

CLS 2026

Building Bridges of Hope

New Superintendents Academy (NSA)
October 17–18, 2026

Catholic Leadership Summit (CLS)
October 18–21, 2026

Grand Rapids, MI
Amway Grand Plaza

FINAL PROGRAM

NCEA
National Catholic Educational Association

www.**NCEA**.org/CLS #NCEACLS NCEATalk NCEAorg

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Dear Friends and Partners in Catholic Education,

It is my privilege to welcome you to the 2026 Catholic Leadership Summit (CLS), October 18–21, in Grand Rapids, MI. This year, we will gather around the theme *Building Bridges of Hope*.

Catholic school leadership has always been about building bridges. In partnership with your bishop, you help advance the educational mission of the Church and model the collaboration that principals and pastors bring to their own school communities. Your leadership strengthens the connection between our Catholic schools, our dioceses, and the broader life of the Church.

You also build bridges between the needs of today and the possibilities of tomorrow, between the wisdom of our tradition and the opportunities before us. At a time when so much can divide and discourage us, Catholic school leaders are called to bring people together, strengthen community, and offer the hope found in Christ.

During our time in Grand Rapids, I encourage you to take full advantage of the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations with fellow diocesan and system leaders, empower one another through shared wisdom and best practices, and inspire one another to lead with hope and renewed commitment to our shared mission. The relationships strengthened at CLS 2026 will continue long after we return home, helping us better serve and support Catholic schools across our nation.

I am deeply grateful to the Diocese of Grand Rapids, especially the Most Reverend David John Walkowiak, JCD, and Superintendent Sarah Grey, for their generous partnership and hospitality.

Thank you for answering the call to lead and for all you do in service to Catholic education. I pray that these days together will renew your spirit, strengthen your leadership, and remind you that you are never alone in this important ministry.

May God bless you, and may Our Lady, Mother of Hope, guide us as together we build bridges of hope for the future of Catholic education.

Dr. Steven F. Cheeseman
President/CEO, National Catholic Educational Association

National Catholic Educational Association
200 North Glebe Road | Suite 730 | Arlington, VA 22203 | t 800.711.6232 | f 703.243.0025 | www.NCEA.org

DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Office of the Bishop

Dear Friends in Christ,

It is our great joy and honor to welcome you to West Michigan for the 2026 National Catholic Educational Association Catholic Leadership Summit. Your presence here is a testament to our shared mission and the strength that comes from walking together as leaders in Catholic education.

Catholic schools are, above all, communities of faith. They help parents place in the hearts of their daughters and sons the desire to become saints. We are grateful for your ardent commitment to this ministry of forming young men and women in faith, wisdom, and virtue.

The theme, "Building Bridges of Hope," invites us to reflect on the relationships that sustain and advance our mission—with one another, and with our school and parish communities. As Pope Leo XIV writes in *Drawing New Maps of Hope*, "Where educational communities allow themselves to be guided by the word of Christ, they do not retreat, but are revitalized; they do not build walls, but bridges" (1.1). These words remind us that our work is rooted in encounter. Every school, every classroom, and every act of leadership is an opportunity to build bridges that lead others to the hope found in Jesus Christ.

During your time in Grand Rapids, we invite you to embrace the opportunities for prayer, professional growth, and fellowship. May these days provide meaningful conversations and renewed inspiration as you discuss ideas and address the challenges facing Catholic schools.

Thank you for your faithful witness and your dedication to Catholic education. We recognize and celebrate the extraordinary work you do each day to build communities where students encounter Christ, discover their God-given gifts, and are prepared to serve the Church and the world.

May the Holy Spirit guide this summit and send us forth to continue building bridges of hope for the Catholic communities we serve.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+DJWalkowiak

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of the Diocese of Grand Rapids

Sarah Grey

Mrs. Sarah Grey
Superintendent of Catholic Schools

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CACE 2012
San Diego, CA



CACE 2004
Dallas, TX



CLS 2022
Arlington, VA



CLS 2024
Seattle, WA

Celebrating 90 Years of #NCEACLS

What was your first CLS? Share your memories on social media with #NCEACLS and #MyFirstCLS.

First Informal
Gathering of Superintendents
1936
Washington, DC

Ad Hoc Gathering Becomes
Official Meeting under the Parish School Department
1938
Washington, DC

Meeting Renamed
Chief Administrators of Catholic Education (CACE)
Early 1970s

You Are Here!
Building Bridges of Hope
CLS 2026
Grand Rapids, MI

Meeting Renamed
Catholic Leadership Summit (CLS)
2015
Atlanta, GA

See You Next Year in the Diocese of St. Augustine!
Inspiring the Dream
CLS 2027
Jacksonville, FL

Among the first members of NCEA, as constituents of the original Parish School Department, school superintendents from diocesan and religious orders began conferring informally as a separate NCEA sub-group in 1936, cognizant of their unique needs, perspectives and the importance of collegiality. So successful was their ad hoc interaction that in 1938 they became an official section, under the Parish School Department. In the early 1970s, the group was renamed the Chief Administrators of Catholic Education. In 2015, the meeting was renamed as the Catholic Leadership Summit.

Unless noted, all Summit events will take place at the Amway Grand Plaza in Grand Rapids, MI.

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

NEW SUPERINTENDENTS ACADEMY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2026

10 AM – 5 PM
Registration & Badge Pick-up
NORTH CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

11 – 11:30 AM
Welcome Remarks and Introduction
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

11:30 AM – 12:15 PM
NCEA Support and Resources
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

12:15 – 1 PM
Lunch
Sponsored by Strategic Measurement and Evaluation
VANDENBERG A, SECOND LEVEL

1 – 1:45 PM
The Leadership Bridge: Connecting Style to Situation
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

1:45 – 2 PM Break

2 – 3 PM
School Budgets- Steering School Leaders Toward Sustainability
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

3 – 3:15 PM Break

3:15 – 4:15 PM
Leaning into Difficult Decisions and Discussions Using Data
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

4:15 – 4:30 PM Break

4:30 – 5:30 PM
Federal Programs the Catholic School Superintendent
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

5:30 – 6 PM Relax and Refresh

6 – 8 PM
New Superintendents Dinner
Sponsored by FACTS
WOODROWS DUCKPIN BOWLING

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026

8 – 11 AM
Registration & Badge Pick-up
NORTH CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

8:45 – 9:30 AM
Breakfast
VANDENBERG A, SECOND LEVEL

9:30 – 10:30 AM
Measuring What Matters: The Five Marks as a Framework for Hope and Renewal
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

10:30 – 10:45 AM Break

10:45 – 11:45 AM
What Every New Superintendent Should Know Panel
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

11:45 AM – 12 PM Break

12 – 1 PM
Articulate Your Leadership Plan
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

Closing Remarks for the New Superintendents Academy will immediately follow the "Articulate Your Leadership Plan" sesson in Vandenberg B.

Make NCEA Central your go-to stop during the Summit! Browse the latest publications, pick up exclusive merch, and explore the latest NCEA programs and resources. Whether you're looking to shop, learn, or connect, NCEA Central will be open throughout the Summit.

NORTH CONCOURSE
Saturday: 10 AM – 5 PM*
Sunday: 8 – 11 AM*

CENTER CONCOURSE
Sunday: 1 – 4 PM
Monday: 7:30 AM – 4 PM
Tuesday: 7:30 AM – 4 PM
Wednesday: 8 – 11 AM

VISIT NCEA CENTRAL

**Select Offerings*

Unless noted, all Summit events will take place at the Amway Grand Plaza in Grand Rapids, MI.

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026

1 – 3 PM
Lunch & Learn:
Discover NCEA Academy
Advance Registration Required
Sponsored by Eduscape
VANDENBERG A, SECOND LEVEL

1 – 4 PM
Registration & Badge Pick-up
NORTH CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

5 – 6 PM
Welcome and Opening Mass
BASILICA OF ST. ADALBERT

6:30 – 8 PM
Welcome Dinner
Sponsored by FACTS and Renaissance
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

8 – 9:30 PM
Dessert and Cocktail Reception
Sponsored by Catapult Learning
CENTER CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026

7:30 AM – 4 PM
Registration & Badge Pick-up
REGISTRATION 1, SECOND LEVEL

8 – 8:45 AM
Morning Liturgy
PANTLIND BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

8:45 – 9:30 AM
Breakfast
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

9 – 9:30 AM
Headshot Lounge
Sponsored by Lifetouch
CENTER CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

9:30 – 10 AM
Welcome Remarks
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

10 – 11 AM
Keynote
In a Time of Storms: Leading with Faith, Focus and Hope
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

11 – 11:30 AM Break

11:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Professional Learning Sessions 1

12:30 – 1:30 PM
Lunch
Sponsored by William H. Sadlier
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

1:30 – 2:30 PM
Professional Learning Sessions 2

2:30 – 2:45 PM Break

2:45 – 3:45 PM
Professional Learning Sessions 3

3:45 – 4:15 PM
Headshot Lounge
Sponsored by Lifetouch
CENTER CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

3:45 – 5 PM Relax and Refresh

6 – 9 PM
Monday Night Off-Site Dinner
Sponsored by Catapult Learning, Corporate Travel, FlynnO'Hara Uniforms, and William H. Sadlier
GRAND RAPIDS MUSEUM

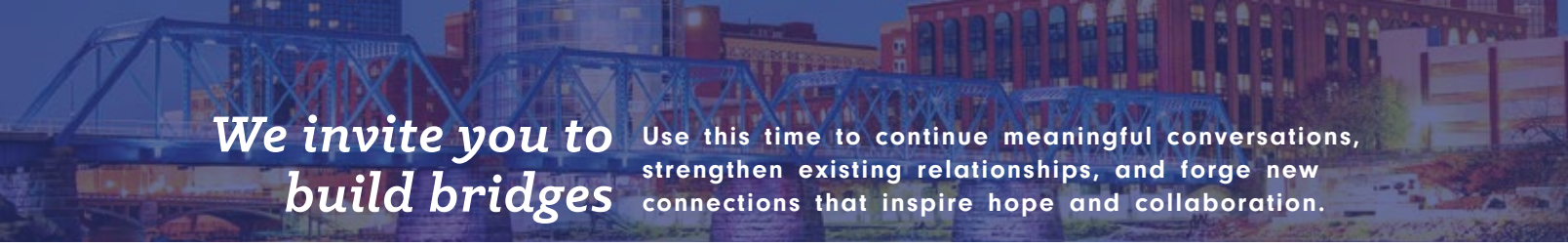
VISIT NCEA CENTRAL

Make NCEA Central your go-to stop during the Summit! Browse the latest publications, pick up exclusive merch, and explore the latest NCEA programs and resources. Whether you're looking to shop, learn, or connect, NCEA Central will be open throughout the Summit.

NORTH CONCOURSE
Saturday: 10 AM – 5 PM*
Sunday: 8 – 11 AM*

CENTER CONCOURSE
Sunday: 1 – 4 PM
Monday: 7:30 AM – 4 PM
Tuesday: 7:30 AM – 4 PM
Wednesday: 8 – 11 AM

**Select Offerings*



We invite you to build bridges

Use this time to continue meaningful conversations, strengthen existing relationships, and forge new connections that inspire hope and collaboration.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2026

7:30 AM – 4 PM
Registration & Badge Pick-up
REGISTRATION 1, SECOND LEVEL

8 – 8:45 AM
Morning Liturgy
PANTLIND BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

8:45 – 9:30 AM
Breakfast
Sponsored by Cabrini Films
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

9 – 9:30 AM
Headshot Lounge
Sponsored by Lifetouch
CENTER CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

9:30 – 11 AM
Hope Renewed: A National Process of Listening, Discernment and Shared Action
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

11 – 11:15 AM Break

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM
Professional Learning Sessions 4

12 – 3 PM
Sip & Gain Clarity — Specialty Espresso Bar
Sponsored by Clarity Tuition
WEST CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

12:15 – 1:15 PM
Lunch
Sponsored by Scouting America
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

12:15 – 1:15 PM
Catholic Higher Education Supporting Catholic Schools (CHESCS) Meeting and Luncheon
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

1:15 – 2:30 PM
NCEA Updates Panel
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

2:30 – 3 PM Break

3 – 4 PM
Professional Learning Sessions 5

5 – 6 PM Relax and Refresh

5 – 8 PM
Corporate Partner Events

7 – 10 PM
Bridging the Keys: The Ultimate Piano Showdown
Sponsored by VenturEd
MOJO'S DUELING PIANO BAR
180 MONROE AVENUE, NW

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2026

8 – 8:45 AM
Morning Liturgy
PANTLIND BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

8 – 11 AM
Registration & Badge Pick-up
REGISTRATION 1, SECOND LEVEL

8:45 – 9:30 AM
Breakfast and Parental Choice Q and A
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

9:30 – 10:30 AM
What Now for Federal Education Programs
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

10:30 – 10:45 AM Break

10:45 – 11:45 AM
Professional Learning Sessions 6

11:45 AM – 12 PM Break

12 – 1 PM
Keynote
Magnifica Humanitas and Catholic School Leadership in the Age of Artificial Intelligence
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

1 PM – 1:15 PM
Closing Remarks
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

Questions?
Check out page 10 for Summit info and assistance, including the lost and found, mobile app, Wi-Fi access, and more!

