



September 5, 2008

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The Diocese of St. Petersburg has engaged, once again, the services of Meitler Consultants, Inc., from Hales Corner, Wisconsin, to study the Catholic elementary and secondary schools in northern Pinellas and Hillsborough Counties and to develop a Strategic Plan to ensure a strong Catholic school presence within our diocese in the years ahead. Meitler Consultants undertook such a study for the schools in southern Pinellas County and the three northern counties four years ago. The current study will result in a comprehensive strategic plan for all Catholic schools within the five counties.

The planning process began last June with an initial organizational meeting with the two consultants from Meitler Consultants Sister Mary Anne Heenan, CSJ and Sister Kathleen Carr, CSJ. As a result of this initial meeting, the diocesan offices began gathering essential data needed for the process such as school enrollment, parish enrollment, the number of baptisms, number of First Communions, and enrollment in parish Religious Education programs. In addition to the ecclesial data, Meitler Consultants worked with local county planners and demographers to obtain projected demographic data. This week Sister Mary Anne and Sister Kathleen had the opportunity to visit each of the schools in the project area. They interviewed the principal and pastor and toured each facility.

Two Task Forces were established to assist the consultants with the interpretation of the data and to provide feed back and input in the interpretation of the data analysis and to participate in the development of recommendations for the final report. The membership of each Task Force represents school administrators, pastors, and parents. The three Associate Superintendents and I are participating members of the Task Forces.

Bishop Robert Lynch asked Meitler Consultants to include a survey component into the project. He requested that survey recipients be limited to Catholic families within the project area who have children between the ages of 0 and 4. We anticipate that the survey results will paint a concrete “picture” of parent attitudes toward a Catholic school education and the potential future enrollment in our Catholic schools. The responses will serve as one piece of data in the development of the recommendations for Catholic schools in this diocese. The survey participants will be randomly-selected from parish enrollments. I would encourage you to complete the survey if you are selected.

Strategic Planning is an intense process yet critical to the future foundation of Catholic schools in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. The factors that influence a Catholic school are

many and interdependent requiring the utmost attention to the formulation of recommendations. Strategic Planning is a proactive step that allows us to shape the future of Catholic school education in the Diocese of St. Petersburg rather than to be the reactive victim to circumstances.

This letter is intended to inform you of the Strategic Planning process that will be ongoing throughout the years. A second intent is to request your prayers for the Holy Spirit's presence at each step of the project. A third desire is that if you are selected to participate in the survey phase that you respond to the invitation. Your input is extremely important to our Catholic schools.

Let me conclude by thanking you for the opportunity to educate your child in one of our Catholic elementary or high schools. We take this responsibility seriously. I pray that our good and gracious God continue to bless you with Grace.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John L. Cummings".

John L. Cummings, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Catholic Schools and Centers