

CATHOLIC HERALD

**Seton Catholic Schools:
Letting Our Light Shine Across Greater Milwaukee**



Faith, Family at Center of Seton's Success

KAREN MAHONEY
SPECIAL TO THE CATHOLIC HERALD

Faith and family are at the heart of Seton Catholic Schools. Both are vital to creating a vibrant learning environment for students that allows them to grow and flourish to reach their God-given potential.

When Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKi and Dr. Kathleen Cepelka, Emeritus Superintendent of Schools, first laid the foundation for Seton Catholic Schools, the community was at the heart of their vision, Kristen Foster, Chief Schools Officer for Seton Catholic Schools, explained.

"They knew that if a Catholic school or parish was flourishing in a neighborhood, those communities thrived," Foster said. "That sense of community drives us each day. Family engagement is important, and we try to ensure families have access to resources to meet those most basic needs, such as housing, food and second language classes when needed. If we can help our community and help uplift them, the children are uplifted in response."

First and foremost is helping students understand God's love for them through the Catholic faith, and in turn grow in love of God and others. Each of Seton's 12 schools are supported by parishes. The connection between parish and school is crucial to the sustainability of Catholic parish schools.

According to Foster, hiring a Director of Mission and Catholic Identity helped solidify the integration of faith with education inside and outside the classroom.

"We have Spark teachers who fully embrace our Catholic faith and who focus on igniting the Holy Spirit to make sure it comes alive in the schools," she said. "We celebrate weekly Mass, holy days (and) incorporate religion into the curriculum. And we teach students what it means to be faith leaders."

In addition to instilling faith-based education, Seton schools offer high-quality education tailored to the needs of each student. Student test scores are a testament to the rigorous curriculum. A 33-percent increase in reading scores over the past two years and a 50-percent increase in math scores demonstrates Seton's commitment to academic excellence for its



▲ Mary Queen of Saints kindergarten teacher Patty Springer works one-on-one with students to help them develop reading skills.

3,000 students. That dedication has resulted in some of the top schools in the city, with six five-star schools.

Academic growth begins with a team leader at each school who focuses on assisting first-year teachers.

"The leader makes sure new teachers receive coaching, understand how to educate students in small groups, read data, differentiate instruction and are committed to aligning our education across all 12 schools," said Foster. "All of our great teachers collaborate monthly and each has a partner teacher. This enables a teacher to share materials or strategies that have helped them with their partner."

Each campus also has a master teacher who takes on extra academic leadership roles, helps coach teachers and serves as the next candidates for leadership in Seton. "We are looking to grow from within and when a leadership position opens, we'll have a strong educator ready to move into these positions," said Foster.

Each Seton school participates in the Wisconsin or Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, which offers parents the chance to choose a Catholic education for their children.

Long term, Seton plans to grow to 20 schools, Foster said. St. Adalbert is the newest Seton school and will join in the fall of 2023.

"We are excited to have 12 schools and grow in our mission and beauty of Seton. We have schools in all four corners of Milwaukee — there is no other organization or family of schools like this," she said. "We recently had an all-school Mass this year with Archbishop ListECKi at the Al McGuire Center and had 19 concelebrants. This helped the children see they are part of something much larger and are all connected in God's love. The love of God is in everything we do, from academics to communities, to social well-being, to faith celebration and, all combined, has made us a successful and beautiful vision."

Many Ways to Advocate for and Support Seton Schools

COLLEEN JURKIEWICZ
CATHOLIC HERALD STAFF

Supporting the students of Seton's family of Catholic schools shouldn't be a priority only for the members of those particular parish communities served.

Since the 3,000 students who attend the 12 current Seton schools represent some of the most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city, ensuring their access to quality Catholic education becomes a matter of social justice for all Catholics throughout the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

Brian Couch, President and CEO of Seton Catholic Schools, discussed ways everyone can support the mission of Seton and the futures of the children who thrive in its classrooms.

Support School Choice Programs

The most fundamental way to ensure the success of Seton schools is by supporting their main source of revenue: Wisconsin's Private School Choice Programs. Families participating in this program are able to send their children to private schools when they otherwise could not afford the tuition. The private school is reimbursed by state aid payments for eligible students.