KEYNOTE

DR. ANSEL AUGUSTINE

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS



MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026, 10 – 11 AM

AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

Dr. Ansel Augustine is an Emmy-nominated producer and an award-winning author. He is presently the Assistant Director of African American Affairs for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the former Director of the Office of Black Catholic Ministries for the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Dr. Augustine has served on the Board of Trustees of St. Michael's College (Burlington, Vermont). He is also on the Board of Directors for the Congo Square Preservation Society and the National Black Catholic Congress. He is the former Executive Director of Cultural Diversity and Outreach for the Archdiocese of Washington. Previously he served as the Associate Director/Coordinator of Black Youth & Young Adult Ministry for the CYO Youth & Young Adult Ministry Office. He is also on the Faculty of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana, Graduate Theological Foundation, and Loyola University New Orleans' Institute for Ministry. Dr. Augustine has also served as a Campus Minister at Xavier University of Louisiana, Loyola University New Orleans, and St. John's University in Queens, NY. Ansel has served on the board of directors for the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association (NCYAMA) and the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM).

He began his career in ministry over 26 years ago when he became the youth minister at his home parish of St. Peter Claver in the Treme area of New Orleans, which he helped to rebuild following Hurricane Katrina. He has presented workshops and keynotes around the world and has written various pieces related to ministry including *The African American Catholic Youth Bible* and, the award-winning book, *Leveling the Praying Field: Can the Church we Love, Love us Back?* He is also the author of the award-winning book, *Praying with Our Feet: Encountering God in the Margins* (Loyola Press).

Dr. Augustine is also an Emmy-nominated producer for the documentary "Black Faith Matters," now titled "Black and Catholic" on YouTube. Ansel has worked in prison ministry for over 25 years in various capacities. He volunteers with the Mardi Gras Indian Council and Backstreet Cultural Museum of which he is an honorary board member. He is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., the Knights of Columbus, the Knights of Peter Claver, and has masked with the Wild Tchoupitoulas (Black Masking) Mardi Gras Indians. He is also an Associate Member of the Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans, LA and the Chaplain for the National Hip Hop Museum in Washington, DC.

KEYNOTE

FR. NATE WILLS

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME



WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2026, 12 – 1 PM

AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

Fr. Nate Wills, CSC is an associate professor of the practice at the University of Notre Dame. He teaches in the Mary Ann Remick Leadership Program and is the director of the Higher-Powered Learning program in Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education. A native of St. Paul, Minnesota, Fr. Nate has served in a variety of capacities including parish work, teaching high school, and seminary formation. He completed his M.Div. and M.Ed. at the University of Notre Dame and his doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, studying technology policy in K-12 Catholic schools. Since the fall of 2015, Father Nate has been a faculty member in the Alliance for Catholic Education's Remick Leadership Program and founded a program based on his research. This "Higher-Powered Learning" program helps teachers to use technology for personalization in K-12 classrooms. Father Nate's research interests include blended and personalized learning, artificial intelligence, and leadership in Catholic schools. He serves on Notre Dame's University-wide AI Innovation Council and gave the closing keynote address at the 2025 NCEA conference. He is the priest-in-residence in Keough Hall and the chaplain to the Notre Dame football team.

INFO & ASSISTANCE

City Information
There is so much to see and do in Grand Rapids. Visit www.experiencegr.com for more information.

Courtesy Request
Attendees are asked to remain seated until sessions conclude. If you must leave early, please sit at the back of the session room. Early departures disturb the speaker and other attendees. Please silence all mobile devices during all programs.

Endorsements
An appearance by a speaker and/or an exhibitor at this Summit does not imply an NCEA endorsement. Official endorsements are granted only by NCEA management.

Evaluation of Sessions and the Full Convention
Complete session evaluations and share valuable feedback through the Summit Evaluation, available in the mobile app. Your feedback is essential to our work.

Guest Services
If you require special assistance while attending the Summit, please notify an NCEA staff member by visiting the registration desk.

Lost and Found
The Lost and Found is located at Reg Counter 1.

Mobile App
Download the free NCEA Events app from your device's app store. Seach for "CLS 2026" to access this year's content. Login credentials have been sent to each attendee at the email address used to register for the Summit. Once logged in, use the "CLS 2026" app to view the most up to date session details, speakers, sponsors and more. Make sure you're using the latest version to access the new features and receive important notifications at login.

Name Badge
Registration stations are located on Center Concourse (second floor) of the Amway Grand Hotel. Attendees, speakers, and sponsors must wear their Summit name badges for all activities.

Only people with official Summit badges will be admitted to general sessions, liturgies, and professional learning sessions.

Photography
By participating in this Summit, attendees grant NCEA the right to use and reproduce photographs for NCEA educational, news, or promotional material, whether in print, electronic, or other media, including the NCEA website. Event photography is brought to you by Lifetouch, NCEA platinum partner.

Complimentary professional headshots will be offered by Lifetouch on a first-come, first-served basis on Monday, 9AM - 9:30 AM and 3:45 - 4:15 PM, and Tuesday, 9 - 10:30 AM, on the center concourse, second level.

Session Overcrowding
As seating is on a first-come, first-served basis, attendees are encouraged to arrive early and preselect alternative sessions. Safety and fire regulations must be followed. Once meeting rooms reach maximum capacity, attendees will be restricted. Standing in the aisle ways and blocking doors will not be permitted.

Social Media
Join us online! Include #NCEACLS and tag us in your posts: @NCEATalk on X and Instagram; National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) on Facebook and LinkedIn.

Wireless Internet
Complimentary Wi-Fi is available for all guests in the meeting rooms and hallways at the Amway Grand Plaza.

Network (SSID): **CLS 2026**
Password: **CLSHOPE26**

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- Download the free **NCEA Events** app from your device's app store.
- Search for "CLS 2026" to access this year's content.
- Login credentials have been sent to each attendee at the email address used to register for the Summit.
- Once logged in, use the **CLS 2026** app to view the most up to date session details, speakers, sponsors, and more.
- Turn on notifications to receive push notifications from NCEA during the Summit!

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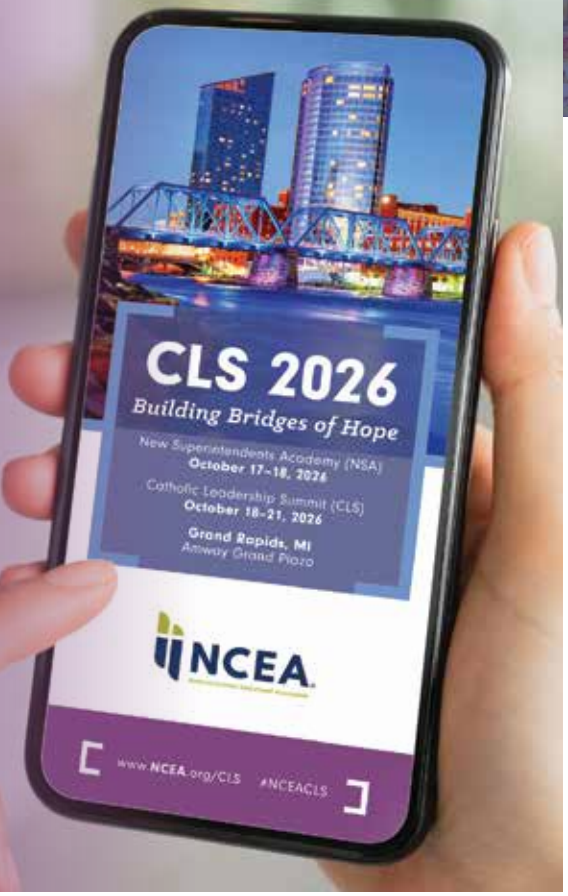
NCEA Events App



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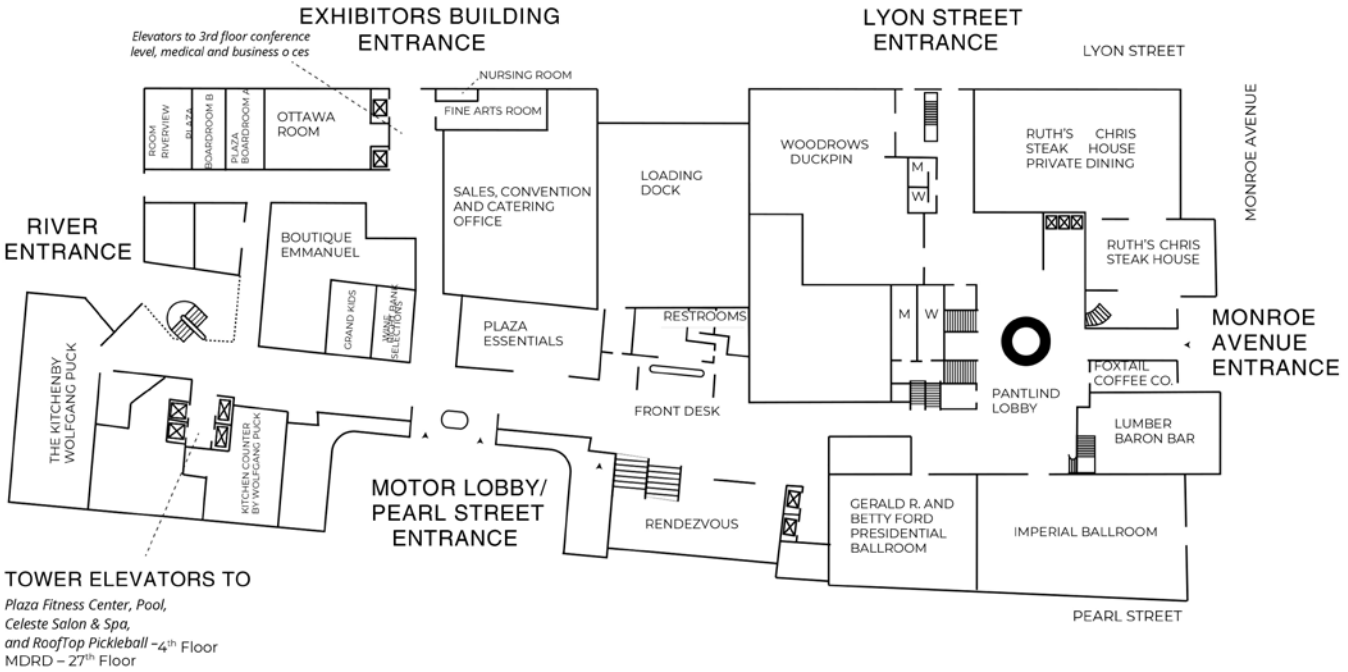

