n that statement we pointed to the great value and the many successes of atholic schools and the numerous challenges that they face We unequivocally committed ourselves and the whole atholic community to the following set of goals

- atholic schools will continue to provide a ospel based education of the highest quality
- atholic schools will be available accessible and affordable
- •

convinced that atholic schools continue to be "the most effective means available to the hurch for the education of children and young people" who are the future of the hurch *To Teach as Jesus Did* no

Why We Value Our Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools

Young people of the third millennium must be a source of energy and leadership in our hurch and our nation herefore we must provide young people with an academically rigorous and doctrinally sound program of education and faith formation designed to strengthen their union with hrist and his hurch atholic schools collaborate with parents and guardians in raising and forming their children as families struggle with the changing and challenging cultural and moral contexts in which they find themselves atholic schools provide young people with sound

hurch teaching through a broad based curriculum where faith and culture are intertwined in all areas of a school's life y equipping our young people with a sound education rooted in the ospel message the erson of esus hrist and rich in the cherished traditions and liturgical practices of our faith we ensure that they have the foundation to live morally and uprightly in our complex modern world his unique atholic identity makes our atholic elementary and secondary schools "schools for the human person" and allows them to fill a critical role in the future life of our hurch our country and our world *Catholic Schools on the Threshold* no

t is made abundantly clear in an unbroken list of statements from the documents of the econd Vatican ouncil to ope ohn aul 's exhortation *The Church in America Ecclesia in America* that atholic schools play a vital role in the evangelizing mission of the hurch hey are the privileged environment in which hristian education is carried out atholic schools are at once places of evangelization of complete formation of inculturation of apprenticeship in a lively dialogue between young people of different religions and social backgrounds *Catholic Schools on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* no

atholic schools are often the hurch's most effective contribution to those families who are poor and disadvantaged especially in poor inner city neighborhoods and rural areas atholic schools cultivate healthy interaction among the increasingly diverse populations of our society n cities and rural areas atholic schools are often the only opportunity for economically disadvantaged young people to receive an education of quality that speaks to the development of the whole person s we continue to address the many and varied needs of our nation's new immigrant population the hurch and its schools are often among the few institutions providing immigrants and newcomers with a sense of welcome dignity community and connection with their spiritual roots

s important as a sound atholic school education is for the new immigrant and the poor it continues to be of prime importance to those children and grandchildren of the generations who earlier came to our shores ur atholic schools have produced countless numbers of well educated and moral citizens who are leaders in our civic and ecclesial communities. We must work with all parents so they have the choice of an education that no other school can supply—excellent academics imparted in the context of atholic teaching and practice.

Catholic Schools Today

Overview Since 1990

he ational atholic ducational ssociation's annual statistical report shows that there are atholic elementary and secondary schools in the United tates which enroll currently million students hese schools currently account for almost over percent of all private and religious schools in the United tates and enroll over percent of the students in these schools ince the hurch in the United tates has opened more than new schools egrettably there has been a net decline of more than atholic schools in the country during the same period of time Imost all of this loss has been in urban inner city and rural areas of our nation n the last decade of the twentieth century atholic schools experienced a period of however that trend slowed then reversed and now growth in enrollments ince the year shows a net loss of over students

urrently there are more than atholic schools in the country with waiting lists I most all of these schools are located in suburban areas wenty six percent of current students in atholic schools are members of minority groups—a figure that is steadily growing he enrolIment of students who are not atholic has grown to percent taffing trends in atholic elementary and secondary schools show a steady increase in the number of lay people who are administrators and teachers currently percent ince the average tuition in both elementary and secondary atholic schools has more than doubled in that same time the portion of the total cost of educating a student which parents pay in tuition has risen by almost percent

