed. “They’re just little sponges (at this age) ... they bring me joy every day.”

At The John Carroll School in Bel Air, senior and student body president Ava Barnd welcomed Archbishop Lori on her last first day of high school.

“John Carroll did a really good job of opening opportunities up for the future,” said Barnd, who added that she took advantage of as many as she could. “(Leaving) is definitely bittersweet.”

At an assembly with the school’s seniors, juniors and sophomores (freshmen begin Sept. 5), Sellinger mentioned four characteristics displayed on John Carroll’s website: innovate, contribute, explore and lead.

“I just ask that you take to heart those four things this year,” Sellinger said.

Hargens offered a word of encouragement to the students, and to the teachers.

“There is no greater calling,” Hargens said to the faculty. “Your impact on these students will last a lifetime.”

Archbishop Lori said the high school students will recall their time at John Carroll with gratitude, but acknowledged that they might not consider it now.

“This is the time when you are laying the foundation for the rest of your life,” the archbishop said.

The archbishop, Sellinger and Hargens hosted a similar assembly at St. Stephen School in Bradshaw, altering the message for a group that ranged from kindergarten through eighth grade.

“It’s absolutely wonderful to be back (to school),” said Mary Patrick, principal. “(Hosting the archbishop) was such a wonderful experience for all of us.”

Patrick said it was especially nice to welcome the archbishop to bless the students, as the administration has been in the process of approving plans for an addition to the school, which is “bursting at the seams.”

“We are in a traditional building, but we have 21<sup>st</sup>-century children,” Patrick said, adding that the expansion will allow the thriving school the room it needs to continue growing.

Due to extreme heat, several schools in the Baltimore area never opened, and dozens more closed early.

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