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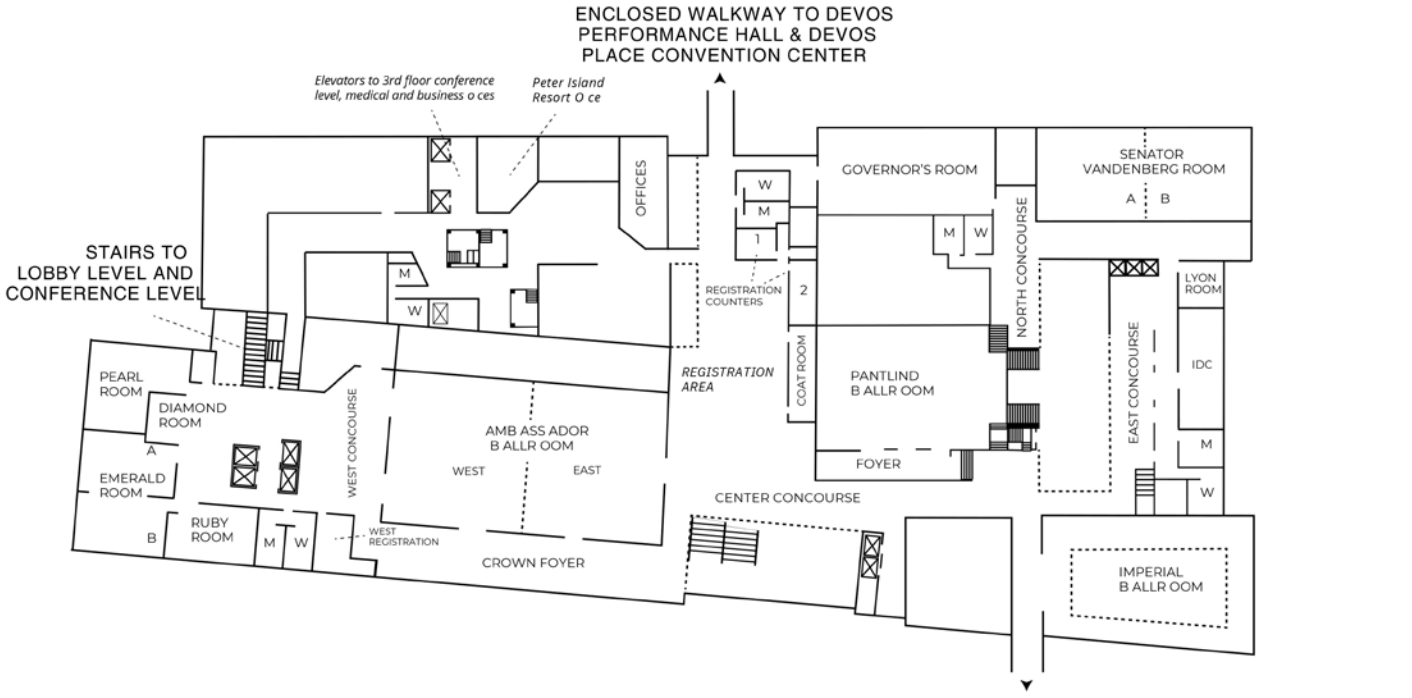
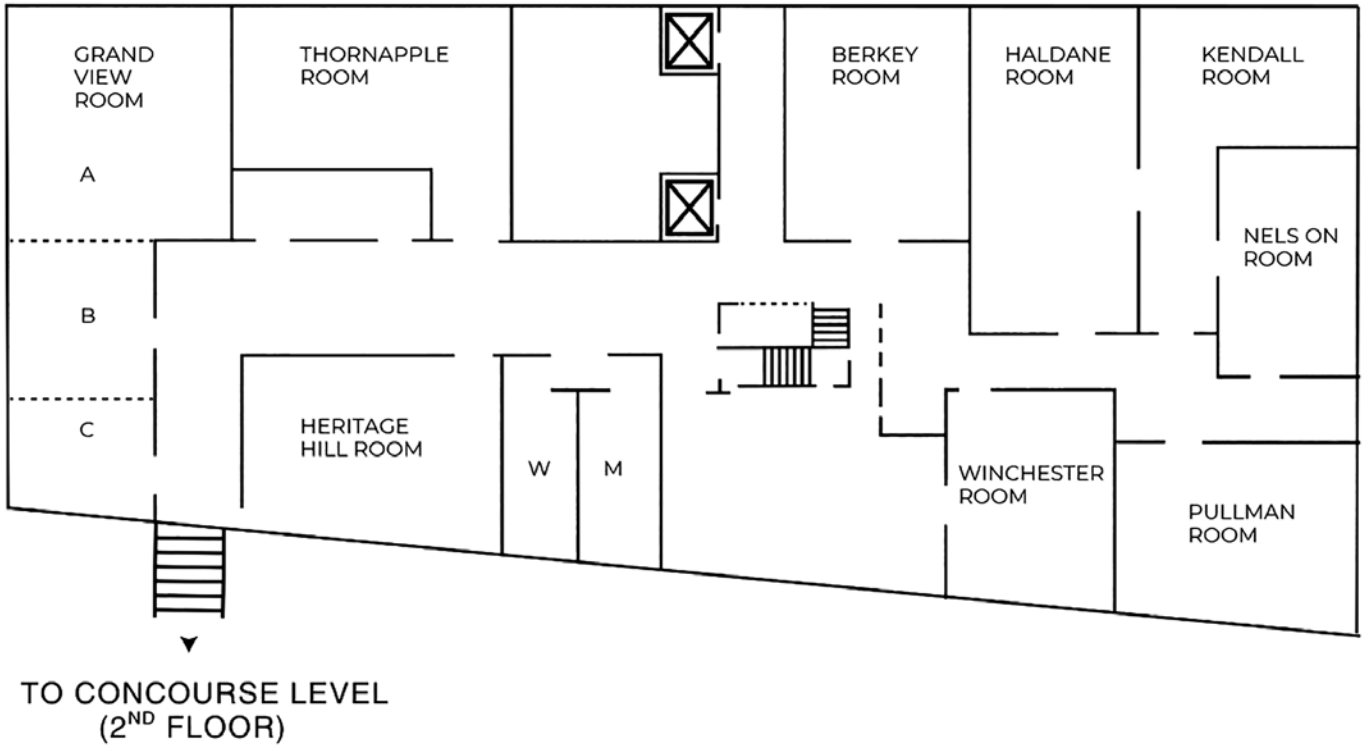


CONFERENCE LEVEL – 3RD FLOOR





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Topics Include:
- Mission and Catholic Identity
- Academic Excellence
- Governance and Leadership
- Operational Vitality
- NSBECS
- Public Policy and Legal Issues
- Data Culture
- Hispanic/Latino Engagement
- Developing the Whole Child
- And More...

SAVE THE DATES

The work of Catholic education is a shared mission, strengthened when we come together to learn, lead, and build what comes next. We invite you to continue the journey with NCEA at these upcoming opportunities to connect with fellow Catholic educators and leaders, deepen your impact, and shape the future of Catholic education together.

MARCH 30 – APRIL 1, 2027
NCEA 2027: *Bridge Builders*
One of the largest private-education association gatherings in the nation that brings together Catholic educators and leaders from across the U.S., Canada, and other countries
www.NCEA.org/NCEA2027
Register and book your hotel now.
Indianapolis Convention Center
INDIANAPOLIS, IN

JUNE 27 – 30, 2027
School Building Leader Summit: *Be the Bridge*
Designed for principals and presidents committed to shaping schools for lasting impact
www.NCEA.org/Building
Call for Proposals opens November 2026.
Registration opens March 2027.
Hilton Columbus
COLUMBUS, OH

OCTOBER 23 – 27, 2027
Catholic Leadership Summit: *Inspiring the Dream*
www.NCEA.org/CLS
Hyatt Regency Jacksonville
JACKSONVILLE, FL

APRIL 18 – 20, 2028
NCEA 2028: *Together We Dream*
Anaheim Convention Center
ANAHEIM, CA

APRIL 3 – 5, 2029
NCEA 2029
Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center
FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

APRIL 24 – 26, 2030
NCEA 2030
Special Note: Convention shifts to Wednesday – Friday!
Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center
SAN ANTONIO, TX



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Be part of the largest professional learning community of private school educators in the world.

NCEA is a trusted partner that empowers all Catholic schools and their communities to flourish spiritually, academically, and operationally.

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- *Momentum* Magazine (Print and Digital)
- NCEA Talk Blog
- NCEA Weekly
- Catholic Schools Week and Year Round Marketing Kit
- *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*

Public Policy and Advocacy

NCEA collaborates with national associations to advance Catholic school interests with federal agencies regarding national education policy, equitable services, and other current issues facing our schools.

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Your membership includes professional development tailored to your needs.

- Live and On-Demand Webinars
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- NCEA ACRE (Assessment of Catholic Religious Education)
- NCEA Academy
- Access to Current NCEA Research and Data
- Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) to Support Educators/ Leaders
- NCEA Superintendent Collective and Partner Collective

Catholic Schools
Communities of Hope and Joy

NCEA 2027 INDIANAPOLIS
Bridge Builders

Strengthen Communities

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- NCEA Career Center Member Pricing
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Your membership affords you advance registration and member pricing on in-person and virtual events.

- NCEA Convention & Expo
- NCEA Catholic Leadership Summit (CLS)
- NCEA New Superintendents Academy
- NCEA School Building Leader Summit
- NCEA New Building Leader Academy
- Annual Education Law Symposium

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Unless noted, all Summit events will take place at the Amway Grand Plaza in Grand Rapids, MI.

FULL SCHEDULE

NEW SUPERINTENDENTS ACADEMY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2026

10 AM – 5 PM
Registration & Badge Pick-up
NORTH CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

11 – 11:30 AM
Welcome Remarks and Introduction
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

11:30 AM – 12:15 PM
NCEA Support and Resources
Laura MacDonald, M.A., NCEA; **Wade Marshall**, NCEA
This session will introduce participants to the many ways NCEA supports diocesan leaders throughout the year. Participants will learn more about available resources, tools and opportunities for connection. The session will highlight ways leaders can engage with NCEA and one another. Participants will leave with a better understanding of how NCEA can support their work throughout the year.
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

12:15 – 1 PM
Lunch
Sponsored by Strategic Measurement and Evaluation
VANDENBERG A, SECOND LEVEL

1 – 1:45 PM
The Leadership Bridge: Connecting Style to Situation
Kyle A. Lee, Ed.D., NCEA
Effective leadership is not about relying on a single leadership style or approach but recognizing when and how to adapt to the situation at hand. Based upon the framework of Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats, this interactive session will challenge early career superintendents to examine circumstances commonly encountered in school leadership and governance through multiple perspectives. Participants will explore how different leadership styles can be intentionally applied based on the needs, challenges, and dynamics of a particular situation. Through practical scenarios and collaborative discussion, superintendents will leave with strategies for building a stronger bridge between how they lead and what the moment requires.
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

1:45 – 2 PM Break

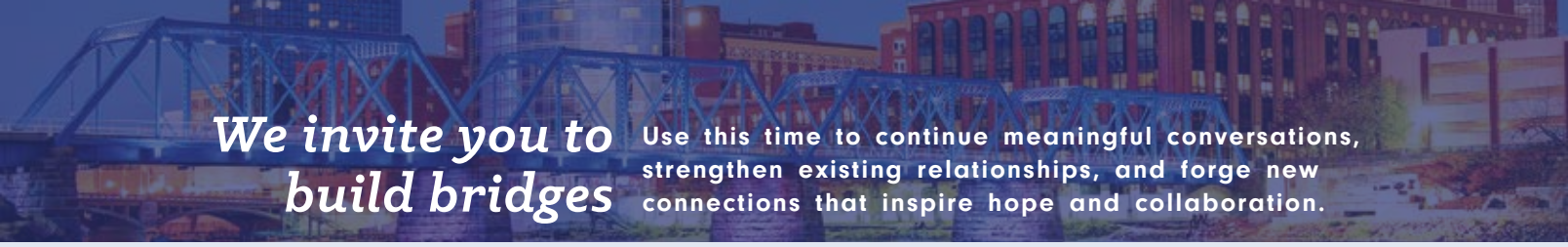
2 – 3 PM
School Budgets — Steering School Leaders Toward Sustainability
John Galvan, M.A., M.Ed., NCEA
When teacher leaders move up the ranks and become Catholic school principals, an overarching deficit in their toolbelt is how to draft and manage the school's budget. Many earn their educational leadership degrees studying public school finance, not the unique business model of running a non-public, Catholic school. In this session, new superintendents will engage and discuss: articulating the why of sound budgeting, defining the role of principals as financial leaders, supporting the process from the Catholic Schools Office, and tips for building a balanced school budget. Mission is central to all Catholic schools, but money also matters. When the two work together, we find success.
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

3 – 3:15 PM Break

3:15 – 4:15 PM
Leaning into Difficult Decisions and Discussions Using Data
Kyle A. Lee, Ed.D., NCEA
Difficult conversations and challenging decisions are unavoidable realities of effective school leadership. This session will provide superintendents with practical strategies for approaching these moments with clarity, confidence, and purpose while using data and evidence to inform and support the decision-making process. Participants will explore how data can help move difficult conversations beyond opinion and emotion toward a shared understanding of the circumstances, needs, and potential outcomes. Through practical examples and discussion, superintendents will develop strategies for communicating difficult decisions while maintaining trust, transparency, and strong relationships within their school communities.
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

4:15 – 4:30 PM Break

4:30 – 5:30 PM
SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY
Federal Programs the Catholic School Superintendent
Dale McDonald, PBVM, Ph.D., NCEA;
Mary McElroy, J.D., NCEA
This presentation will discuss the leader's role in keeping principals informed and encouraged to participate in federal program benefits available to schools and educational personnel. There will be an overview of the main K-12 federal education benefits available for Catholic school students and teachers and the various changes that are being enacted by the U.S. Department of Education as it prepares to come to closure. There will be time for questions and conversation.
NSBECS Standard 4
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL



We invite you to build bridges

Use this time to continue meaningful conversations, strengthen existing relationships, and forge new connections that inspire hope and collaboration.

5:30 – 6 PM Relax and Refresh

6 – 8 PM
New Superintendents Dinner
Sponsored by FACTS
Join us for the New Superintendent Academy Dinner, a dedicated gathering for those stepping into the role of superintendent. This exclusive dinner is designed to foster connection and support for new leaders as they embark on their journey in Catholic education. This dinner requires registration to the New Superintendents Academy.

