

# **NORWALK CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

## **SETTING OUR DIRECTION DINNERS SUMMARY**

### **OCTOBER 8, 9, 11, & 15, 2017**

The Setting Our Direction Dinners were developed to engage parents, staff and stakeholders in a process to identify growth opportunities, envision the future and create excitement and ownership for the future of Norwalk Catholic School. Over 600 invitations were sent, along with invitations in school newsletters, parish bulletins, and social media. The response was excellent with attendance for the 4 meetings at nearly 250 people. Demographics represented were current parents, staff, alumni, parishioners, parents of alumni, and future parents.

Participants responded well to all aspects of the dinners and were very engaged. They were enthusiastic about NCS, valued the education their children were, or had received and very willing to help plan for the future. Their dedication and commitment to take ownership for their “watch” was inspiring.

The following is a summary of the responses to the large group activities, small group brain storming and individual response forms from all 4 dinners, highlighting the most frequent responses collected. The compilation of all input from the meetings is available to review all input submitted.

#### **What We Value about NCS:**

After reflecting on a cherished memory of NCS and sharing it at their table, participants shared what they valued most about the school. The assets, strengths and values most often cited were Faith, followed by Tradition/Legacy, Family and Compassion/Caring.

#### **Characteristics of our People:**

At the end of the evening we again reflected on the history of Catholic education and the legacy we had been given, and identified the characteristics of the people who had given us this legacy. Then we reflected on the characteristics of the people who would create the future we had envisioned. All groups immediately identified that both groups needed the same characteristics. Three characteristics, that were cited every evening, are Faith, Perseverance and Vision. Hard work and Sacrifice were cited at 3 dinners and Dreamers and Commitment were cited at two.

#### **Identify the Future You Envision (Small Group Brainstorming)**

Much of the evening was spent in small group brainstorming at each table of 8-10 people. Ideas were recorded and then reported out to the whole group. The most often shared ideas follow:

##### **Religion and Faith Formation**

An area identified by every group was the faith formation for our students. The ability to pray and share our faith, to form our students’ faith, is the heart of our mission. It is the most important, the defining quality of our holistic education. Various components were emphasized including sacramental preparation, service opportunities, and keeping our students Catholic for life.

### **Technology & Preparing our Students for Jobs of Tomorrow**

Most groups had technology at the top of their list with strong emphasis on staying up to date with technology. Specific ideas included one-on-one student technology availability, more training for staff or a computer trainer on staff, keeping learning hands-on with more programs like robotics, and programming. Lots of discussion pointed to more affiliation and interaction with local businesses and professionals as well as local colleges to identify future trends, what jobs will be available, and what training is needed. There was much energy about job shadowing and internships so students can identify earlier and more easily where their passion and interests lie. The technology discussion included ideas about STEM/STREAM education and ways to make science, math and technology more hands-on and pertinent to today's world. Participants often emphasized the importance of giving our students balance between their technology training and the need for good social, relationship, and communication skills; the need to not sacrifice one for the other.

### **Teacher Recruitment and Retention**

There was a general understanding by all groups that our teacher salaries are low. Most groups expressed appreciation for our teachers' commitment and expertise. All groups understood how essential quality staff is to our continued success, and identified increased salaries as an ongoing need. Suggestions beyond salaries included varied benefit options, stipends for continuing education and professional development, and children's tuition reimbursement. Unique ideas were presented for recruitment including attracting alumni and offering student loan assistance for a commitment to come back to teach at NCS, as well as promoting the benefits of the family environment and faith component of teaching at NCS. There was also many ideas about teacher evaluation, and incentive pay.

### **Curriculum and Life Skills Training**

Many groups offered other ideas about various areas of curriculum including special needs and gifted programs, language classes, College Credit and Advanced Placement classes. Participants also wanted to emphasize life skills training for budgeting, checkbook balancing and various household responsibilities for all students.

### **Fundraising and Tuition**

Participants were appreciative of the efforts to keep tuition affordable and recognized the attraction that has for our parents. Suggestions included increasing endowment and enrollment to keep our finances stable. Other suggestions included estate planning, more volunteer opportunities, and corporate partnerships.

### **Enrollment and Marketing**

Participants offered many suggestions to grow enrollment by reaching out to other Catholic Schools and other Christian Churches in the area. Many suggestions were made about improved website access, offering transportation options, and being more aggressive in "tooting our own horn." An "All Are Welcome" attitude prevailed, wanting to ensure students, with whatever educational needs, and families with financial need are welcomed to NCS. Our before and after care is a great selling point as well.

### **Facilities**

Some groups mentioned areas of our facilities in need of updating included the bathrooms at the ECC and the Elementary School.

## **Participant Individual Response Forms -- Questions With Answers**

Individual response forms offer us a real look at the evening and how participants digested what they heard and learned. Their enthusiasm and passion for NCS is felt in their responses as well as their willingness to take ownership for what is next.

### **1. The ideal, value, belief most important for the school.**

The overwhelming response to question one was focused on the Catholic/Christian faith formation for our students, passing on the faith, maintaining a strong Catholic identity and overall faith development. Other top responses were the family/community environment of the school, maintaining our dedicated staff and our tradition, and a commitment to academic excellence. "Catholic education stands for faith in Jesus." and "Promote Jesus in their lives and 'walk the talk'."

### **2. Tonight the most significant insight I gained was.**

Again there was a collective response from nearly all participants with two areas highlighted. One area was real surprise by the similarity and agreement of the ideas presented for the school's future. The other response was general satisfaction in the tremendous commitment and love for the school that was evident in the room. Another frequent insight was learning about the legacy of the school and a pride in being part of it. "...how committed folks of all ages are to this school and its future!" and "Many people have the same vision for our school."

### **3. My opinion that the most important areas (projects, needs) for the school are.**

The most frequent response to this question was to find ways to attract and retain quality teachers, with many ideas offered of how we might do this. A close second was the area of technology, STEM and STREAM education with hands-on learning, more collaboration and opportunities for students to experience the "real world." Other ideas were centered on other areas of curriculum, faith formation and career development. Suggestions also included financial and enrollment ideas. ""Keep our great teachers." and "Keep technology up-to-date with ever-changing world."

### **4. The best part of tonight's meeting.**

Camaraderie and community were the best parts of the evening for most people! They loved meeting new people, sharing ideas and hearing others commitment. Others were grateful to be asked for their advice and they appreciated the good meal. "We were discussing freely and no idea was shot down." and "All aspects were enjoyable. Thanks for putting this together." and "Being inspired!"

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS.**

Mostly these comments were thanks for the opportunity to come and share; to learn more about our history and the school; and appreciation for the cross-generations make-up of the group. Many expanded on ideas that were suggested or shared a concern. Many shared their love and commitment for the school and our mission. Many committed to whatever comes next and asked to be involved. "This was an enlightening evening. Very thought-provoking." and "Thanks for including us, giving us a voice in the future." and "Excited to take turn as watchmen."