



# ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



## EDUCATORS TODAY: “BRONCO BUSTERS”

As we near the end of another school year, it is appropriate to reflect on the state of education today and how our Catholic schools fit into that picture, which is aptly captured in the Fredrick Remington sculpture that I have on my office desk titled “Broncho Buster” (Remington’s spelling). The rugged Western frontier character portrayed in Remington’s 1895 sculpture, won the hearts of the American people, and being a cowboy at heart, I enjoy it for both the subject matter and its dynamic composition. Remington’s comments on this piece may well be applied to education today: *“Only those who have ridden a bronco the first time it was saddled, or have lived through a railroad accident, can form any conception of the solemnity*

*of such experiences. Few people appreciate the sky-rocket bounds, grunts, and stiff-legged striking...”*

I think educators today are truly “Bronco Busters” (the disciples, saints, Pope Benedict XVI, and Archbishop Chaput come to mind as well). Throughout the state, school districts are engaged in critical discussions about their budgets as Colorado faces its worst revenue downturn since the Great Depression. Anticipating at least \$42 million in state funding cuts for the next school year, Denver Public Schools administrators are calling for salary freezes, a reduction of 3.5 percent in every school budget and less money for special education. Cherry Creek is anticipating about \$13 million in cuts next year, and Jefferson County is expecting about \$40 million over the next two years. Douglas County officials cut about \$35 million from the budget over two years, eliminating about 300 positions, increasing class sizes and redesigning bus routes. Littleton schools are facing larger classes, fewer electives, reduced literacy programs and staff furlough days. Districts are seeking many options and innovations to “ride out” these challenging times for education. It is no different for Catholic schools across the nation. Since 2000, 1524 Catholic schools have closed or consolidated for a loss of 461,507 students (17.4%). In the past year, 162 schools have consolidated or closed.

In the last decade enrollment in the Archdiocese of Denver Catholic schools has declined by 1526 students (13.2%). In this economy, grant money has declined by several million dollars, affecting at least 22 of our 39 schools that rely on grant assistance. Just as in all of education today, our schools and the archdiocese funding entities have to selectively prune in order to maintain systemic quality and long term sustainability.

Although we have very real and serious challenges, our archdiocesan Catholic schools are not facing the same level of “sky-rocket bounds, grunts, and stiff-legged striking” that is being experienced in public education today. There are several reasons for this. First, Catholic schools have always faced resource challenges and have done more with less. Second, six years ago we anticipated these growing issues facing education in general and Catholic schools in particular and initiated the research and planning necessary for stabilization and systemic sustainability. Third, with hard work and creativity on the part of each school, we engaged in an active branding and marketing plan to help our schools be more identifiable and differentiated in an education market that contains numerous education options. Fourth, in collaboration with all stakeholders, we developed a strategic plan that has four pillars. These pillars include (1) Providing the vision, tools and resources necessary to help schools grow in self-sufficiency; (2) Continuing to develop, nurture and be good stewards of the philanthropic base necessary to ensure that our system remains accessible to people of all social and economic strata; (3) Creating and implementing a broad-based funding formula to expand the parish support base for Catholic schools; (4) Utilizing and communicating data-driven sustainability measurements to determine and recommend strategic pruning for schools.

With these and so many other efforts on behalf of so many, we still face tough decisions and many uncertainties. Some schools are losing or receiving significantly reduced grant funding; a few schools may have to consolidate or close; all teachers have experienced a salary freeze and some have lost their jobs; a number of students are not able to continue their enrollment due to a shortage of both family and school resources. Rather than pointing fingers, assigning blame, or looking for easy solutions we must all recognize the immense task before us, celebrate the gift of our Catholic schools and work together to maintain a strong system that serves a broad range of families.

There are many reasons to celebrate in our schools this year as in all years, and I will highlight three. (1) Our Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores are spectacular. The composite average scores for all grades are above grade level ranging from .6 years at 2<sup>nd</sup> grade to 3.6 years at 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The average scores in all subtests at all grade levels show a full year of growth or more. (2) We are one of a handful of dioceses to receive district accreditation due to the quality and hard work of each of our 39 schools. Our highest accreditation citations are in Catholic identity and vision and leadership. (3) The presbyterate, Archdiocesan Finance Council, and the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council are supportive of a change in assessment beginning July 1, 2010 that leads to a greater investment in Catholic schools by all parishes and promote larger enrollment in the schools. This broad-based support signals the value placed on our schools for the future of our Church.

The real beauty and enduring popularity of *The Broncho Buster* is that it has come to symbolize all that is triumphant and heroic of the American West. It reflects Remington's attention to detail, along with his ingenious rendering of intense movement combined with a delicate sense

of balance. I offer that these are the same qualities found in our school communities today. Intense movement, delicate sense of balance, attention to detail, heroic, triumphant—all of these qualities mark our schools as together we fight to stay aboard this rearing, plunging, but magnificent creature, the Catholic school.

Many Happy Trails,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "R".

Richard Thompson  
Superintendent of Catholic Schools

CATHOLIC SCHOOL  
TAKE ANOTHER LOOK

*The Archdiocese of Denver Catholic Schools is an investment in the future of our children and our Catholic faith.*