WOODROWS DUCKPIN BOWLING

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026

8 – 11 AM
Registration & Badge Pick-up

NORTH CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

8:45 – 9:30 AM
Breakfast

VANDENBERG A, SECOND LEVEL

9:30 – 10:30 AM
LEADING WITH MISSION AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY
Measuring What Matters: The Five Marks as a Framework for Hope and Renewal
Dr. Daryl C. Hagan, Institute for the Transformation of Catholic Education, The Catholic University
Catholic school leaders are called not only to lead effectively, but to ensure their schools remain deeply rooted in mission and identity. Drawing on The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools by Archbishop Miller, this session introduces the Five Marks of Catholic Schools as a practical framework for reflection and growth. In the spirit of Building Bridges of Hope, participants will engage in a guided assessment process. After a brief overview of the Five Marks, superintendents will use a structured tool to evaluate how well their schools embody these characteristics across their dioceses.Through facilitated discussion and shared reflection, participants will identify strengths, surface areas for growth, and learn from one another's experiences. Participants will leave with a clearer insight into their schools and a focused area for strengthening Catholic identity.
NSBECS Standard 1

VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

10:30 – 10:45 AM Break

10:45 – 11:45 AM
What Every New Superintendent Should Know Panel
Sarah Grey, Diocese of Grand Rapids; **Janet Eaton**, Diocese of Wichita; **Eileen McLaughlin**, Archdiocese of Boston; **Facilitator: John Galvan, M.A., M.Ed.**, NCEA
This facilitated conversation with a panel of three current Catholic school superintendents will answer the burning question: What do new superintendents need to know? Whether you came into the office as a former principal or as a veteran assistant superintendent, getting behind that desk for the first time can be daunting. Topics explored will include: advice on balancing the 4 domains of the NSBECS, identifying early challenges faced when assuming the position, where each panelist found early success, and of course, what our panelists wish they knew then what they know now. This conversational format will leave attendees feeling more confident in their position, and more importantly, knowing that they are not alone!

VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

11:45 AM – 12 PM
Break

NORTH CONCOURSE

12 – 1 PM
Articulate Your Leadership Plan
Laura MacDonald, M.A., NCEA;
John Galvan, M.A., M.Ed., NCEA
In this final session, participants will bring their learning and reflections together to articulate a personal leadership plan for the year ahead. Through guided reflection, they will identify the values that will ground their leadership, clarify the priorities that require their attention, and determine practical next steps for moving their work forward with purpose. Participants will leave with a clearer sense of the leader they want to be, where they need to focus, and how they will begin.

VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

Closing Remarks for the New Superintendents Academy will immediately follow the "Articulate Your Leadership Plan" sesson in Vandenberg B.

Don't forget!

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NCEA® Academy

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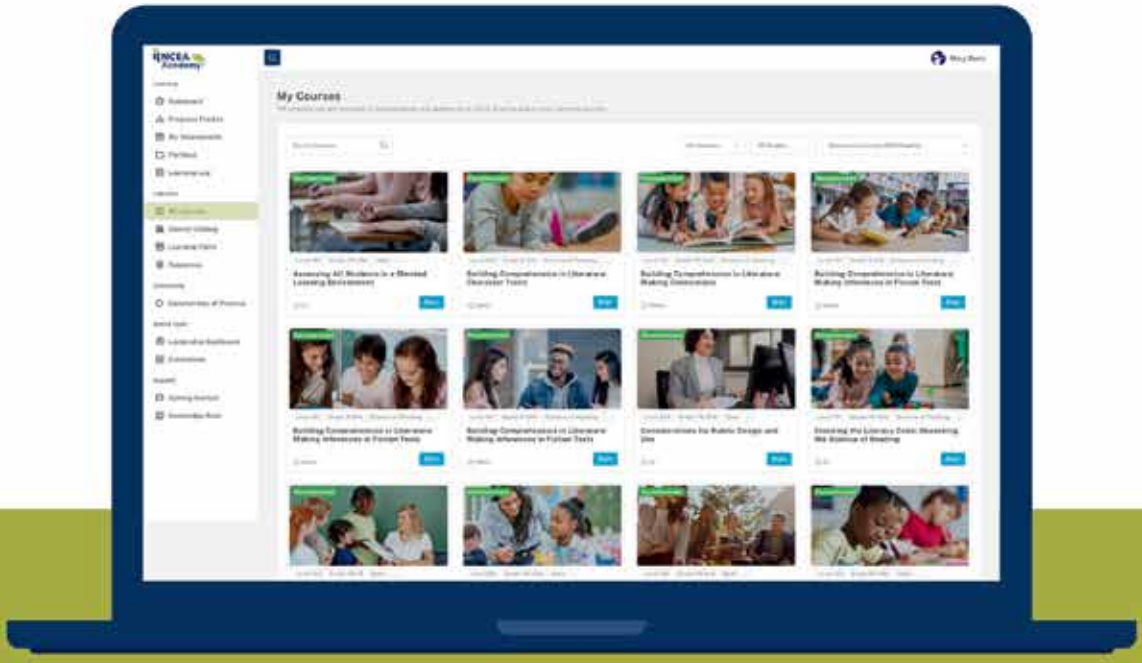

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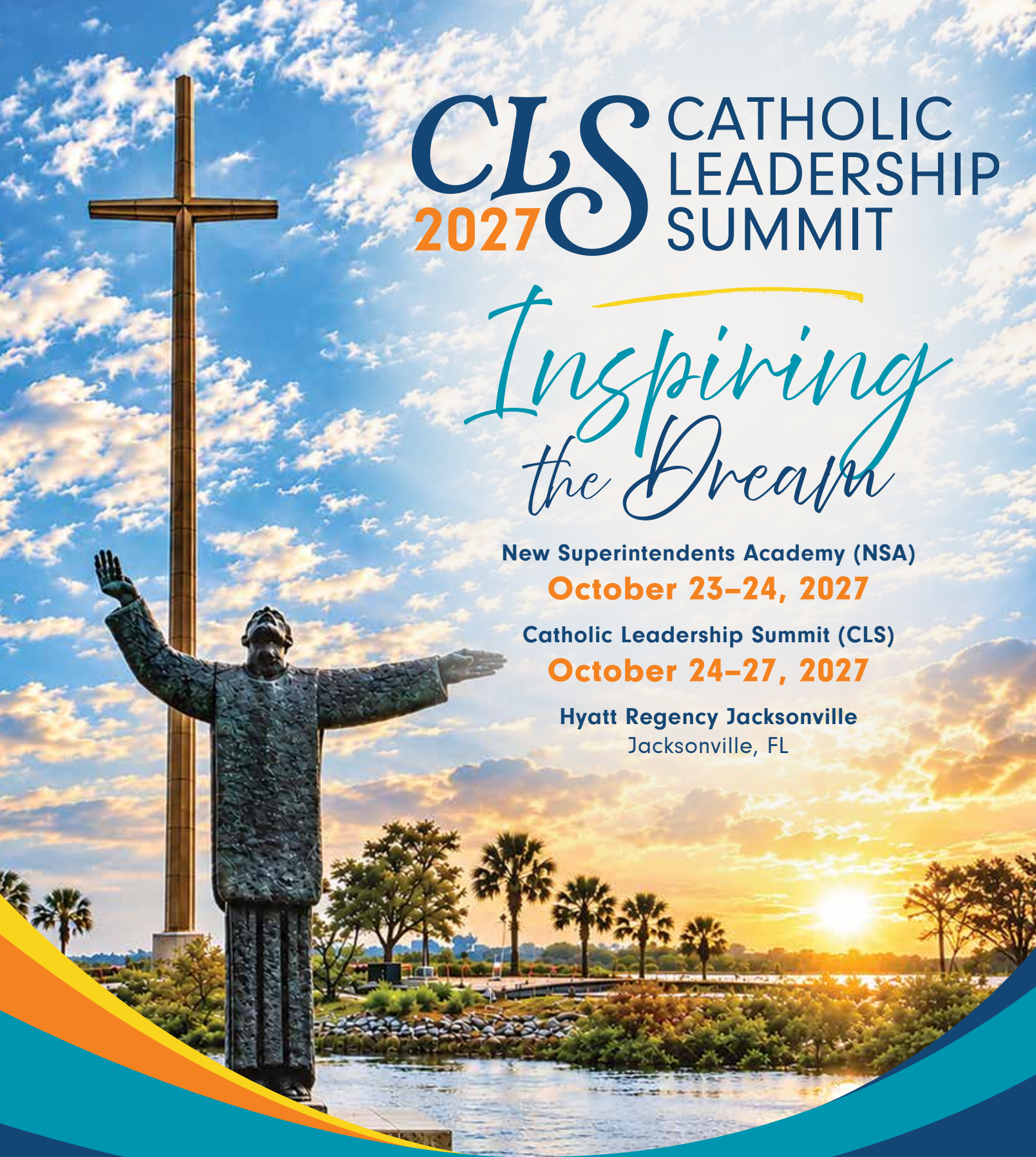

CLS 2027 CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

Inspiring the Dream

New Superintendents Academy (NSA)
October 23–24, 2027

Catholic Leadership Summit (CLS)
October 24–27, 2027

Hyatt Regency Jacksonville
Jacksonville, FL

NCEA

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Unless noted, all Summit events will take place at the Amway Grand Plaza in Grand Rapids, MI.

NCEA AUTHOR

FULL SCHEDULE

CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026

1 – 3 PM
Lunch & Learn: Discover NCEA Academy
Advance Registration Required
Sponsored by Eduscape
VANDENBERG A, SECOND LEVEL

1 – 4 PM
Registration & Badge Pick-up
NORTH CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

5 – 6 PM
Welcome and Opening Mass
Most Reverend David Walkowiak, J.C.D., Diocese of Grand Rapids
The Basilica of St. Adalbert is located 654 Davis Ave NW, Grand Rapids, approximately one mile from the hotel. Buses will depart from the Marriott Hotel cut-out (one block from the hotel) at approximately 4:30 PM.
BASILICA OF ST. ADALBERT

6:30 – 8 PM
Welcome Dinner
Sponsored by FACTS and Renaissance
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

8 – 9:30 PM
Dessert and Cocktail Reception
Sponsored by Catapult Learning
CENTER CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026

7:30 AM – 4 PM
Registration & Badge Pick-up
REGISTRATION 1, SECOND LEVEL

8 – 8:45 AM
Morning Liturgy
Most Reverend Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv., Archdiocese of Atlanta
PANTLIND BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

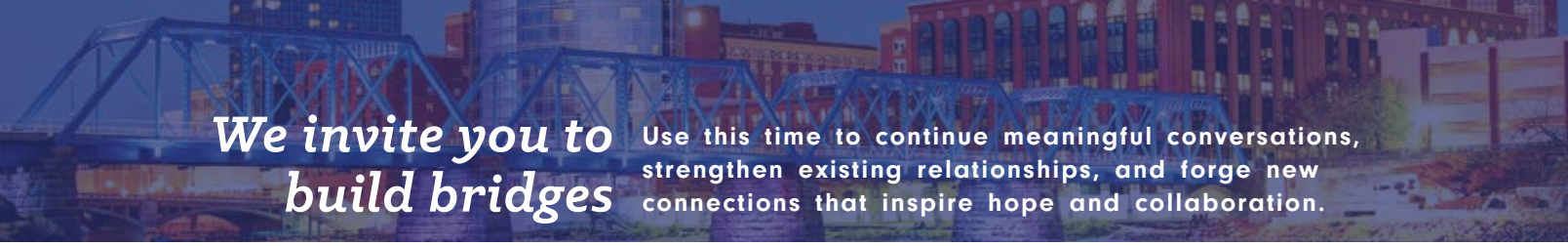
8:45 – 9:30 AM
Breakfast
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

9 – 9:30 AM
Headshot Lounge
Sponsored by Lifetouch
CENTER CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
DR. ANSEL AUGUSTINE



10 – 11 AM
In a Time of Storms: Leading with Faith, Focus and Hope
Dr. Ansel Augustine, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Catholic education leaders are called to lead with clarity and conviction even when the world around us feels uncertain, divided and rapidly changing. This keynote invites system leaders to step away from the noise and reconnect with the why at the heart of their work—the mission of Catholic education, the source of our hope and the faith that sustains us. Together, we will reflect on what it means to remain grounded in Christ, focused on what matters most and prepared to lead communities with courage and hope through whatever storms may come.
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL



We invite you to build bridges

Use this time to continue meaningful conversations, strengthen existing relationships, and forge new connections that inspire hope and collaboration.

9:30 – 10 AM
Welcome Remarks
Dr. Steven F. Cheeseman, NCEA
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

11 – 11:30 AM Break

11:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Professional Learning Sessions 1

Professional Learning Network Discussion: Mission and Catholic Identity

Join this participant-led discussion centered on Mission & Catholic Identity. These PLNs are not formal presentations or strictly professional learning sessions. Come ready to exchange ideas, share experiences, ask questions, and learn from colleagues through an open forum with guided facilitation. Beyond CLS, these conversations are intended to be the start of ongoing collaboration and discussion with colleagues throughout the year with NCEA as the conduit.

VANDENBERG A, SECOND LEVEL

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Stop Fixing Systems. Start Forming Leaders.