"We're able to operate fully Catholic schools from a culture, identity and moral value perspective, using state-provided funding," said Couch, who added that seven out of eight Seton families utilize the Choice program. "Parental Choice Programs are a key element to making vibrant Catholic education available to students, parents and communities that can't afford it on their own."

Supporting legislation and policies that protect the Choice program is essential to Seton's continued progress, said Couch.



▲ Archbishop Jerome ListECKi greets students at St. Rafael the Archangel School.

"It's a matter of equal funding for every student, regardless of who they are, and honoring the ability of parents to make the decision on which school is best for their child," he said.

Be informed and spread the good news

It's important for Catholics in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee to understand the mission of Seton Catholic Schools, said Couch. More than simply being a system of urban schools, Seton is an innovative model of education — a "family" of communities working to ensure the moral and educational well-being of their students.

Seton's goal of revitalizing urban Catholic education is rooted in the

traditional parish-based school model but consolidates the administrative and operational aspects in the team at the Seton level, allowing principals and teachers in each member school to focus on pastoral and academic leadership.

It's all about "enabling high-quality parish schools," said Couch, in a modern society and economy that has caused many parish schools to struggle.

"The parish identity is really at the core of what we want to build on," he said. "We don't operate independent Catholic schools. We operate parish schools, on behalf of the parish, as an archdiocesan entity."

In its seven years of existence, Seton students have demonstrated

impressive academic growth, including improvements of 132 percent in math and 128 percent in reading this past year. Students' average 2022 scores in math and reading were more than double those of their public school counterparts, and 60 percent above the scores of other Choice students in Milwaukee.

Help make up the difference

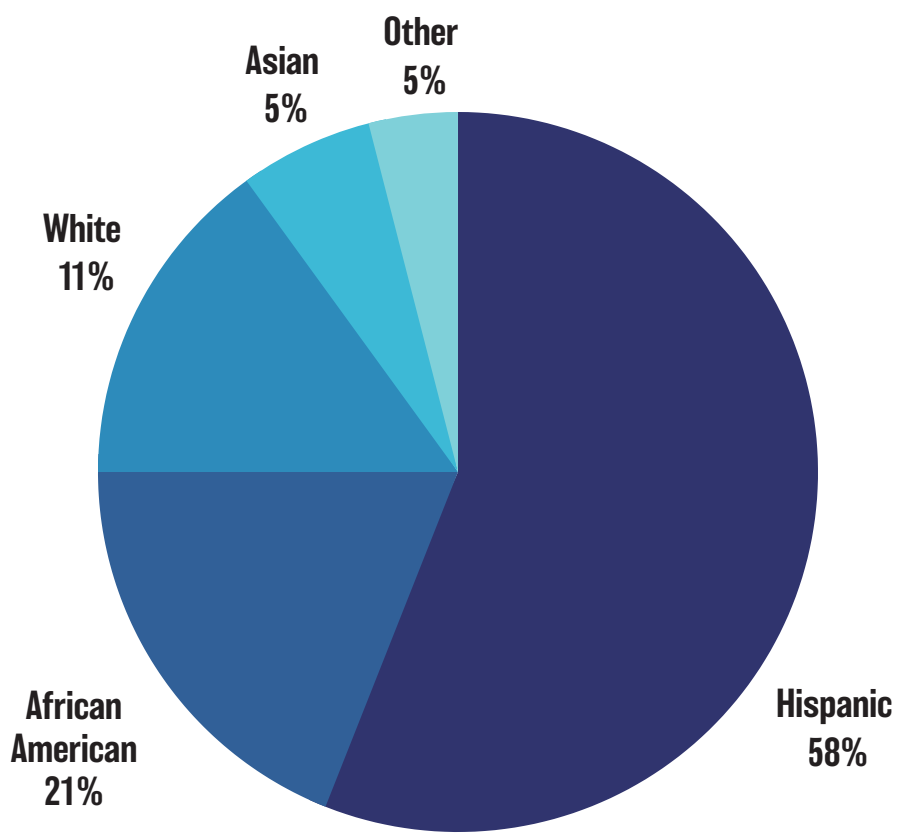
For the 2022-23 school year, private schools participating in the Choice program are reimbursed a maximum of \$8,399 per student in grades K through 8. That leaves a shortfall of roughly \$2,500 per student, each year, for Seton schools to provide the quality of instruction to which they are committed.

