



Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Office of the Archbishop
222 North 17th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1299

January 5, 2012

Feast of St. John Neumann

Mr. John Quindlen, Chair
Blue Ribbon Commission on Catholic Education
Archdiocese of Philadelphia

Dear Mr. Quindlen and members of the Blue Ribbon Commission,

I have received the Blue Ribbon Commission's final report on Catholic education. I look forward to considering and pursuing it in the coming weeks. I'm very grateful to each of you, as well as Bishop Michael Fitzgerald and the Office of Catholic Education, for showing such outstanding dedication to a very difficult task over the past year. You've done a great service for our local Church. Philadelphia's Catholic community is in your debt.

I want to praise in a special way your courage in facing the hard financial realities burdening many of our schools. Over the past decade our parishes and the Archdiocese have spent millions of dollars to support struggling schools. Pastors have made heroic efforts to keep these classrooms open; but in a time of limited resources and fewer children, justice requires that we use our resources to best effect. We cannot sustain unsustainable schools, and as the Commission report notes, many public school systems – both locally and nationally – have had to make the same tough decisions to close or combine schools. We need to honor the great history of Catholic education in our Archdiocese. But we must not be constrained by it. Nostalgia for the past is a bad foundation if we want to think clearly and build creatively for the future.

In that regard, I'm very pleased that the Commission has explored new forms of governance, government advocacy and foundation funding. It is not enough for Catholic education to survive; it needs to grow, and we cannot make that happen with old behaviors and models of operation. The goal of Catholic education remains the same: We need to give our young people a zeal for the Catholic faith and a strong moral character; and in our schools, a superior academic curriculum. But how we achieve that goal should always be open to change.

Over the next 18 months, in the spirit of the report, we should examine all of our education efforts and structures for their effectiveness. So long as we serve our Catholic

identity and mission, we should sincerely consider and strive to cooperate with any serious proposal from major donors and friendly community leaders to deliver high quality Catholic education in creative new ways. Not all such proposals will be workable, but nothing is gained by not listening.

Again, in the months ahead I look forward to pursuing the many good ideas in the Blue Ribbon Commission report. You have my sincere admiration, and the gratitude of the people of the archdiocese. May God bless you and your families in 2012!

Gratefully yours in Jesus Christ,

+ Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.

Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
Archbishop of Philadelphia