David Corvi, Lynch Leadership Academy

Catholic school system leaders are called to guide communities through increasing complexity. Too often, leaders respond with new initiatives, refined systems, or added tools. All necessary, but insufficient for lasting improvement. This interactive session positions adaptive coaching as a critical lever for advancing academic excellence at scale. By developing the capacity of principals and instructional leaders, superintendents can strengthen tiered systems of support, lead with data, and ensure professional development translates into practice. Participants will observe a live coaching model and analyze moves that shift leaders from directing solutions to forming people, aligning innovation with identity to build hope-filled systems for all learners.

NSBECS Standard 6

THORNAPPLE, THIRD LEVEL

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

What We Gain When We Bring the Learning Research and Our Catholic Faith Together

Julie Vogel, Ph.D., Renaissance;
Dr. Gene Kerns, Renaissance

Educators often debate pedagogical approaches, yet cognitive scientists—working apart from trends or curricular preferences—have uncovered powerful insights into how learning truly happens. Their research offers essential guidance not only on what we teach but how we can teach in ways that honor each child's God-given potential. Too often these findings go unnoticed, leaving teachers without evidence-based strategies that help students thrive. As Catholic school leaders committed to forming the whole person, we are called to unite faith and research in service of hope-filled, effective learning. This session explores what cognitive science reveals and how its insights can empower leaders to build stronger learning communities.

NSBECS Standard 7

GRANDVIEW A/B, THIRD LEVEL

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Empowering Educators through a Networked Improvement Community: Five Catholic High Schools Focused on Math Excellence

Lauren Casella, Ed.D., Loyola Marymount University

This presentation explores the impact of a Networked Improvement Community (NIC) designed to foster continuous improvement in secondary mathematics instruction across five Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The presentation will share the partnership structure between a Catholic university partner and five high schools. The presentation will also share the improvement science process, evidence of learning from 16 math and science teachers, and the Catholic identity framework that guided the work. Attendees will explore how this partnership structure and an NIC can foster teacher collective efficacy and drive academic growth within their system.

NSBECS Standard 7

NELSON, THIRD LEVEL

Make NCEA Central your go-to stop during the Summit! Browse the latest publications, pick up exclusive merch, and explore the latest NCEA programs and resources. Whether you're looking to shop, learn, or connect, NCEA Central will be open throughout the Summit.

CENTER CONCOURSE
Sunday: 1 – 4 PM
Monday: 7:30 AM – 4 PM
Tuesday: 7:30 AM – 4 PM
Wednesday: 8 – 11 AM

VISIT NCEA CENTRAL

NCEA AUTHOR

LEADING WITH MISSION AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Using School Partnerships to Enhance Social Capital

Carol Cimino, SSJ, Ed.D., Diocese of Shreveport

Studies done by the US Department of Education and the National Opinion Research Center (Andrew Greeley) have delineated the greatest strength of Catholic schools to be the presence of social capital. Social capital is defined by the shared mores and values of various persons and entities that surround young people who attend Catholic schools. Since the concept of belonging for today's youth is parAMount, the creation and enhancement of shared values is of utmost importance.

This presentation will explore the value of school partnerships with civic, commercial, and service groups in the local community within a covenant relationship to strengthen social capital in our Catholic schools.

NSBECS Standard 4

HALDANE, THIRD LEVEL

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Bridge of Hope Multi-Tiered Support System Applied

Sr. John Dominic Rasmussen, OP, Openlight Media

This session will provide Catholic school leaders with a blueprint for understanding the foundational need for mental health well-being and human flourishing in school communities. By applying the Multi-Tiered Support Systems (MTSS) framework, diocesan leaders would have a means to build bridges of support, trust, and mutual respect with those entrenched in the daily challenge of administering Catholic schools. We will outline how the MTSS framework can support school administrators by identifying responsive interventions based on levels of need and risk. This integrated approach is steeped in Christian anthropology, sacrAMental life, virtue education, and modern neuroscience. Just as students need support in day-to-day rigors of school, Catholic school leaders need to know they are safe, seen, and supported in their roles in a school community.

NSBECS Standard 5

HERITAGE HILL, THIRD LEVEL

Don't forget!

Complete session evaluations and share valuable feedback in the NCEA Events mobile app.

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

A Crisis Communication Tool Kit for New Catholic School Superintendents

Jodee Blanco, NCEA Author

In this session, participants will learn Catholic values-based communications tools and strategies for successfully navigating any crisis. Highlights include: finding your center; the typical mistakes superintendents make under pressure and how to avoid them; the three tenets of emotional credibility in communication and how to apply them to sustain trust; creating a stakeholder checklist; putting together a plan of action; core messaging do's and don'ts; documentation best-practices; finding consensus when opinions differ or tempers flare; mitigating fear; re-active versus pro-active positioning; dealing with social media and the press; dismantling the rumor mill; troubleshooting the unexpected; and how to utilize crisis as an opportunity to bring a community together. Also includes how to facilitate confidence and healing in the aftermath and prevent future crises.

NSBECS Standard 6

WINCHESTER, THIRD LEVEL

SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY

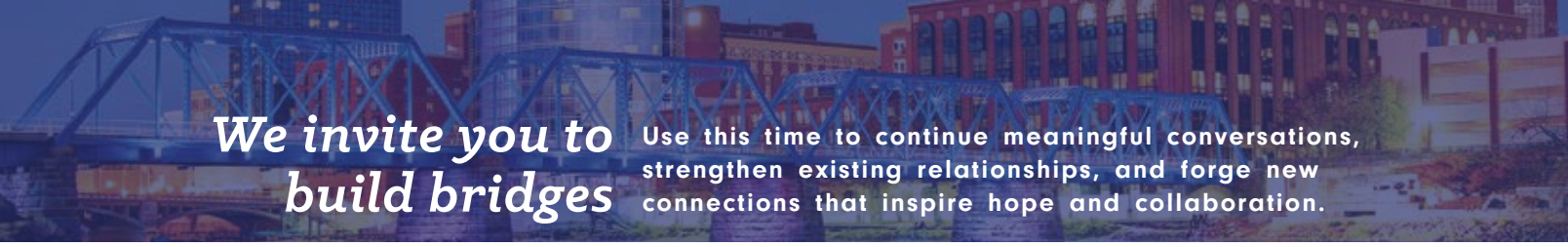
More Than Just Another Meeting: Turning Equitable Services Consultation into Advocacy for Your School Communities

Henry Fortier, Consultant; **Jackie Flanigan**, Consultant

Federal education programs under ESSA provide important opportunities to support our Catholic schools. Yet too often, consultation is viewed as simply another required meeting rather than a powerful opportunity for advocacy and stewardship. This session will help superintendents and leaders reframe consultation as a strategic process to ensure our communities receive the services and resources which they are entitled under federal law. Participants will explore strategies for strengthening consultation, building collaborative partnerships with LEAs, asking the right questions about funding and services, and advocating effectively for their students and educators. Grounded in the principles of stewardship and mission-driven leadership, this presentation will provide actionable tools to move consultation from compliance to meaningful advocacy that strengthens Catholic school communities.

NSBECS Standard 6

BERKEY, THIRD LEVEL



We invite you to build bridges

Use this time to continue meaningful conversations, strengthen existing relationships, and forge new connections that inspire hope and collaboration.

12:30 – 1:30 PM
Lunch
Sponsored by William H. Sadlier
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

1:30 – 2:30 PM
Professional Learning Sessions 2

Professional Learning Network Discussion: Governance and Leadership

Join this participant-led discussion centered on Governance & Leadership. These PLNs are not formal presentations or strictly professional learning sessions. Come ready to exchange ideas, share experiences, ask questions, and learn from colleagues through an open forum with guided facilitation. Beyond CLS, these conversations are intended to be the start of ongoing collaboration and discussion with colleagues throughout the year with NCEA as the conduit.

VANDENBERG A, SECOND LEVEL

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

From Curiosity to Coherence: Building a System-Wide Approach to English Learner Success in Catholic Schools

Dr. Katy Lichon, University of Notre Dame;
Dr. Elisa Zwier Dralle, University of Notre Dame;
Megan Cerbins, Seton Network

As Catholic schools serve an increasingly multilingual population, leaders are called to respond with clarity and purpose, yet many struggle to align language data, instructional supports, educator capacity, and funding streams. This session highlights how one principal's curiosity sparked transformation across a network of Catholic schools. What began as simple questions—Who are our multilingual learners? What are their proficiency levels? What support do they receive?—grew into a system-wide effort to better serve English learners. Through collaboration with the Alliance for Catholic Education's ALMA Initiative, this work revealed key gaps and opportunities, leading to a dedicated network-level role and a more coherent approach. Participants will leave with practical strategies to build coordinated, system-wide supports for multilingual learners.

NSBECS Standard 7

THORNAPPLE, THIRD LEVEL

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Walking with Purpose: A Saint-Centered Framework for Instructional Excellence through Diocesan Discovery Walks

Dr. Mark Williams, Former Superintendent

Scaling Excellence: Data-Driven Instructional Leadership in Catholic Schools—Effective school leadership begins with a commitment to continuous refinement and the belief that what is measured improves. While student performance data is a standard metric, a comprehensive leadership strategy must also prioritize systematic data collection regarding teacher performance. This session demonstrates how school systems can leverage discovery walks and digital platforms to create a unified approach to instructional coaching. By utilizing evidence-gathering instruments specifically contextualized for Catholic education, leaders can transition from anecdotal observations to objective, real-time feedback cycles.

NSBECS Standard 8

WINCHESTER, THIRD LEVEL

GUIDING INNOVATION FOR CHANGE

Lowering the Roof: Leadership, Calling, and Social Capital in Catholic Schools

Tyler Mayer, Cristo Rey Network

In Mark 2:1–12, a group of friends brings a man who cannot walk to Jesus. They arrive and the way is blocked. They take responsibility. They go to the roof, open it, and lower him down. It is disruptive, inconvenient, and exactly what was required.

Catholic education is meant to play the role of the friends. We are called to see barriers clearly and take responsibility for creating access. The students we serve are not lacking potential. They are often lacking access to the relationships, networks, and experiences that open doors. Social capital is not secondary to our mission. It is part of it.

In the gospel, the story does not end with access. The man is told to stand, take his mat, and go home. He is restored to dignity and sent forward with responsibility. That is our work. Because the obstacle did not move on its own.

Someone moved it.

NSBECS Standard 1

BERKEY, THIRD LEVEL

LEADING WITH MISSION AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Aligning Formation for Digital Discipleship

Meaghan Crowley-Sullivan, LMU iDEAL Institute

In an age where technology and artificial intelligence are shaping how young people think, learn, and engage with the world, the formation of the whole child cannot rest on the school alone. Catholic education is most powerful when it is rooted in a shared mission across parish, school, and fAMily communities.

This session invites system leaders to reimagine formation as a community-based effort, where parish, school, and families are not operating in parallel, but in partnership with shared language and vision. Participants will explore the challenges that often separate these spaces and consider how emerging technologies AMplify the need for a unified approach. This session draws from the Catholic Companion Framework for Technology and Innovation and the DELTA network to offer a pathway for bridging these communities and forming students as thoughtful and responsible digital disciples.

NSBECS Standard 2

HERITAGE HILL, THIRD LEVEL

LEADING WITH MISSION AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY

When Leadership Gets Heavy: Building Bridges of Trust, Clarity, and Courage in Catholic Schools

Joy Roberts, Ed.D., Friendzy; **Kimberlee Gorr**, Friendzy

Catholic school leaders face growing demands: supporting staff, managing parent expectations, handling conflict, and making high-stakes decisions that shape school communities. This session focuses on relational leadership and how leaders build trust, clarity, and connection during tension. Grounded in emotional intelligence, vulnerability-based trust, and effective communication, participants will explore how leadership presence impacts school culture, staff resilience, and sustainability. Through interactive experiences, leaders will learn practical tools to move from avoidance or reactivity to grounded leadership. Using frameworks for healthy vulnerability and communication that balance care with directness, participants will gain actionable strategies to navigate difficult conversations, strengthen relationships, reduce strain, and foster thriving, mission-centered school communities.

NSBECS Standard 6

HALDANE, THIRD LEVEL

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Unlocking Opportunity: How Superintendents and CSOs Can Maximize Equitable Participation in IDEA & ESSA

Steve Perla, ADAC, Inc.; **John Elcesser**, ADAC Advocacy

How can superintendents and Catholic school offices maximize equitable participation in IDEA and ESSA to better serve students and families? This session features a panel of (arch)diocesan leaders from across the country sharing real-world experiences, lessons learned, and proven strategies for navigating federal programs in Catholic school settings.

Participants will explore how to build effective systems, strengthen partnerships with LEAs, and ensure compliance while remaining mission aligned. Leaders will leave with practical, actionable strategies to increase access, improve implementation, and support schools in delivering high-quality, equitable services to all eligible students.

NSBECS Standard 5

GRANDVIEW A/B, THIRD LEVEL

SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY

Vibrant Catholic School Systems: Successful Parish Partnerships

Dr. Becky Walker, Diocese of Green Bay; **Terry Tyrrell**, Xavier Catholic Schools

Catholic schools are a vital ministry of the Church, entrusted with forming young people as missionary disciples who will help build the Kingdom of God. Yet today's social, demographic, and economic realities make it increasingly difficult for every parish to sustain its own school.

