

SS. ANDREW-THOMAS SCHOOL FAQs

We recognize that the news of Ss. Andrew-Thomas School's closing brings many questions and concerns. In a spirit of openness and care for our community, we have gathered responses to some of the most common questions below.

Q. If extra efforts are made, it's possible enrollment could be increased. Why can't we wait a few years to see if things change?

A. The historical enrollment losses and the demographic shifts in our region demonstrate that the increase in students we would need is simply not likely. In the 1960s, our school had 30-35 students per grade and a waitlist for enrollment. Today, we don't even have 30 students in the entire school. This is not a problem unique to our parish or even our state. Catholic schools across the country are facing the same challenges related to enrollment, stewardship of resources, and prioritization of ministries that support the mission and the parish. These challenges are more pronounced in rural areas where the overall population is decreasing or remaining flat, and the number of children has been slowly but steadily decreasing for many years.

Q. If we raise more money in fundraising or increase tuition, would the school be able to stay open?

A. The operating expenses needed to run the school totaled more than \$358,000 in 2024-2025. There were 18 students in 3K-8th grade that year which means the cost to educate one child last year was \$19,444. We collected \$29,584 in tuition, not enough to even cover two students. Fundraising accounted for \$61,467. Even with the parish subsidy of \$171,250, the school still had a deficit last year.

The ideal financial support model for parish schools is 50% from tuition, 25% from fundraising, and 25% from the parish subsidy. Depending on the number of students enrolled in a given year, raising 50% of needed income from tuition would require rates of approximately \$6,000-\$9,000 per child. These tuition costs would be too high for most families, and the result would be additional declines in enrollment.

Q. Ss. Andrew-Thomas School is the oldest Catholic school in the Diocese of Madison and in Wisconsin. How can we abandon the important mission of having Catholic education in our area?

A. We are absolutely not abandoning Catholic education in our area! There are several other nearby Catholic schools that provide not only excellent academics and Catholic faith-formation but also offer larger class sizes, additional special classes (art, technology, music), and more extracurricular activities (sports, band, etc.). St. Clement School in Lancaster is 12 miles away from Ss. Andrew-Thomas School and has the room to accommodate all of our students. Holy Ghost-Immaculate Conception School in Dickeyville/Kieler is even closer and transportation is covered by the Potosi School District.

Catholic education is not about a specific building. In fact, Ss. Andrew-Thomas School has not always existed in the current building or even as a single school. Its own history includes the blending of different schools and different locations.

To help parish families continue Catholic education for their children, the parish would provide assistance (such as tuition support or transportation). Options will be discussed with school families.

Q. Isn't the school our primary means of educating and serving our Catholic youth? How can we fulfill our mission to make future disciples without it?

A. While it is true that Catholic Schools have been a critical ministry for our parishes, changes in enrollment at Ss. Andrew-Thomas mean that the school is now serving only a small number our parish families. As an example, there are currently only five Catholic families represented in grades 2-8.

A Catholic school's core mission is to form young people as disciples of Jesus Christ, but it cannot fulfill that mission if families do not send their children to the school. The reality is that the money given to the school would have more impact on our parish (and our youth) if used in other areas to form disciples, reach more Catholic families, and accompany our young people through the critical middle and high school years when the Church so often loses them.