



2.7.2017

Erie Catholic School System announces new president, board members

Damon R. Finazzo, 38, principal at Villa Maria Elementary School, has been named president of the new Erie Catholic School System, effective immediately. In addition, the Diocese of Erie has announced the names of the first members to serve on the new board for the system.

“This is another important step as we prepare to launch the school system this summer,” said Father Nicholas Rouch, vicar for Education. “We are very pleased with the people who have accepted these positions and are confident they will provide the kind of innovative leadership we are seeking.”

Board members include:

John Blakeslee, president of A.F. Schultz Company

Sister Mary Drexler, SSJ, veteran educator

Damon Finazzo, president of the Erie Catholic School System

James Gallagher, superintendent of Catholic schools for the Diocese of Erie

Father Scott Jabo, president of Cathedral Prep and Villa Maria Academy

Father John Malthaner, pastor, St. Luke, Erie, and former headmaster, Venango Catholic

Atty. Jerome Wegley, Knox Law Firm

Professor Janice Whiteman, Gannon University School of Education.

Board members are expected to nominate additional directors to serve on the board in the coming months.

- more -

ANNE-MARIE WELSH
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
Office 814.824.1167
Cell 814.746.6889
amwelsh@ErieRCD.org

MARY SOLBERG
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
Office 814.824.1171
Cell 814.969.1844
Home 814.734.1332
msolberg@ErieRCD.org

The board will be responsible for overseeing the Catholic identity, educational quality and operational vitality of the system of schools. Members will approve the budget and help identify strategies for long-term growth. To complement the work of the board, each of the six schools in the system will have a parent organization to assist the principal and support the school.

A native of Erie, Finazzo holds a BS in elementary education from Grove City College and a master's in educational leadership from Virginia Commonwealth University. He has served as principal at VME since 2009. Under his leadership at VME, enrollment increased from 328 students to 431 students. Prior to his service there, he was an administrator at Cashell Donahoe Elementary School in Sandston, Va., and spent six years teaching at Glen Lea Elementary School in Henrico, Va.

"Damon possesses a faithfulness and passion for Catholic education that is contagious," said Jim Gallagher, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Erie. "I am thrilled to work with him to build this new school system and have every confidence in his abilities as a leader. He is a unifying presence and will do well to foster a spirit of collaboration and community throughout the six schools in the Erie area."

With the help of assistants at both the school and the diocese, Finazzo will continue in his role as principal through the end of the final school year at VME, while simultaneously beginning his work as president.

Finazzo will be responsible for developing many of the key components of the Erie Catholic School System that will launch with the 2017-18 school year. He will oversee personnel, enrollment, educational quality, budgeting, and fundraising, and will report to the board of directors and the Catholic Schools Office.

The transition from nine parish-based schools in the Erie area to the new Erie Catholic School System with six school sites was announced with the release of *Building in Truth and Love*, the pastoral plan for Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie unveiled in Feb. 2016. The six school sites in the system include Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady of Peace, St. George, St. James, St. Jude and St. Luke.

The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, made the appointments Feb. 6. The diocese expects to announce the names of the principals for each of the six schools in the new system within the week.