A collaborative, multi-parish school-system model offers a compelling path forward, enabling parishes in a shared region to unite resources, facilities, and talent to support vibrant, mission-driven Catholic education and strengthen long-term sustainability.

This session will highlight a successful system model from the Diocese of Green Bay, WI, outlining how a multi-parish Catholic school system is structured, governed, and supported—and how this collaborative approach is bearing fruit for students, families, and parishes alike.

NSBECS Standard 10

NELSON, THIRD LEVEL

2:30 – 2:45 PM Break

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NOVEMBER 15 – 21, 2026

Celebrate Catholic Schools Week (CSW)

JANUARY 31 – FEBRUARY 6, 2027

National Catholic Educational Association

www.NCEA.org/csw #CSW2027


"It takes a lot of courage to become who we're meant to be."
— MOTHER CABRINI
FAITH
SERVICE
PEOPLE
A BRIGHTER TOMORROW
WHAT IF THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON YOUR STUDENTS LEARN THIS YEAR ISN'T IN A TEXTBOOK?
CABRINI
RESILIENCE. LEADERSHIP. PERSEVERANCE. PURPOSE.
Her story challenges young people to consider:
HOW DO I RESPOND WHEN LIFE GETS DIFFICULT?
WHAT GIVES MY LIFE PURPOSE?
CAN ONE PERSON REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
More than 27,000 students have experienced CABRINI through school screenings, inspiring reflection on resilience, leadership, human dignity, service, and the difference each of us can make.
MORE THAN A MOVIE.
A CONVERSATION THAT CONTINUES AFTER THE CREDITS ROLL.
FIND OUT HOW TO BRING CABRINI TO YOUR STUDENTS.
CabriniFilm.org
ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

2:45 – 3:45 PM
Professional Learning Sessions 3

Professional Learning Network Discussion: Academic Excellence

Join this participant-led discussion centered on Academic Excellence. These PLNs are not formal presentations or strictly professional learning sessions. Come ready to exchange ideas, share experiences, ask questions, and learn from colleagues through an open forum with guided facilitation. Beyond CLS, these conversations are intended to be the start of ongoing collaboration and discussion with colleagues throughout the year with NCEA as the conduit.

VANDENBERG A, SECOND LEVEL

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Leading Whole-Child Care: A Catholic School Response to Student Loneliness and Mental Health

Michael Boyle, Herrmann Center for Innovative Catholic Education Saint Louis University

This session reframes mental health as both a pastoral and leadership responsibility. Rather than focusing only on reactive responses, participants will explore proactive, school-wide strategies that strengthen belonging as a protective factor. The session introduces a leadership framework that integrates mental wellness into existing systems. Leaders will learn to identify students experiencing disconnection, embed belonging into faculty practice, and align supports addressing academic and social-emotional needs. Emphasis is placed on using structures such as faculty meetings, student support teams, and improvement planning. Grounded in Catholic identity and human dignity, this session equips leaders to create schools where students are known, valued, and connected, leaving with a practical plan to strengthen belonging and mental wellness.

NSBECS Standard 3

WINCHESTER, THIRD LEVEL

GUIDING INNOVATION FOR CHANGE

AI Policy and Student Use: Preliminary Findings from a National Study of Catholic High Schools

Lewis Poche, University of Notre Dame; **Fr. Nate Wills**, University of Notre Dame; **Monica Kowalski**, University of Notre Dame

Catholic schools are increasingly developing policies and guidance related to generative artificial intelligence (genAI), yet little research currently exists on how Catholic school AI policies influence student use of these technologies. This session will present preliminary findings from a national study conducted by a research team from the University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE), exAMining the relationship between AI policies and student AI use in Catholic high schools. Participants will explore emerging trends from Catholic high schools related to student patterns of AI use, policy clarity, and implementation practices. The session will also examine how Catholic school and (arch)diocesan leaders are navigating questions related to academic integrity, student formation, and communication.

NSBECS Standard 5

GRANDVIEW A/B, THIRD LEVEL

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

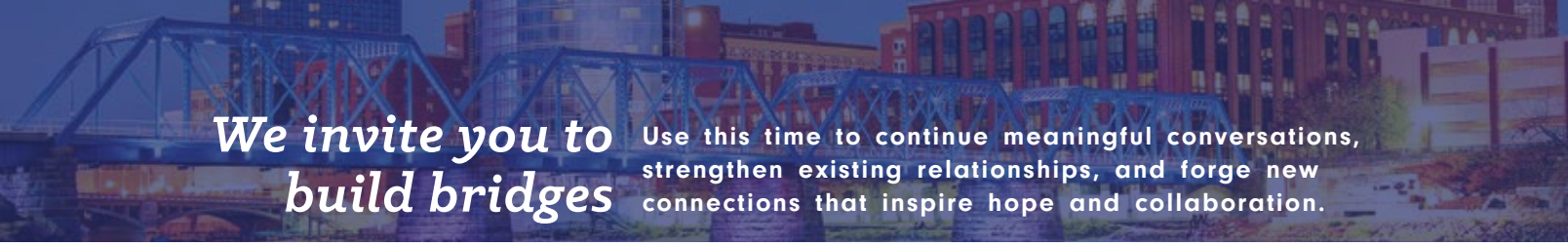
EFTC Readiness: What Will Break in the First 60 Days and How to Prepare Now

Matt Richardson, FACTS

As the Education Freedom Tax Credit Program (EFTC) approaches its January 2027 launch, most dioceses have already made key participation decisions. The challenge now is whether schools are truly aligned and ready to execute. Schools are simultaneously managing admissions cycles, financial aid decisions, donor communication, and evolving program timelines, often without clear internal ownership or consistent messaging. This session focuses on the critical areas where misalignment is most likely to occur, including how schools communicate the program to families, make enrollment and aid decisions without full funding clarity, and coordinate across multiple stakeholders. Designed for diocesan leaders, this session offers a practical framework to identify gaps, align schools, and strengthen readiness, ensuring a more stable and consistent experience as EFTC goes live.

NSBECS Standard 5

HERITAGE HILL, THIRD LEVEL



We invite you to build bridges

Use this time to continue meaningful conversations, strengthen existing relationships, and forge new connections that inspire hope and collaboration.

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Spiritually Fulfilled and Overextended: The Experience of the Catholic School Principal

Sandria Morten, Remick Leadership Program, University of Notre Dame; **Kevin Baxter, Ed.D.**, Remick Leadership Program, University of Notre Dame; **Frankie (Mary Frances) Jones, M.Ed.**, Remick Leadership Program, University of Notre Dame; **April Garcia**, University of Notre Dame

This presentation discusses findings from a national survey of Catholic elementary (K-8) school principals conducted by University of Notre Dame's Remick Leadership Program. Examining a representative sample of over 900 principals, the study explores motivations, role conceptualization, and factors impacting effectiveness. We share data illustrating why leaders are drawn to the role and what sustains them over time. We further examine the tension between principals' ideal use of time and the administrative tasks that dominate their schedules, including an analysis of delegation versus ownership. These findings offer critical implications for diocesan strategies regarding recruitment, support, and retention of leaders. Participants will collaboratively process the research, making connections to their local contexts and brainstorming opportunities for systemic leadership development.

NSBECS Standard 6

HALDANE, THIRD LEVEL

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Teacher Leadership Formation: Empowering Educators to Build Bridges of Hope in Catholic Schools

Michael O'Connor, Ph.D., Roche Center for Catholic Education, Boston College; **Jeremy Alexander**, Roche Center for Catholic Education, Boston College

This session demonstrates how structured, intentional teacher leadership formation can transform Catholic schools and systems in three critical areas: 1) Building a distributed leadership culture where teacher leaders support school and system leaders to cultivate mission and identity, academic excellence, and holistic student outcomes; 2) Serve as models of faith, virtue, and service for peer colleagues within and across schools; and 3) Retaining teachers by affirming their gifts and talents, providing opportunities for growth and formation, and signaling opportunities for future leadership. Drawing from scripture, educational research, and practical examples, this session will share why teacher leadership formation is needed and how to make it a reality. Attendees will reflect, discuss, and design what teacher leadership formation could look like in their Catholic schools and systems.

NSBECS Standard 6

THORNAPPLE, THIRD LEVEL

SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY

Funding the Future: Three Revenue Strategies to Sustain and Strengthen Catholic Education

David Sexauer, DAST

This session will provide superintendents and other leaders with strategic, actionable insights into three powerful revenue streams that Catholic schools can leverage to expand capacity, invest in quality programming, and improve student outcomes.

You'll learn how to:

- Maximize State and Federal Funding
  Understand how to access and apply for EFTC, ESSA Equitable Services (Title I–IV), SPED programs, Education Savings Accounts, E-Rate, and others.
- Launch Work-Based Learning Partnerships
  Discover how Catholic high schools can collaborate with local businesses to create student-centered programs that build job readiness skills and generate additional income.
- Tap Into Corporate Giveback and Sponsorships
  Learn how to form mission-aligned partnerships with corporations that support your school's future while providing meaningful brand collaboration.

NSBECS Standard 10

BERKEY, THIRD LEVEL

SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY

A Connected Approach to Catholic School Marketing & Admissions

Sarah Toepfer, Diocese of Grand Rapids

How can diocesan leaders strengthen enrollment and school identity while supporting the unique needs of individual schools? As director of marketing & admissions for 31 Catholic schools, I lead system-wide initiatives including digital advertising, media campaigns, enrollment strategy, and communications support, while also providing individualized assistance through website audits, templates, coaching, and planning resources. This session will highlight practical ways to build collaboration across schools through marketing and admissions cohorts, professional development, and shared initiatives. Attendees will learn how intentional networking among school leaders has strengthened communication, enrollment efforts, and even student programming across multiple schools. Participants will leave with scalable ideas for creating stronger diocesan alignment, collaboration, and support systems.

NSBECS Standard 13

NELSON, THIRD LEVEL

NCEA AUTHOR

THE NSBECS STANDARDS

The *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NSBECS) is intended to describe how the most mission-driven, program effective, well managed, and responsibly governed Catholic schools operate. They are offered as school effectiveness standards rather than curriculum content standards, although they support curriculum development consistent with national curriculum standards.

STANDARD DOMAINS AND BENCHMARKS

Domain I: Mission and Catholic Identity *(Standards 1-4)*

Catholic schools invite young people to a relationship with Jesus Christ, insert them into the life of the Church, and help them see the role of faith in life.

Domain II: Governance and Leadership *(Standards 5–6)*

Catholic school governance and leadership based on the principles and practices of excellence are essential to insuring the Catholic identity, academic excellence, and operational vitality of the school.

Domain III: Academic Excellence *(Standards 7–9)*

Catholic schools provide curricular and co-curricular experiences which are academically rigorous, relevant, research-based, and infused with Catholic faith and traditions.

Domain IV: Operational Vitality *(Standards 10–13)*

To support and ensure viability and sustainability, Catholic schools must adopt standards for operational vitality in four key areas: finances, human resources/ personnel, facilities, and institutional advancement.

Learn more about the NSBECS on the NCEA website.

3:45 – 4:15 PM
Headshot Lounge
Sponsored by Lifetouch
CENTER CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

3:45 – 5 PM Relax and Refresh

6 – 9 PM
Monday Night Off-Site Dinner
Sponsored by Catapult Learning, Corporate Travel, FlynnO'Hara Uniforms, and William H. Sadlier
GRAND RAPIDS MUSEUM

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2026

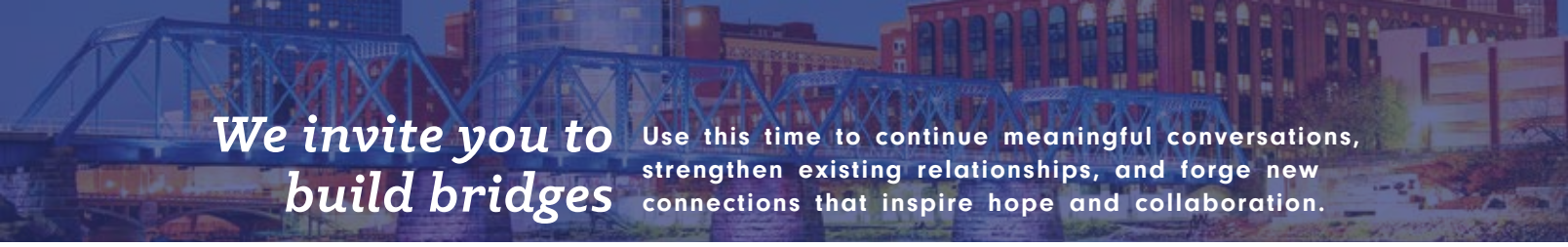
7:30 AM – 4 PM
Registration & Badge Pick-up
REGISTRATION 1, SECOND LEVEL

8 – 8:45 AM
Morning Liturgy
Most Reverend Thomas Zinkula, D.D., J.D., J.C.L., Archdiocese of Dubuque
PANTLIND BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

8:45 – 9:30 AM
Breakfast
Sponsored by Cabrini Films
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

9 – 9:30 AM
Headshot Lounge
Sponsored by Lifetouch
CENTER CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

9:30 – 11 AM
Hope Renewed: A National Process of Listening, Discernment and Shared Action
Dr. Steven F. Cheeseman, NCEA
Rooted in the Church's understanding of synodality, the upcoming initiative, Hope Renewed, invites the Catholic education community to listen deeply to one another, identify common priorities, and develop a clearer vision for the future. This will serve as an opportunity to bring voices, experiences, and aspirations together in a structured process of listening, discernment, and shared action.
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL



We invite you to build bridges

Use this time to continue meaningful conversations, strengthen existing relationships, and forge new connections that inspire hope and collaboration.

