BCS President's Report
October 2026

Andrew McDonald, President
Billings Catholic Schools

Dear Billings Catholic Schools Community,
The beginning of this school year has brought meaningful opportunities to celebrate progress, strengthen partnerships, and plan for the future of Catholic education in our community and strengthen our schools.

Over the past several months, we have continued to advance our long-term master planning efforts, completed campus improvements, strengthened governance transparency, welcomed new leaderships, and participated in important conversations about education across Montana. We have also worked alongside valued partners such as Rocky Mountain College and continued sharing our story through our annual reporting efforts.

As we look ahead, much of our work remains focused on stewardship, continuous improvement, and responding to the feedback of the community. Whether planning future improvements at Billing Central Catholic or navigating leadership transitions, our commitment remains the same: providing an exceptional Catholic education emphasizing faith, family spirit, and academic excellence.

The pages that follow provide an overview of these efforts and the progress being made across our school system.

Thank you for your continued trust and partnership.

In Christ,
Andrew McDonald – President

An Opportunity worth Watching - Federal Tax Credit

For generations, families have made sacrifices to choose Billings Catholic Schools. They have done so because they believe faith, family spirit, and academic excellence. At Billings Catholic Schools, we are privileged to walk alongside those families every day.

In January, a new opportunity is expected to become available that could significantly expand scholarship support for students across Montana.

Beginning January 1, 2027, qualifying contributions to approved Scholarship Granting Organizations may be eligible for a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit ($1,700 per individual, $3,400 married filing jointly) creating a new source of scholarship funding for K-12 students. Montana has already elected to participate in the program, and we are preparing for implementation.

While details continue to be finalized, the potential is significant!

At Billings Catholic Schools, we provide approximately $1.7 million in tuition assistance each year because we believe a family's financial circumstances should not be the primary factor determining access to a Catholic education. Even with that investment, many families continue to face difficult financial decisions. Additional scholarship resources could help bridge that gap and make Catholic education more accessible for current and future students.

This opportunity is not simply about tax credits. It is about expanding access. It is about helping families choose the educational environment that best meets the needs of their children. And it is about strengthening the future of Catholic education in Montana.

Over the coming months, we will share additional information about how the program works, who may qualify, and how families, donors, and supporters can participate.

For now, I encourage our community to stay informed. This may become one of the most important educational opportunities available to Montana families in many years.

BCS Building Level and Department Highlights

Saint Francis Catholic Early Childhood Education Center
Michelle Trafton, Director

FAITH

*In celebration of the Feast of Saint Francis, Father John visited ECE to bless the teachers and preschoolers. He spent time in each classroom talking to the children about the life and ministry of Saint Francis.

*The Preschool teachers have introduced a new religion curriculum. Allelu! is an age appropriate, multi-sensory experience that provides the teachers a format to teach the liturgical calendar in fun and engaging ways. Each preschooler receives a weekly activity sheet to share with their family and spread faith at home.

FAMILY SPIRIT

*The 2026-2027 current enrollment at Saint Francis ECE is 170. ECE welcomed 52 new families and welcomed back 118 families!

*Twenty-five Human Growth and Development students from Rocky Mountain College and six nursing students from MSU have volunteered at ECE during September and October. The teachers and children enjoy interacting with the students and it is a positive way to build community.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

*The preschool teachers attended a weeklong Orton Gillingham workshop in August with Saint Francis Catholic teachers. It was beneficial for them to learn about the science of reading and the best way to teach preschoolers written and oral language.

The teachers have started to introduce some of the alphabet letters and sounds and will continue to build on the OG program throughout the school year.

*Beginning of the year academic assessments are nearly complete. The assessment measures basic knowledge of letters, numbers, shapes and colors. The teachers will use the information to establish instructional goals for the 2026-2027 school year.

Saint Francis Catholic K-8
Debra Hayes, Principal
Jim Stanton, Principal

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Continued work on the following goals:

#1- Create opportunities to collaborate among staff during the school day with focuses on curriculum, planning, analyzing data, and sharing best teaching practices.

