

September 13, 2024

Prot. N. 2024-0542 AB A

Dear Wellspring Catholic Academy of St. Bernadette Community,

With a heavy heart, we write to inform you of the difficult decision regarding the closure of Wellspring Catholic Academy of St. Bernadette, with the last day of school being Dec. 20.

Our commitment to the health of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Denver is grounded in three essential pillars: Catholic identity, educational vitality and financial stability. Many of our schools continue to thrive by exemplifying these pillars, contributing positively to their communities and providing a solid foundation for their students. However, not all areas are experiencing the same vitality. In regions not expanding, difficult decisions become necessary to ensure the overall sustainability of our educational mission.

Wellspring's enrollment has continued to lag projected numbers, with only 70 total students this year and only a few students in some classes. The drop in enrollment can be seen across the state, with 21 Jefferson County schools and six Denver charter schools having closed since 2021, citing low enrollment; Denver Public Schools is also actively considering more school closures as well. A Meitler study commissioned by the Archdiocese and presented in 2021 confirmed the negative trends in enrollment across the state, due to a decline in the number of Coloradan children. When classes are severely underpopulated, delivering the educational vitality and financial stability pillars of a healthy Catholic school is impossible.

Additionally, the school has operated at a significant deficit for many years. Even with the generous support of the parish community, the parish itself and generous donors, in addition to the Archdiocese, the financial support required to maintain operations has proven unsustainable. At current rates, the school would be unable to compensate teachers during the Spring semester. As such, with the pastor's support, the parish finance council indicated that it is no longer feasible for the parish to support Wellspring.

Considering all these factors, the need to consolidate schools to preserve educational vitality and financial stability has become evident across the archdiocese. As such, the decision was made to close the school, with the last day of school being Dec. 20. Additionally, Guardian Angels Catholic School in Denver will close at the end of the academic year, and Bishop Machebeuf High School will partner with St. John Paul the Great High School, effective in the 2025-2026 academic year.

We commend the faculty and staff of Wellspring for opening their doors to all, especially exceptional learners with serious disability presentations and those with modest financial means. Their tremendous, heroic work to include more of God's children has not gone unnoticed, and we renew our commitment to this work. The Department of Student Support Services will make itself available to

accompany exceptional learners through this difficult transition. For those students with Seeds of Hope, ACE or Schmitz Scholarships, the Office of Catholic Schools is actively working to ensure students' scholarships transfer to their next Catholic school. The Archdiocese is also dedicated to assisting Wellspring staff in finding new roles within our Catholic schools.

We are confident that the several nearby Catholic elementary schools, some of which are only three miles away, will provide welcoming environments, robust programs and faithful human formation for Wellspring students. To assist in your search for a new Catholic school nearby, the Office of Catholic Schools has assembled packets available in English and Spanish. The Archdiocese has also asked that whatever new archdiocesan Catholic school your family may choose, your tuition rate at Wellspring be honored through the end of the 2024-2025 academic year.

Lastly, we would like to thank Wellspring and Avery Coats for their work in the lawsuit against the State of Colorado to ensure all families have access to universal pre-k education. Because of the constitutional issues raised and the additional plaintiffs, the lawsuit will continue.

We know this news is challenging and brings up many emotions. Though a difficult decision, we believe this is necessary to ensure the future strength and viability of Catholic education in our archdiocese. Please know our commitment to supporting you and our Catholic educational mission remains unwavering.

In Christ's peace,



Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.D.
Archbishop of Denver



Dr. Kemmerly Hill
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Archdiocese of Denver



Father Joseph McLagan
Pastor
St. Bernadette Parish