11 – 11:15 AM Break

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM
Professional Learning Sessions 4

Professional Learning Network Discussion: Operational Vitality

Join this participant-led discussion centered on Operational Vitality. These PLNs are not formal presentations or strictly professional learning sessions. Come ready to exchange ideas, share experiences, ask questions, and learn from colleagues through an open forum with guided facilitation. Beyond CLS, these conversations are intended to be the start of ongoing collaboration and discussion with colleagues throughout the year with NCEA as the conduit.

VANDENBERG A, SECOND LEVEL

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Leading the Voyage: Building Inclusive Catholic Schools with Clarity and Courage

Michael Boyle, Herrmann Center for Innovative Catholic Education Saint Louis Univeristiy

Catholic school leaders are increasingly called to serve a broader range of learners, yet many systems lack a clear path forward. Grounded in *Journey with St. Brendan: Navigating the Path to Inclusive Catholic Schools*, this session offers a practical, mission-centered framework for building inclusive school communities. Using St. Brendan's journey into unknown waters as a guiding image, participants will explore key stages of growth: clarifying a shared purpose rooted in Catholic identity, assessing current capacity, strengthening systems of support, and implementing practices that serve all learners. Designed for Catholic school and diocesan leaders, the session emphasizes actionable leadership moves, reflective tools, and strategic planning. Participants will leave with concrete next steps to advance inclusion.

NSBECS Standard 3

GRANDVIEW A/B, THIRD LEVEL

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Building Bridges of Hope Through Partnership: Advancing Literacy Excellence

Kiley Colby, William H. Sadlier;
John O'Brien, Diocese of Brooklyn

Strong systems don't improve in isolation; they improve through purposeful partnership. This session highlights how a strategic partnership can serve as a bridge to hope, enabling Catholic school systems to strengthen literacy outcomes, support diverse learners, and sustain academic excellence.

Grounded in a two-year diocesan case study with Sadlier, participants will examine how aligned professional learning, high-quality instructional resources, and system-level leadership can result in measurable gains in student achievement and engagement. Students in partner schools significantly outpaced peers, demonstrating meaningful growth in reading performance, particularly among multilingual learners and historically underserved populations.

NSBECS Standard 7

HALDANE, THIRD LEVEL

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

We Are One Body: Strategies for Working with School Pastors

Jim Rigg, Ed.D., Archdiocese of Miami;
Melissa Link, D.Min., Archdiocese of Chicago OCS

School pastors are essential partners in the ministry of Catholic education. Yet building strong, productive relationships with pastors requires both intentionality and skill. In this interactive session, diocesan leaders will explore the canonical, pastoral, and organizational dimensions of the school pastor's role through recent research and shared experience. Participants will identify strategies for strengthening pastor relationships, navigating common challenges, and cultivating partnerships that support both parish and school vitality. Attendees will leave with practical tools, fresh insights, and actionable next steps for engaging school pastors as essential partners in our educational mission.

NSBECS Standard 5

NELSON, THIRD LEVEL

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

A Board Formation Framework: Key Components as Bridges to Mission-Effectiveness

Todd Sweda, Ed.D., Catholic University of America

Board members are generally forgotten when schools are creating growth and continuous improvement opportunities for their constituents. Designed for superintendents, board members, and other school leaders, this session will provide a playbook with the essential components for creating an effective board development program. All models of Catholic school governance (advisory, consultative, limited jurisdiction, governing) should be empowered through education to ensure the future identity and vitality of Catholic schools. Participants will dive deeply into the four major components of bridge-building for board excellence: fundamentals, faith foundations, forces, and future. Components are reinforced through understanding effective structures and responsibilities; personal and communal spiritual growth; the goals of Catholic education; and board assessment and generative planning.

NSBECS Standard 5

THORNAPPLE, THIRD LEVEL

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Forming and Supporting New Catholic School Leaders

Lauren Schell, Archdiocese of Atlanta

The role of school leaders has become increasingly complex over the past two decades, changing the landscape of leadership. This session will present current realities, challenges, and data regarding Catholic school leadership and formation and the need for increased support for school leaders. Participants will learn the components of the leadership formation and support programs used in the Archdiocese of Atlanta, success results, and recent changes made to the programs based on current data. Mindful of the variation in system-level personnel and resources, participants will discuss components of current leadership formation and support in their dioceses and explore ideas for strengthening programs based on current needs and resources.

NSBECS Standard 6

HERITAGE HILL, THIRD LEVEL

SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY

The Affordability Conversation: Building Trust with Families in a Time of Uncertainty

Christi Reece, VenturEd Solutions

For many families, the decision to enroll in a Catholic school hinges on one critical question: "Can we afford this?"

Too often, the affordability conversation is unclear, delayed, or unintentionally discouraging. This session helps school leaders rethink how they communicate tuition, financial aid, and value—so families feel informed, supported, and confident in their decision.

Participants will explore how to simplify financial aid processes, increase transparency, and create a more approachable experience for families navigating cost concerns. The result is not just improved enrollment, but stronger trust and long-term retention.

NSBECS Standard 10

WINCHESTER, THIRD LEVEL

SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY

Archdiocesan Support for Catholic Schools in the Operational Vitality Domain

Frank Donaldson, NCEA Author; **Dr. RaeNell Houston**, Archdiocese of New Orleans

This session will share the 2025-2026 successful implementation model of Operational Vitality into the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Forming a partnership between the office of Catholic schools led by the superintendent, the Catholic schools throughout the archdiocese, and the Institute for School and Parish Development (ISPD), this process was a combination of five workshops, monthly individual coaching by individual schools, and cohort coaching with groups of 3-5 schools. Over 60 Catholic schools were served. Included in this implementation were advisory board workshops outlining their role in the development/advancement efforts of their school, along with workshops for pastors, especially those with Catholic schools in their parish.

NSBECS Standard 13

BERKEY, THIRD LEVEL

12 – 3 PM

Sip & Gain Clarity — Specialty Espresso Bar

Sponsored by Clarity Tuition

WEST CONCOURSE, SECOND LEVEL

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Facilitation Resources



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NCEA®
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The **ACRE (Assessment of Catholic Religious Education)** provides schools and parishes with a tool to evaluate how well students are learning and living the Catholic faith. More than an assessment, **ACRE** helps you walk with your students and understand both their knowledge and their lived experiences.

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- For additional questions, contact John Galvan, NCEA Executive Vice President of Engagement: **john@ncea.org**

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  - Improved assessments available for **all grades 2–12**
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NCEA Beacon & Legacy Awards

NCEA is proud to honor educators and leaders whose work illuminates minds, forms hearts, inspires the future, and leaves a lasting legacy in Catholic education with the all new NCEA Beacon & Legacy Awards.

Visit **www.NCEA.org/Awards** to learn more.
Nominations close **October 30, 2026**.

National Catholic Educational Association

momentum

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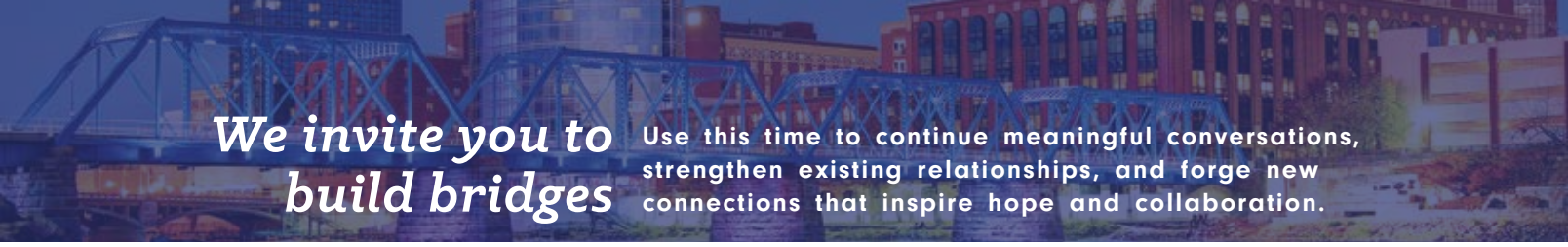


We invite you to build bridges

Use this time to continue meaningful conversations, strengthen existing relationships, and forge new connections that inspire hope and collaboration.

12:15 – 1:15 PM
Lunch
Sponsored by Scouting America
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

12:15 – 1:15 PM
Catholic Higher Education Supporting Catholic Schools (CHESCS) Meeting and Luncheon
VANDENBERG B, SECOND LEVEL

1:15 – 2:30 PM
NCEA Updates
Stay up to date on the latest from NCEA. This session will provide a broad overview of current initiatives, upcoming programs, and areas of focus as we continue to serve Catholic school leaders, educators, and communities. Participants will hear what NCEA has been working on recently, learn about new opportunities, and gain insight into where we are headed next.
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

2:30 – 3 PM Break

3 – 4 PM
Professional Learning Sessions 5

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
Leading Through Data Storytelling: Turning Insight into Action for School Improvement
Dr. Amy Jefferis, Curriculum Associates;
Kim Shields, Archdiocese of Atlanta
Catholic school leaders are called to make mission-driven decisions that strengthen student learning and school vitality, yet many systems struggle to move from data analysis to meaningful action. This session equips diocesan leaders to use data as a tool for faithful stewardship and effective leadership, with a focus on data storytelling as a leadership practice. Participants will learn to translate complex data into clear, mission-centered narratives that clarify priorities, guide next steps, and build shared understanding across stakeholders. Leaders will explore how to identify root causes, prioritize high-impact needs, and integrate multiple data sources to support clear goals, informed decisions, and outcomes. Grounded in real-world examples, this session provides tools to move from insight to action and lead purposeful, sustainable change that builds trust, alignment, and hope.
NSBECS Standard 5
BERKEY, THIRD LEVEL

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
Leading Curriculum Development with A Roadmap
Kaitlin Reichart, Loyola University Chicago;
Michelle Lia, Ed.D., Loyola University Chicago
This session will explore best practices for leading curriculum within Catholic schools, highlighting research-based strategies such as backward design, universal design for learning, executive functions, and positive behavior supports. Using insights from *The Curriculum Roadmap*, we will explore practical, mission-aligned approaches to provide an excellent Catholic education. Participants will reflect on their current systems, identify strengths and gaps, and develop actionable strategies to advance curriculum in Catholic schools.
NSBECS Standard 7
HALDANE, THIRD LEVEL

LEADING WITH MISSION AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY
Proven Methods to Increase the Belief Levels of Students Through Science-Based Apologetics
Robert Spitzer, SJ, Magis Center
Several surveys show that one of the main reasons for the 51 percent disaffiliation rate from the Church and God in college is attributable to the pervasive student misconception that faith and science are opposed. Belief scores plummet from 8th to 12th grade, resulting in a D+ (67) at the beginning of senior year. ARKTest has measured the effectiveness of one solution to this problem, using science-based apologetics to raise the students' score from a D+ to a B (83), which is the difference between likely disaffiliation versus continued affiliation. Fr. Spitzer will briefly discuss five topics that can significantly improve belief scores through science: cosmological evidence for an intelligent creator, medical evidence of life after death and a soul, evidence of Jesus' passion and resurrection from the Shroud of Turin, and the scientific investigation of Eucharistic and Marian miracles.
NSBECS Standard 2
GRANDVIEW A/B, THIRD LEVEL

Don't forget!
Complete session evaluations and share valuable feedback in the NCEA Events mobile app.

NCEA AUTHOR

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Measuring Principal Effectiveness: An Analysis of Diocesan Practices and Perceptions of Catholic K-8 Principal Evaluation

Gregory O'Donnell, University of Notre Dame;
Frankie (Mary Frances) Jones, M.Ed., Remick Leadership Program, University of Notre Dame

This session will explore current practices of principal evaluation and performance review in K-8 Catholic schools across the United States. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, presenters will review the data and results from responses to a recent national survey of Catholic school superintendents, analyzing common practices across diocesan systems. Additionally, this session will explore perceptions of superintendents relative to elements of leadership that are most indicative of effectiveness in a building-level principal, exAMining these perceptions in light of current practices used to evaluate principals and build their capacity to be more effective leaders. Participants will collaboratively process the findings and brainstorm strategies to examine existing protocols in their local context.