Seton donors come from all walks of life, said Couch, and represent a variety of geographic areas and economic backgrounds — but are united in their "passionate belief in the value of a high-quality Catholic education for urban students, families and communities."

The Seton Difference Campaign was launched last summer with a fundraising goal of \$30 million, \$16 million of which has already been raised. The money will go to support the implementation of Seton's strategic plan, which anticipates an expansion to include approximately 20 parish schools in the city of Milwaukee in the next five to seven years. The plan also calls for the investment in Catholic culture with a Director of Mission and Catholic Identity, already hired, the revitalization of existing facilities and the building of new ones, and the acquisition and retention of top teaching talent.

"Every gift makes a difference," said Couch.

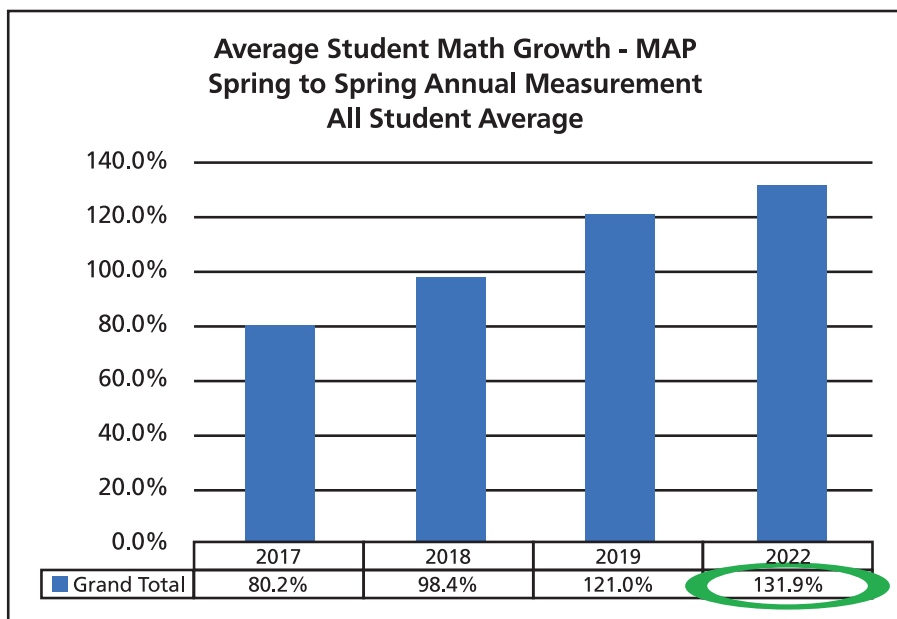
Seton Student Diversity



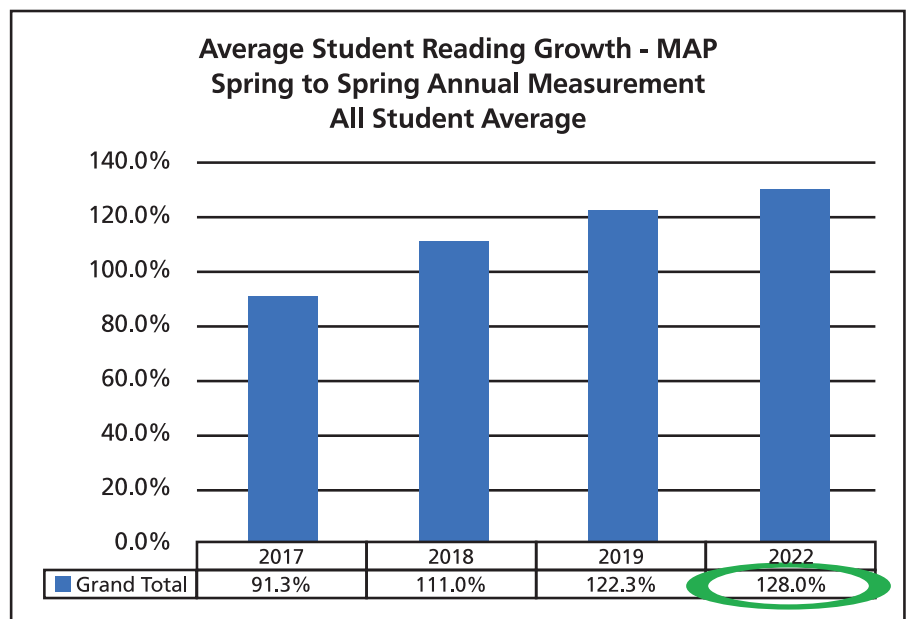
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
2021-22 Report Cards