#2- Increase achievement growth for all students; especially focusing on growth achievement for high achieving students. MAP assessments, pre-assessments, DIBELS, and individual classroom assessments will be used to generate the data necessary to track the growth.

CLASS ENROLLMENTS:

K-4: 323 STUDENTS

5-8: 283 STUDENTS

40 SFC students participated in the Yellowstone Cross-Country meet; 5th Grade Boys and 3rd grade girls won overall team awards. Congratulations!

New at SFC:

- DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) is a set of short, standardized, individual assessments used to measure foundational reading and early literacy skills in students from kindergarten through fourth grade.
- FISHTANK ELA is a high-quality, knowledge-building English Language Arts curriculum designed to help students develop into critical readers, writers, and thinkers as they engage with authentic texts that affirm their experiences and expand their perspectives.
- ORTON-GILLINGHAM training was provided August 17-2 for the K-4 staff. This is a direct, explicit, multisensory, structured, and sequential method designed to teach literacy.

- Staff participated in professional development for Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions Across School Environments presented by Shawna M. Heiser, MS, Licensed BCBA from MSU-Bozeman.

SCHOOL SAFETY:

The SFC Emergency Plan was updated over the summer. Various evacuation drills will continue, as well as lockdown procedures. Updated door entrance security systems were installed.

FAMILY SPIRIT

Parent Information Nights were conducted on September 1st and 2nd. They were well attended.

Activities are in full swing and be sure to read the Friday newsletters for information on upcoming dates and times for concerts.

FAITH

The 5th and 8th grade students have participated in school retreats.

Students practiced mass protocols at the beginning of the year over at St. Thomas church.

The first SAINTS groups met on October 2nd with an emphasis on The Feast of St. Francis.

St. Francis Catholic School students, staff, and families raised $2255.00 to give to Chase Lantz's family.

Billings Central Catholic High School
Nolan Trafton, Principal

Faith

- September 9 was the annual Freshman Retreat. Thank you to Mrs. Wahl and Mr. Khan for your dedication and efforts in planning this memorable day! Thank you to St. Pius X Parish for generously hosting the Class of 2030.
- BCCHS welcomed Andy Laszlo as a guest speaker. Mr. Laszlo shared his father's life story surviving the holocaust. Now, Mr. Laszlo shares stories of his father's resiliency and courage. To learn more, check out Andy Laszlo's book Footnote to History.
- Save the Date: November 24, 9am at Ralph Nelles Center. BCCHS is excited to welcome you to our annual Thanksgiving Liturgy! We look forward to celebrating with you.

Family Spirit

- Together We Build: What Flag Football Taught Us
- Congratulations to BCCHS Boys Golf on winning the 2026 State A Championship! Congratulations to our state placers: Colin Jensen (2nd), Matthew Hermanson (3rd), Bordie Glaser (12th), Carson Mangel and Ethan Stergar (21st). Additionally, CeCe Fornshell placed 3rd on the girls side!
- BCCHS is pleased to announce the hiring of Dave Renno as Head Baseball Coach. Coach Renno's coaching philosophy aligns with the mission of BCS. He is committed to developing faith, character, team unity, and competitive excellence.

Academic Excellence

- In the spring, the Class of 2029 took the PreACT 8/9. Nine BCCHS students scored in the top 3% in the U.S. ACT recognizes these students as Distinguished Scholars. An additional 25 students scored in the top 10% in the U.S. ACT recognized these students as Rising Scholars. Finally, 75 of the 89 test takers scored above average. These test takers are recognized as Early Scholars. Distinguished, Rising, and Early Scholars are given a certificate to recognize their Academic Excellence!
- Research shows a strong correlation between attendance and academic achievement. Please stop by the Wall of Excellence at BCCHS to see the list of 73 students who have perfect attendance through the first 6 weeks! Their average current GPA is 93%, demonstrating the strong correlation between attendance and Academic Excellence.