NSBECS Standard 5

WINCHESTER, THIRD LEVEL

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Leading Faithful Change: Adaptive Leadership Tools for Catholic School Leaders

Dr. David Fremo, Catholic Community Schools

Catholic school leaders often face complex challenges where mission, Catholic identity, enrollment, staffing, fAMily expectations, governance, and student needs intersect. In these moments, technical or "go-to" problem-solving approaches alone may not be enough. This session introduces adaptive leadership as a practical framework for leading faithful change in Catholic schools and systems. Drawing from dissertation research on adaptive leadership practices among Catholic K-12 school presidents, participants will explore tools for distinguishing technical and adaptive challenges, engaging stakeholders, navigating tension, and preserving what is essential to mission while adapting to new realities. Participants will leave with practical strategies for leading change that is mission-centered, collaborative, and sustainable.

NSBECS Standard 6

THORNAPPLE, THIRD LEVEL

NCEA

PLNs are year-long, participant-centered communities focused on shared roles, interests, or areas of practice. As an NCEA member, you can participate at no additional cost.

- Advancement and Development
- Campus Ministry
- Diocesan Leader Prayer Forum
- Diocesan School Leaders
- ELL Educators
- Emerging School Leaders
- Learning Reimagined
- Public Policy
- Rising Scholars
- School Building Leaders
- Technology and AI

Plus two collaborative communities:

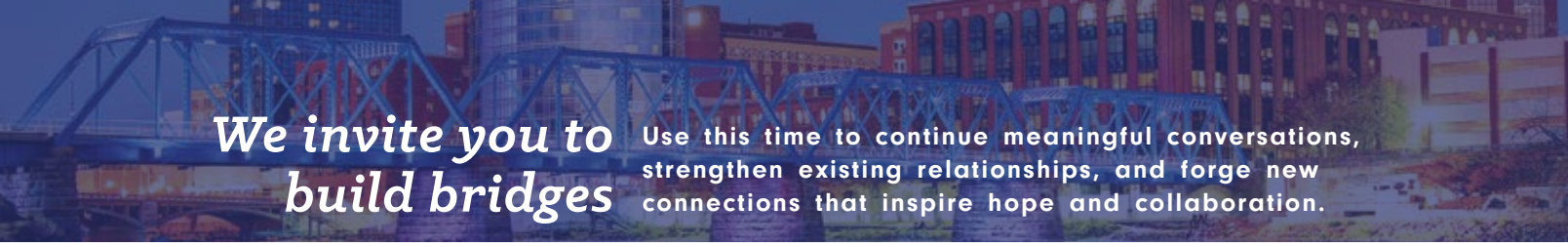
- CHESCS & GRACE

Questions? Connect with Laura McDonald, lmcdonald@ncea.org, and visit our website to explore each PLN, including its intended audience and areas of focus.



www.NCEA.org/PLN

NCEA Professional Learning Networks (PLNs)



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SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY

AI-Driven Operational Innovation - A Diocesan Office Journey

Katie Kervi, Diocese of Palm Beach;
Alex Urrea, Eduscape

Learn about the innovative quest of the Diocese of Palm Beach Catholic Schools Office, which embarked on a journey to consolidate five (5) disjointed and dated teacher credentialing and professional learning databases into one AI-driven platform. The result was a remarkable dashboard that provides real-time insights into the professional learning standards, certification and license requirements, and recommended learning paths for every educator in the diocese.

NSBECS Standard 10

HERITAGE HILL, THIRD LEVEL

SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY

Building Safe, Sustainable Catholic Schools: NSBECS Standard 12 and the Facility Planning Template

Patty Dailey, Diocese of Orlando;
Jacqueline Abrahams, Diocese of Orlando

What does it truly mean to steward the physical environments where Catholic education happens? This session moves beyond checklists and compliance to examine how NSBECS Standard 12—the physical environment standard—connects to the financial health, security design, and operational sustainability of your schools.

Participants will explore the Facility Planning Template as a practical diocesan tool, apply CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles to real campus scenarios, and develop a concrete framework for connecting deferred maintenance and capital planning to mission. Whether your schools are newly accredited or long overdue for a facilities conversation, this session will give you language, tools, and a plan to bring home.

NSBECS Standard 12

NELSON, THIRD LEVEL

SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY

Navigating the State and Federal School Choice Landscape to Maximize Enrollment.

Shaka Mitchell, American Federation for Children

State-level school choice programs continue to see high demand across the nation and have created a pathway for families to choose the educational environment that best fits their student's needs. With the launch of the Education Freedom Tax Credit program in 2027, all families in states that have opted-in to participate now have access to funding. This session will focus on how school leaders can best utilize these programs to enhance admissions and enrollment practices to blend all available school choice scholarships for families. A special emphasis will be placed on strategies for creating awareness of what is available, promoting interest in using the program(s), and eliminating barriers for families to enroll.

NSBECS Standard 10

VANDENBERG A, SECOND LEVEL

5 – 6 PM Relax and Refresh

5 – 8 PM
Corporate Partner Events

7 – 10 PM
Bridging the Keys: The Ultimate Piano Showdown

After a day of insightful sessions and meaningful connections, keep the energy going at Mojo's Dueling Piano Bar & Restaurant. This lively, interactive evening brings attendees together for a high-energy dueling piano experience where talented musicians, crowd-favorite requests, sing-alongs, and plenty of laughter set the stage for unforgettable networking.

Sponsored by VenturEd

MOJO'S DUELING PIANO BAR, 180 MONROE AVENUE, NW

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2026

8 – 8:45 AM
Morning Liturgy
Most Reverend David Walkowiak, J.C.D., Diocese of Grand Rapids

PANTLIND BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

8 – 11 AM
Registration & Badge Pick-up

REGISTRATION 1, SECOND LEVEL

8:45 – 9:30 AM
Breakfast and Parental Choice Q and A
Dale McDonald, PBVM, Ph.D., NCEA; **Mary McElroy**, NCEA
Join us for breakfast and an opportunity to get your Parental Choice questions answered!
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

9:30 – 10:30 AM
What Now for Federal Education Programs
Dale McDonald, PBVM, Ph.D., NCEA; **Maureen Dowling, Ed.D.**, U.S. Department of Education; **Eli Langston**, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
The U.S. Department of Education has shifted the administration of ESEA K-12 education programs to other federal agencies as it prepares to come to closure. This presentation will focus on various changes to programs' administration and how to ensure that new management honors the legislative requirement to provide equitable services to Catholic school students and educational personnel.
AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

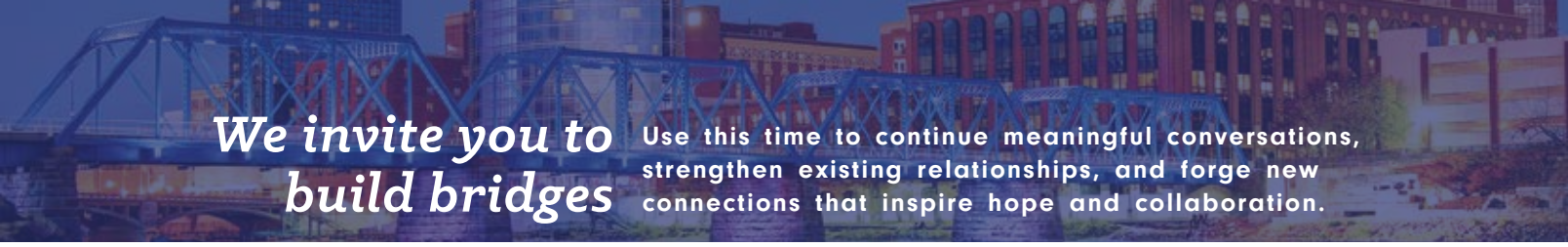
10:30 – 10:45 AM Break

10:45 – 11:45 AM
Professional Learning Sessions 6

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
Bridging Mission, Academic Excellence, and Sustainability Using Multiage Instructional Design
Kaitlin Reichart, Loyola University Chicago; **Debra Sullivan, Ed.D.**, Loyola University Chicago
This session will examine the foundations of multiage instruction, highlighting the purpose and methods for transitioning from a traditional school model to a multiage model. Participants will explore how multiage instruction can strengthen academic excellence to support the diverse needs of students, while maintaining operational vitality by promoting flexibility and long-term sustainability. Through guided reflection and discussion, participants will analyze their current school and diocesan systems, identify strengths and gaps, and consider how multiage instruction can serve as a strategic method to support the mission of Catholic education.
NSBECS Standard 7
KENDALL, THIRD LEVEL

ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
Building Bridges of Academic Excellence: A Systems-Level Approach to Prioritized Standards and Benchmark Assessments
Bonnie Delciotto, Archdiocese of Philadelphia; **Julie Cantillon**, ADAC, Inc.
In this session, diocesan leaders will share the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's multi-year "Establishing Foundations" journey, focused on prioritizing what is most critical for student learning and long-term success. This work strengthens academic rigor while building clarity and consistency across schools. We will highlight how content-area committees identified Priority 1 standards, the most essential for student success, and how this shaped a more intentional Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum, refined through implementation. Participants will also see how benchmark assessment blueprints, built using Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK), support a growing culture of data use. We will explore how results inform Tier 1 instruction and Tier 2 supports, helping teachers focus on what matters most and deepen standards-based learning.
NSBECS Standard 7
GRANDVIEW A/B, THIRD LEVEL

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP
Diocesan Critical Incident Response: What Your Diocese Must Have in Place to Support Schools
Bruce Varick, Archdiocese of Milwaukee
When crisis strikes a Catholic school, is your diocese ready? Individual schools cannot bear the weight of a critical incident alone. This session equips diocesan leaders with the frameworks, structures, and systems needed to support schools before, during, and after crises—from active threats and student deaths to natural disasters and abuse disclosures. Drawing on Department of Homeland Security and FEMA guidelines, FBI threat assessment research, and hard-won lessons from Sandy Hook, Parkland, and Uvalde, participants will examine the four pillars of diocesan readiness: Prevention, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. Leave with a clear picture of what your diocese must have in place—and a practical 90-day action plan to close the gaps.
NSBECS Standard 6
HALDANE, THIRD LEVEL



We invite you to build bridges

Use this time to continue meaningful conversations, strengthen existing relationships, and forge new connections that inspire hope and collaboration.

SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY

Building From the Ground Up: Why Early Childhood Is the Engine of School Vitality

Maria Ippolito, Consultant;
Elizabeth Bartley, M.Ed., Consultant

In an era of enrollment pressure and rising demand for excellence, early childhood programs are one of the strongest sustainability levers Catholic school networks have. They anchor enrollment pipelines, boost retention, build lasting fAMily loyalty, and shape first impressions. This session equips network leaders to treat early childhood as a strategic priority, positioning it as both an academic foundation and an enrollment engine. Participants will learn actionable strategies, including creating playgroups, designing events that convert interest into applications, leveraging digital marketing and lead capture, strengthening tours to increase conversion, and implementing retention practices from Pre-K through upper grades. Leaders will leave with a practical plan to elevate quality, stand out in a competitive market, and drive sustained enrollment growth.

NSBECS Standard 13

HERITAGE HILL, THIRD LEVEL

SUPPORTING OPERATIONAL VITALITY

Excellence by Design: Identifying, Cultivating, and Retaining Leaders

Dr. Christina Mendez-Hall, Diocese of Arlington

As the challenge to find and hire quality teachers continues, the challenge to find and hire mission-driven administrators for Catholic schools and diocesan offices has also arisen. How do we identify those whom the Lord is calling to lead while also supporting new leaders and retaining the strong leaders within our buildings? In this session, we will discuss the systems, supports, and curriculum used in the Diocese of Arlington for the recruiting, training, and retaining of strong, mission-driven leaders for our schools. Attendees will also be encouraged to share their best practices and exchange ideas to refresh their current practices.

NSBECS Standard 6

BERKEY, THIRD LEVEL

11:45 AM – 12 PM Break

1 – 1:15 PM
Closing Remarks
Dr. Steven F. Cheeseman

AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
FR. NATE WILLS



12 – 1 PM

Magnifica Humanitas and Catholic School Leadership in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Fr. Nate Wills, University of Notre Dame

As artificial intelligence reshapes teaching, learning, work, relationships, and human agency, leaders in Catholic schools need to understand how to put Pope Leo XIV's encyclical on AI, ""Magnifica Humanitas"" into practice. This session will explore the overall themes of Magnifica Humanitas through the lens of policy, literacy, and what this means for teaching and learning in Catholic schools. Participants will consider whether existing (arch)diocesan policies and school perspectives on AI need to be updated and shaped in light of this new encyclical from the Holy Father. Through reflection, discussion, and practical application, leaders will identify ways to ensure that AI serves the full flourishing of the human person and strengthens, rather than diminishes, the Catholic identity of their schools.

AMBASSADOR BALLROOM, SECOND LEVEL



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