St. Charles Borromeo	★★★★★
Catholic East Elementary	★★★★★
Mary Queen of Saints	★★★★★
St. Thomas Aquinas Academy	★★★★★
Prince of Peace	★★★★★
St. Roman	★★★★★
St. Rafael the Archangel	★★★★
Our Lady Queen of Peace	★★★★
St. Adalbert	★★★★
Northwest Catholic	★★★
Saint Margaret Mary	★★★
St. Catherine	★★

Measure of Academic Progress Test Results



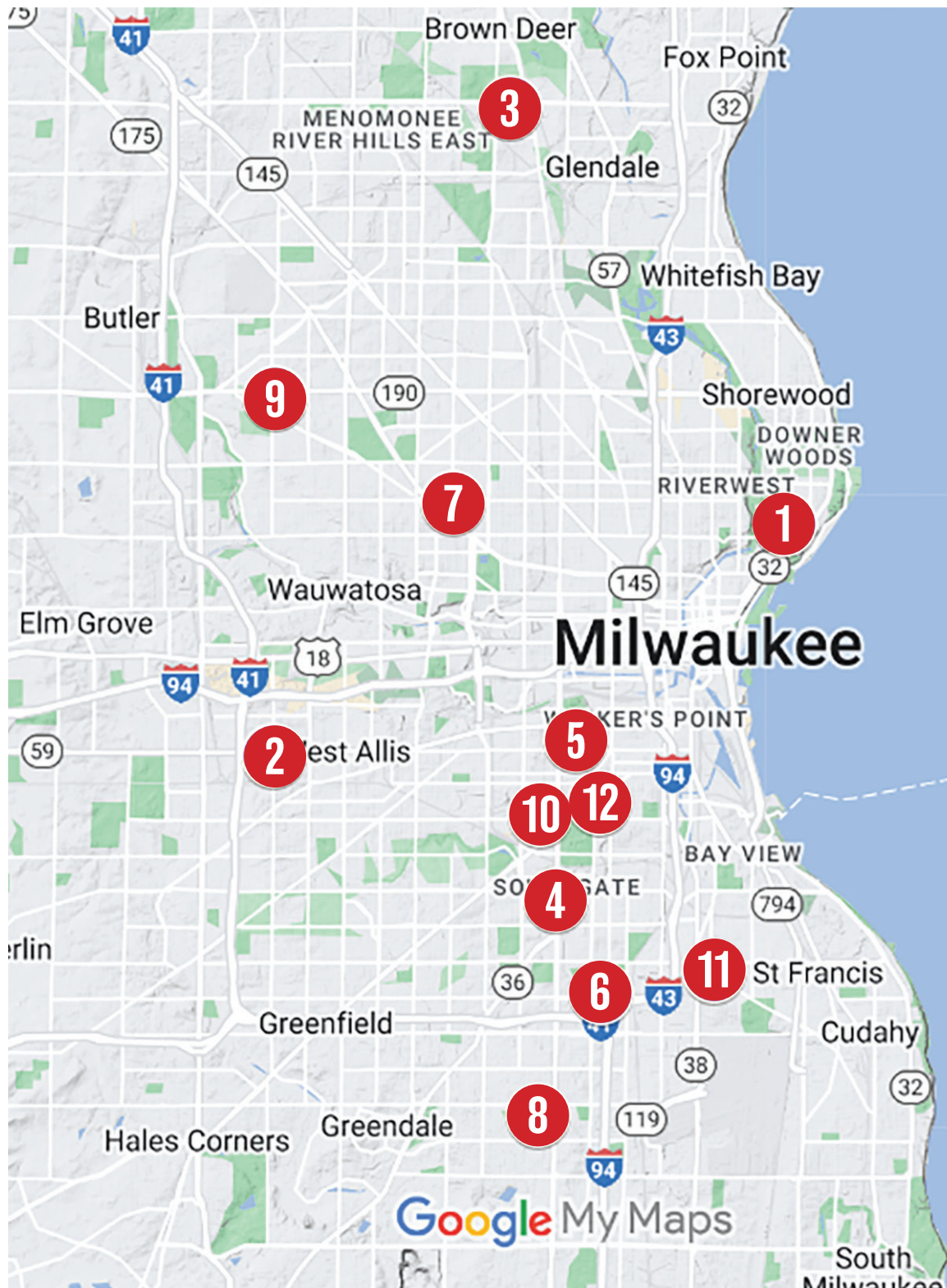
Over 60% Increase in Growth Rate



Over 40% Increase in Growth Rate



Seton Catholic Schools Located Throughout Milwaukee



- 1 Catholic East Elementary**
2038 N. Bartlett Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53202
414-964-1770 • catholicceast.org
- 2 Mary Queen of Saints Catholic Academy**
1227 S. 116th Street, West Allis, WI 53214
414-476-0751 • mqscsca.org
- 3 Northwest Catholic School**
7140 N. 41st Street, Milwaukee, WI 53209
414-352-6927 • nwcschool.org
- 4 Our Lady Queen of Peace School**
2733 W. Euclid Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53215
414-672-6660 • olqpmke.org
- 5 Prince of Peace School**
1114 S. 25th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53204
414-383-2157 • princeofpeaceschool.org
- 6 St. Roman Parish School**
1810 W. Bolivar Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53221
414-282-7970 • stromanschool.com
- 7 St. Catherine School**
2647 N. 51st Street, Milwaukee, WI 53210
414-445-2846 • saintcatherine.org
- 8 St. Charles Borromeo Parish School**
3100 W. Parnell Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53221
414-282-0767 • scbschoolmil.org
- 9 St. Margaret Mary Catholic School**
