

April 1, 2021

Dear Catholic School Community Members,

I pray this correspondence find you well on this Holy Thursday. Approximately one year ago, a global pandemic, the most significant in 100 years forced the closure of TK-12 campuses worldwide. For us in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, our school communities transitioned in an extraordinary way to distance learning within 72 hours. Since that moment, what we thought would be a temporary adjustment turned out to be a year-long journey together that no one could have imagined.

Like so many parents, my wife and I had to quickly navigate the challenges of supporting our children's learning and development while balancing the demands of work and everyday life. This challenge has been overwhelming in so many ways, especially trying to manage their emotional health, expectations and disappointments. Though some of our TK-12 students were fortunate to return to in-person instruction in the fall in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, along with TK-2 students in LA County, many of our students have remained in distance learning for a year due to local public health restrictions.

Though there have been many challenges and setbacks, our public health conditions are finally improving. Through it all, our Catholic schools have demonstrated resilience and have emerged stronger and more committed to our collective ministry to inspire and educate children in the image of Christ. During this school year, we've kept every school open, distributed over 25,000 digital devices to students, served nearly 3 million meals to needy students and families, distributed over 85,000 pieces of personal protective equipment to schools, made COVID-19 vaccine available to all school personnel and kept transmission on-campus to a minimum. We've also cultivated philanthropic support to aide needy families, ensuring that the gift of a Catholic education can continue for their children. With many campuses now reopening, we are excited to welcome our students back to campus this spring to finish the school year strong.

We are also pleased to report that our Catholic school students, elementary to high schools, demonstrated academic performance growth in reading and math. Whereas most school systems did not assess students learning this year, over 90% of our Catholic school students participated in the STAR Renaissance assessment this Fall and Winter – a major achievement. Over 60% of students demonstrated growth between Fall and Winter when compared nationally to academic peers. Growth ranged from 4.4% to 7.7% across grade levels and subject matters. This, among so many other accomplishments, is something we can all be proud of!

None of this would be possible without the loving care and passionate commitment of our teachers, staff, principals, presidents and pastors. They have demonstrated why Catholic

education is such a blessing. We are so honored and grateful for their courageous conviction, tireless efforts and true devotion to their ministry – thank you to all of our school faculty and staff members, principals and pastors who have made it possible for us to serve students and welcome them home this spring. We owe them our appreciation and a debt of gratitude for their ministry of teaching and leading our students during this extraordinary time.

This pandemic has not come without its consequences. Many of our parish and school community members have suffered tremendous loss of loved ones. Many of the neighborhoods we serve have been ravaged by COVID-19 and continue to be faced with unimaginable impacts. We pray for all of those who have been lost and for the families who carry on the legacies of their loved ones with honor and dignity.

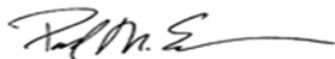
These impacts are not just human ones. Many have lost their businesses, jobs, homes and possessions. These losses effect our school communities as well. Sadly, at the end of this school year, six of our parish schools will be consolidated with nearby Catholic schools due to historical declining enrollment, shifting demographics and distressed finances. We will be welcoming those students, their families and staff to local Catholic schools in the fall with love and support. The ministry of Catholic education will carry on for these students and staff members.

As students and staff have a well-deserved break and return to campus, it's vital to emphasize again the importance of maintaining personal health safety measures outside of school. Young people are not immune from this virus. Our ability to reopen schools and keep them open requires the entire school community – parents, family members, students, and staff to remain vigilant. Wearing masks, washing hands and maintaining distance will help to ensure we keep everyone safe and our schools open.

Finally, I want to thank our parents, families and students. To our students, I know this pandemic has created an extraordinary hardship for you. Though much has been lost this past year, I encourage you to think about what has been gained – all that you have learned and how that has strengthened you to persevere into the future. To our parents and families, thank you for the many sacrifices you have made this past year. Your unconditional love and commitment to your children is our inspiration and a reflection of God's gift of life.

On behalf of Archbishop José Gomez and our entire Catholic school ministry, Happy Easter to you and your family. Rejoice – He is Risen!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul M. Escala", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul M. Escala  
Superintendent of Schools