The Good News

We the atholic bishops of the United tates wish to offer our deep gratitude to those individuals who staff our atholic elementary and secondary schools the dedicated lay and religious administrators and teachers. We applaud their professionalism personal sacrifices daily witness to faith and efforts to integrate learning and faith in the lives of their students in order to "accomplish the very purpose of evangelization the incarnation of the hristian message in the lives of men and women" *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* no We take this opportunity to encourage all who are devoted to working in atholic schools to "persevere in their most important mission" *Ecclesia in America* no

esearch conducted by the United tates epartment of ducation the ational atholic ducational ssociation and other independent agencies shows that atholic schools make a major impact in closing the achievement gap for poor and minority students in inner city environments atholic schools have a lower dropout rate percent than both public percent and other private schools inety nine percent of atholic high school percent students graduate and percent go on to some form of post secondary education atholic school students continue to score well on standardized tests such as the ational ssessment of ducational rogress in subjects such as reading mathematics social studies and science often surpassing standards established by federal and or state agencies arvard University study issued in reported that atholic school students performed better than other students on the three basic objectives of civic education—the capacity for civic engagement e g voluntary community service political knowledge e.g. learning and using civic skills and political tolerance e.g. respect for opinions different from their own

We are encouraged by the laity's increased involvement with school boards commissions and councils. We commend the efforts that are being made to develop programs for the spiritual growth of staff students and parents to create safe environment programs for children and young people to open development and endowment offices in dioceses and schools to market schools and to establish parent organizations that advocate for the rights of atholic school students and teachers to be treated equitably in govermarkej wspns or development for schools in Q q

The Challenges of the Future

While we look with pride to the many successes and achievements of our atholic elementary and secondary schools the entire atholic community must now focus on the future and the many challenges we face We the atholic bishops of the United tates with the cooperation of diocesan school and community leadership should pursue effective responses to the challenges we face We must then move forward with faith courage and enthusiasm because atholic

atholic schools we should open schools that have a mission to evangelize We also need to consider providing new or expanded facilities where we currently have schools with waiting lists Wherever possible atholic schools should remain available and accessible in all areas of a diocese for children who are from poor and middle class families who face major economic challenges n addition atholic schools should be available to students who are not atholic and who wish to attend them his has been a proud part of the history of atholic schools in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries We must continue this outreach in the new millennium We must also serve the increasing ispanic atino population which makes up percent of our current atholic community ispanics atinos make up percent of atholics under the age of percent of atholics under the age of ten t is currently estimated that by the thirty and second decade of this century the ispanic atino population will compose percent of all atholics in the United tates atholic parishes and schools must reflect this reality and reach out and welcome ispanics and atinos into the atholic faith communities in the United tates

positive contribution that we enthusiastically support is the opening by so many of our dioceses and religious communities of schools that offer reduced or no tuition for at risk students hese schools utilize comprehensive and innovative educational approaches to improve the academic progress of some of the most disadvantaged young people

atholic schools must also continue to look for ways to include and serve better the needs of young people in our hurch who have special educational and physical needs ecognizing that educating students with disabilities often requires more intensive instructional support we call on government to allow special education monies to follow and support students with disabilities no matter where they attend school

Personnel

inety five percent of our current school administrators and teachers are members of the laity he preparation and ongoing formation of new administrators and teachers is vital if our schools are to remain truly atholic in all aspects of school life atholic school personnel should be grounded in a faith based atholic culture have strong bonds to hrist and the hurch and be witnesses to the faith in both their words and actions he formation of personnel will allow the ospel message and the living presence of esus to permeate the entire life of the school community and thus be faithful to the school's evangelizing mission. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of school personnel who are not atholic but who support and cooperate in accomplishing the mission of the atholic school

We must provide a sufficient number of programs of the highest quality to recruit and prepare our future diocesan and local school administrators and teachers so that they are knowledgeable in matters of our faith are professionally prepared and are committed to the hurch hese programs will require even more active involvement and cooperation by our atholic colleges and universities in collaboration with the diocesan educational leadership

ngoing faith formation and professional development programs must also be available so that administrators and teachers in atholic schools can continue to grow in their ministry of education hese programs will introduce new and effective initiatives educational models and approaches while always maintaining a sound atholic identity in our schools his is especially important when new atholic school administrators and teachers come from private and state colleges and universities or from careers in the public school system