3950 N. 92nd Street, Milwaukee, WI 53222
414-463-8760 • stmms.org
- 10 St. Rafael the Archangel School**
2251 S. 31st Street, Milwaukee, WI 53215
414-645-1300 • strafael.org
- 11 St. Thomas Aquinas Academy**
341 E. Norwich Street, Milwaukee, WI 53207
411-744-1214 • thomasaquinasacademy.com
- 12 St. Adalbert School**
1913 W. Becher Street, Milwaukee, WI 53215
414-645-5450 • stadalbertmke.com

Seton Experience Includes Academic, Child, Family Support

KATHLEEN MCGILLIS DRAYNA
CATHOLIC HERALD STAFF

Diana and Jose Mantejano sent their two daughters to St. Roman School in Milwaukee four years ago because Jose's sister sent her older children there.

Both families live nearby and looked forward to helping each other out more easily with both family's children — now seven in all — attending one school as the years passed.

But Diana Mantejano got much more than she bargained for — she has found that the St. Roman staff and parents closely work together to create a strong, faith-filled learning environment for children.

"It's a whole village working together," Diana said. "My daughters have that support all around them."

St. Roman is part of Seton Catholic Schools, which offers extra support to 3,000 grade K3-8 children and their parents in 12 parish schools in greater Milwaukee.

It's been Seton's mission since 2016 to prepare children to attend high-performing high schools through rigorous, individualized instruction. Seton also understands how important it is for children, their parents, their teachers and other school staff to work together for academic success.