BCS Education Director
Suzanne Vaira

Billings Catholic Schools started the 2026–2027 school year focused on forming the whole child in faith, family spirit, and academic excellence. This fall, our work centers on three things: a stronger literacy foundation, shared professional learning for teachers, and consistent support for students from preschool through grade 12.

Faith

- Our faculty and staff began the year together on August 24 with an all-staff Mass and retreat at St. Thomas, grounding our work in our shared mission.
- Teachers now have a PK–12 Child Development Teacher Reference, written through our Catholic understanding of the dignity of every child. It helps teachers understand what is developmentally typical at each age and partner with families when a student needs extra support.
- Our approach to student behavior is grounded in restorative practices, which focus on repairing relationships and helping students grow rather than on consequences alone.

Family Spirit

- Our schools are aligning around one PK–12 behavior framework, so expectations stay consistent as students move from Saint Francis Catholic to Billings Central Catholic High School.
- An Education Committee of leaders from across the system is guiding the launch of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), giving teachers regular time to collaborate around student learning.
- The Ram Guide, our 2026–2027 school-year calendar book, and the SFC 5–8 A/B day calendar help families plan the year ahead.

Academic Excellence

Strengthening Literacy

- K–4 students now receive Orton-Gillingham International phonics instruction, a structured, multisensory approach to building strong readers and spellers. Teachers completed training in August and are using it daily in classrooms.
- DIBELS 8th Edition is now our common K–4 reading assessment. It helps teachers see early which students need more support or more challenge.
- Fishtank Learning is now our common reading curriculum in grades K–8, giving students a consistent, knowledge-rich reading experience from grade to grade.

Supporting Our Teachers

- On September 25, PK–12 staff took part in training with Shawna M. Heiser, MS, a Licensed Board-Certified Behavior Analyst, Director of Special Learning 1-ON-1, and Senior Lecturer of Psychology at Montana State University–Bozeman. Her session, "Reaching and Teaching the Neurodiverse Students in Our Schools," gave teachers practical positive behavior supports and interventions to help students with autism and other learning differences succeed in the classroom.
- Teachers continue professional learning through ASCD's Witsby platform, where a BCS-specific DIBELS training course is being developed.
- Staff book studies keep our teaching practice current and reflective. These include Building Thinking Classrooms by Peter Liljedahl, which supports student problem-solving in math; The Writing Revolution, our system-wide approach to strengthening student writing; John Hattie's Visible Learning, which focuses on the practices that most improve student achievement; and this fall's Ruthless Equity session.

BCS Technology Integration

Billings Catholic Schools is pleased to announce the hiring of Brett Zent as our new Director of Technology. Brett brings more than 20 years of technology leadership experience and a deep commitment to serving organizations that support children, families, and community.

For the past two decades, Brett has served as a technology professional with Tractor & Equipment Company, managing technology systems and network operations across multiple locations in Montana, Wyoming, and North Dakota. In that role, he has overseen network security, Office 365 administration, cloud services, disaster recovery planning, telecommunications systems, and technology support.

Beyond his professional experience, Brett has demonstrated a commitment to youth and community organizations here in Billings. He currently serves as President of Neon Swish, a nonprofit travel basketball organization, and previously served as Chief Information Officer and board member for Burlington Central Little League.

Throughout the hiring process, Brett distinguished himself not only through his technical expertise but also through his understanding of how technology can support the educational mission of our schools. He expressed a desire to help provide dependable tools for teachers, keep families connected, protect students online, and ensure technology remains a tool that serves learning and human development.

As he shared during the interview process, his interest in Catholic education is rooted in a belief that schools should educate the whole person and partner closely with families in forming students academically, spiritually, and morally.

We are excited to welcome Brett to our leadership team and look forward to the expertise, service, and collaborative spirit he will bring to Billings Catholic Schools.

Please join us in welcoming Brett Zent to the BCS community.