Finances

ur total atholic community must increase efforts to address the financial needs of our atholic school administrators teachers and staff any of our employees make great sacrifices to work in atholic schools he atholic community must not ignore the reality of inadequate salaries which often require these individuals to seek supplemental employment *Lay Catholics* no to meet living expenses and expenses due to limited or non existent health care and retirement benefits hese benefits are very often lost if a school employee moves from one diocese to another he atholic community needs to study the success of the ichigan atholic onference's portable employee benefit program as a possible model for others to replicate atholic social teaching on the provision of just wages and benefits is both strong and clear t is our community's responsibility to take action to address these issues now

Advocacy

inally we need to intensify our efforts in advocating just and equitable treatment of our students and teachers in federal and state funded educational programs While we are pleased with the progress made in developing parent advocacy groups since the atholic community must work to increase the number and effectiveness of these groups dvocacy is not just the responsibility of parents and teachers but of all members of the atholic community s the primary educators of their children parents have the right to choose the school best suited for them he entire atholic community should be encouraged to advocate for parental school choice and personal and corporate tax credits which will help parents to fulfill their responsibility in educating their children

s we said in our statement *Principles for Educational Reform in the United States* we believe that "government at all levels acting in partnership with parents has a responsibility to provide adequate professional and material resources to assist all children to attain a quality education" p

We also stated in that same document

When services that are aimed at improving the educational environment—especially for those most at risk—are available to students and teachers in public schools these services should also be available to students and teachers in private and religious schools hese individuals should not be penalized for choosing to enroll or work in these schools since they also serve the common good of our nation p

arents have the constitutional right to direct the upbringing and education of their children *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* and we call on the entire atholic community to join in advocating for the opportunities and resources to implement this right through constitutionally permissible programs and legislation e.g. *Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District Mitchell v. Helms,* and *Zelman v. Simons-Harris*

n some states so called "laine" amendments which ban or severely limit assistance to private and or religious schools make the attainment of this goal very difficult if not impossible hese amendments are part of an anti religious and more specifically anti atholic legacy in our nation's history. We need to advocate for the repeal of these relics of unfortunate bigotry

Future Action

n addition to recommendations we have already made and to ensure that our atholic elementary and secondary schools not only continue to exist but will grow and prosper we call on bishops and those in educational leadership to

- onvene gatherings of educational business and community leaders in either the fourteen episcopal regions or in each state to address the critical issues of atholic identity cultural diversity finances just wages and benefits academic quality—especially in the area of religious education—alternative governance models and the marketing of our atholic schools
- evelop programs to assist pastors clergy seminarians and laity to understand appreciate support and promote the critical value of our atholic schools in fulfilling the teaching ministry of the hurch
- evelop strategies to increase the effective advocacy for the equitable treatment of atholic school students and teachers in government programs his would include support for existing and creation of new parent advocacy groups in each state and diocese
- Work with the leaders of atholic colleges and universities to address the critical staffing needs of our atholic elementary and secondary schools his would include steps to ensure that sound and effective programs of teacher education and administration are available and affordable to those interested in working in our atholic schools

t is essential that every possible effort be made to ensure that atholic schools despite financial difficulties continue to provide a atholic education to the poor and marginalized in society t will never be possible to free the needy from their poverty unless they are first freed from the impoverishment arising from the lack of adequate education no

he atholic community is encouraged at every level to support the work of our atholic elementary and secondary schools keeping them available and accessible to as many parents as possible herefore we the atholic bishops of the United tates strongly encourage our clergy and laity to market and support atholic elementary and secondary schools as one of our church's primary missions

ur vision is clear our atholic schools are a vital part of the teaching mission of the hurch he challenges ahead are many but our spirit and will to succeed are strong We the atholic bishops of the United tates in cooperation with the total atholic community are committed to overcoming these challenges dversity often brings out the best in men and women We must respond to challenging times with faith vision and the will to succeed because the atholic school's mission is vital to the future of our young people our nation and most especially our hurch

Resources

Catechism of the Catholic Church nd ed Washington U – ibreria ditrice Vaticana

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997),