Parishes in the Seton Family of Catholic Schools sponsor their school which is operated by Seton. Major administrative functions such as enrollment, payroll, hiring, accounting, marketing, maintenance and more are handled by the Seton team.

This collaboration frees principals to focus on making academics as strong as possible. In the classroom, new teachers are matched with coaches and mentors and they receive professional development to help them grow their skills. With smaller class sizes, teachers at the 12 Seton Catholic Schools also can offer children more individual attention with the help of intensive testing that is analyzed closely to make sure children are learning. Seton schools use the rigorous MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) assessment three times a year. MAP measures what each child knows by customizing upcoming questions based on how well the student answered test questions. The testing data of each child is analyzed to determine strengths and weaknesses. Teachers create custom learning plans for each child and curriculum adjustments are made if broader needs are noted.



▲ A mother and her son from Prince of Peace School enjoy breakfast during Mexican Mother's Day celebration.

In addition, grade 3-8 children take part in Forward Testing that measures how they perform relative to Wisconsin state standards. Results from the Forward Exam indicate that our students are surpassing their peers. Seton students score proficient or above on the Forward Exam at nearly twice the rate of public school students in Milwaukee.

The Mantejanos are very pleased with their daughters' education.

"They're doing great academically. Communication is a big thing," Diana said. Teacher conferences are helpful, but Diana also appreciates how frequently teachers communicate with the help of a convenient, collaborative classroom phone app.

Communication, personalized attention and family involvement is stressed. For example, the Mantejanos are Catholic, but not members of St. Roman. The school connected them with the parish staff so their second grader, Elena, could complete First Communion preparation and receive the sacrament at the school's parish.

"Their faith is something that is a part of them now," Diana said. "They are learning to serve others as Jesus did."

For example, when her youngest, Sofia, sees someone doing something kind, the first grader says, "Oh, that's something Jesus would do." Sofia also successfully gave up chocolate for all of Lent. "She was proud of herself," Diana said, adding that she might have expected a first grader not to stick with that sacrifice.

Erika Ramirez and her husband, Jonathan Flores, have two sons who have attended another Seton family school, Prince of Peace School, since grade K4.

"My children are receiving a high-quality education. My family and I are very satisfied with the school because teachers are always willing to support my kids' education in any possible way," Ramirez said. "For example, they have programs to help students improve their English communication skills to increase their academic performance."

Ramirez also is impressed with the school's above-and-beyond efforts to help families.

Two years ago, Seton received grants to pilot a Family Engagement Collaborative Program at Prince of Peace School. The program's goal is to help students succeed by understanding and confronting the challenges of families. Seton hopes to eventually expand the program to all of its schools.

"The family engagement program led by Ms. Malena Torres has been very beneficial to our school community because it gives access to resources to improve our quality of life," Ramirez said. "Housing, health and job fairs are just an example of the multiple ways that our families have access to free resources in the community."

After parents expressed a need to learn English better, Peace of Prince began offering an onsite English as a Second Language program on school days.

"The ESL program has helped me develop my English communication skills to understand the American education system and support my children with homework," Ramirez said. "For example, I can talk to my children's teacher without an interpreter."

At the same time, Ramirez appreciates that some school leaders are Hispanic, speak her family's first language of Spanish and are good role models for her sons. Nearly all of the 371 children who attend Prince of Peace are Hispanic.

"The teachers and staff are welcoming and celebrate Hispanic culture, which is greatly appreciated because the school makes me feel at home," Ramirez said.

Faith Formation, Team Building Provide Backbone of Seton

LARRY HANSON
CATHOLIC HERALD STAFF

Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKi is fond of saying, “We don’t educate children because they are Catholic; we educate them because we are Catholic.”

The Seton Family of Catholic Schools is a shining example, growing from its roots in 2016 to become a model of regional school systems for other dioceses across the nation.

“It’s the most focused form of evangelization we have in the Church because we have these families five days a week, 10 months a year,” said retired Catholic Schools Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Cepelka, who is still mentoring Seton teachers in her spare time. “They are absorbing the faith life we are presenting to them. There is no other place in the Church where we have that opportunity for evangelization.”