BCS Facilities
Mac McCann

The Facilities Department experienced a highly productive summer session, successfully executing comprehensive improvements across all three campuses. Project scopes encompassed critical infrastructure and aesthetic renewals, including extensive flooring replacements, wall remediation, water and heating system improvements, interior painting, and area cleanup.
While the majority of operations concluded prior to the academic year, select projects have strategically extended into the early autumn months.
Completed Campus Initiatives

- General Renewal: Finalized comprehensive flooring replacements, wall repairs, interior painting, and area cleanup across all three educational facilities.
- Emergency Systems: Replaced all AED (Automated External Defibrillator) systems across the three campuses and deployed an additional AED unit at Central.
- Communications: Installed a new intercom system at SFC.

Pending Finalization & Inspections

- SFC Fire Alarm Panel: System installation is fully complete and prepared for activation. The unit is currently offline pending a final regulatory inspection.
- Parking Lot Surveillance: Hardware deployment is complete, with new high-definition security cameras now fully installed at the new parking lot facility.

BCS Finance
Leah Gibson

Business Office Update

The Business Office continues to strengthen the financial foundation of Billings Catholic Schools through sound stewardship, strategic planning, and a commitment to operational excellence. We are grateful for the continued collaboration of our school leaders, faculty, staff, and families in supporting our shared mission.

Key Accomplishments

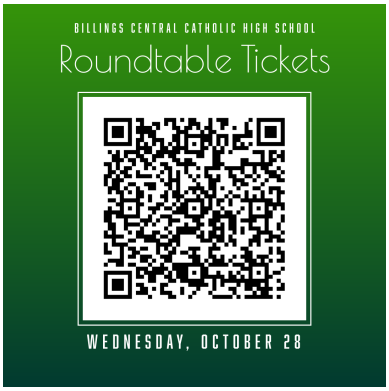
- Successfully completed the 2025 Annual Audit, earning a clean audit opinion and affirming the strength of our financial practices and internal controls.
- Maintained strong financial oversight through timely monthly reporting and budget-to-actual analysis, providing leadership and the Board with clear insight into organizational performance.
- Continued to support families through tuition management, payment plans, scholarships, and financial aid programs, helping make Catholic education accessible to more students.
- Expanded our substitute teacher pool, increasing staffing flexibility and helping ensure consistent classroom coverage across our schools.
- Ensured timely and accurate processing of payroll, accounts payable, and other critical financial functions across the school system.

Current Challenges

- Managing inflationary pressures and rising operating costs while maintaining affordability for families.
- Adapting to evolving scholarship and financial aid funding processes, including ongoing coordination with external scholarship providers.
- Balancing enrollment-driven revenue fluctuations with long-term staffing and operational needs.

Community Engagement
Kathy Harris

- Running On Faith went well this year, with 40 more participants in the race than last year and several new booths participating in the carnival
- Three reunions took advantage of the all-year Alumni and Friends Homecoming BBQ
    - After serving 300 people the caterer ran out of food; last year fewer than 200 were served.
    - Nolan Trafton spoke to the Class of '66 at their event on Saturday night, outlining the positive things happening at Central
    - Father John Pankratz held mass for a packed house in the chapel on Sunday
    - All three reunion groups toured the school
- The women's Turn The Table was held last month. Roundtable will be held on Wednesday, October 28. A group of interested stakeholders from BCS and BCSF met between the two events to brainstorm ideas for increasing ticket sales and opportunities to give at these two events. Men, get your ticket here! https://billingscatholicschools.org/roundtable-and-turn-the-table-fall-social-events/
- Helped BCSF promote an incredibly successful RAMS Day of Giving
- With the BCS business office, communicated to parents who had not submitted their enrollment contracts, resulting in the most contracts submitted before the school year began in at least seven years
- Click HERE to view the updated Billings Central Catholic school profile



*Please be sure to check the BCS Shared Calendar for times of events, dates, and more!

BCS Shared Calendar: This calendar gives you information for activities, bell schedules, clubs and community service opportunities. You can turn on and/or whichever categories you are interested in by simply clicking on the categories on the right. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the office and I will do my best to help.