Two planks Seton is based on, aside from the model that creates greater efficiencies and assures the sustainability of individual schools, are Catholic identity and a sense of community among the educators at Seton’s 12 schools.

Fr. Tim Kitzke, when he was appointed chaplain of Seton Catholic Schools, suggested the Spark program as a way of igniting the Holy Spirit and fostering Catholic identity in the schools.

Each month, Dr. Cepelka and Jim Schultz, Director of Mission and Catholic Identity for Seton Catholic Schools, meet with each school’s principal and their Spark teacher for a formation session that focuses on one aspect of the Catholic faith.



▲ Students receive communion during The Seton Family of Catholic Schools Mass.

The Spark teachers serve as mentors to their colleagues at their schools, promoting Catholic identity in the schools and assisting with liturgical services and service projects.

Michele Zampino, a music teacher at St. Roman School, Milwaukee, is her school’s Spark representative.

“To be able to share that faith is vital to me, to be able to talk about it, to be able to help children learn, that has definitely been a great thing,” Zampino said. “Seton-wide, we have shared values, and our shared values help us to form a community.”

Seton takes a holistic approach to nurture children and develop students of strong moral character that instills Catholic values and guides them through life’s challenges.

“(The objective is) to have these young people understand what it really is to be able to follow Christ and live with hope in their hearts and really get through

any kind of struggles they have,” Zampino said.

Having Dr. Cepelka assisting on a regular basis is beneficial for educators, Zampino said.

“She’s a listener, and she brings out things in you,” Zampino said. “She’s an incredible lady, and with all those years behind her, even though she’s retired, she’s still totally involved with us. She really strongly supports what we do. She’s helping guide us through her knowledge, to be better leaders within the school. Then, she’s taking the time out to come to the schools.”

Part of Dr. Cepelka’s weekly visits to individual schools includes providing a sounding board for principals and teachers, based on her intricate knowledge of Seton’s structure, standards and practices.

Forming that community among teachers across the city is vital to creating and maintaining Seton’s

demanding level of performance, for staff, administration, teachers and, most importantly, students.

The Seton Educator Academy is a yearlong program for teachers who are new to Seton Catholic Schools. It kicks off with two days in the summer.

The first day focuses on the mission, the communities and Seton’s values. The second day focuses on Seton’s coaching model, which includes sessions for each curricular area that they will teach. Then, there are monthly sessions. Each session starts with a meal and faith sharing to build community across the family of schools. The monthly sessions focus on coaching, instructional practices and creating a classroom culture. Each new teacher is also assigned a mentor and they meet monthly to provide support and resources.

“Seton Educator Academy is the foundation to both our community building and alignment to instructional practices,” said Courtney Albright, Senior Director of Curriculum and Instructional Effectiveness for Seton Catholic Schools.

Twelve schools. One mission. That’s the Seton Way.

“Seton is not an optional form of Catholic education for the city of Milwaukee,” Dr. Cepelka said. “It is the archdiocesan vision, plan and system for the way we do Catholic education in Milwaukee. It is our vision. This is really an opportunity for excellence. Seton is at the heart of the archdiocesan commitment to the city of Milwaukee. It’s through these children and families — there’s an outreach that is immeasurable. It’s at the core of the Church’s outreach to the city.”

Welcome to the Seton Family of Catholic Schools!



12 schools proudly serving Greater Milwaukee

Now Enrolling K3 - 8th Grade

We're in a neighborhood near you!

Seton schools provide a thriving Catholic culture that represents the diverse families and ethnicities we serve in neighborhoods throughout Greater Milwaukee.

- Our students thrive spiritually, academically and socially.
- We want every child to know God's love for them.
- Our schools are safe and welcoming environments.

We offer:

- Small class sizes
- Strong student-teacher engagement
- One computer for every student
- Extended care
- Free breakfast and lunch

We proudly participate in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program, allowing you to choose Catholic education for your child. Visit SetonCatholicSchools.org or call 414-831-8400 to learn more. We look forward to welcoming you!



SETON
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS