

By Michael Gresham
The Texas Catholic

With the beginning of a new school year, Catholic schools in the Diocese of Dallas welcome a new superintendent, Dr. Rebecca Hammel.

“I am truly excited to join the team of outstanding school leaders, educators, students, and parents and build relationships and achieve outcomes in an already vibrant and growing Catholic school system,” said Hammel, who was hired in May after a nationwide search and began her new role in mid-July. “I believe in the mission of Catholic education and its transformative potential for all in our community. I know that with the committed team here, along with our benefactors and supporters, we are braced to do great things for our students and to promote Catholic education throughout the diocese.”

Hammel comes to the Diocese of Dallas after serving as superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Nashville since 2018. She has been involved in Catholic education for more than 30 years, serving as a teacher, principal, and administrator.

“I just always had the heart for teaching, even as a child,” explained Hammel, who credited her father, Larry Neidlinger, a lifelong Catholic educator in Indiana, for having a major influence on her career path. “Seccina Memorial High School, where he worked for 33 years, was our second home growing up. He started as a teacher, and he did everything in between – baseball coach, dean of students, vice principal, and after I left, he became principal of the school. He held every position you could imagine there.”

A product of Catholic schools herself, Hammel said that experience also helped inspire her career journey.

“My own experience in Catholic schools certainly nurtured that feeling of service and love for Catholic education,” she explained.

Hammel earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Indiana State University, a master’s degree in education administration and supervision from Butler University and received her Ph.D. in Catholic education leadership and policy from The Catholic University of America.

She began her career as a teacher in Indiana. At the age of 28, she took her first job as a principal. She also worked in the Catholic Schools Office for the Archdiocese of Louisville. Hammel served 11 years as the principal of St. Maria Goretti School in Westfield, Indiana, which is located north of Indianapolis. She also served as the head of the lower school at

the path forward

Diocese welcomes Dr. Rebecca Hammel
as superintendent of Catholic schools



KEVIN BARTRAM/Special Contributor

Dr. Rebecca Hammel joined the Diocese of Dallas in July as the new superintendent of Catholic schools. Coming from the Diocese of Nashville, where she served as superintendent of schools since 2018, Hammel has more than 30 years’ experience as a Catholic school educator and administrator.

St. Gabriel Catholic School in Austin, Texas; and as associate superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

Her time in Austin endeared her to Texas, especially the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops (TCCB) and the focus Texas bishops place on quality, Catholic education.

“I appreciate the structure of that organization and the commitment of the bishops in Texas to education. They have high standards for their Catholic schools, and if we’re going to offer a Catholic education, it needs to be a higher-level education,” she said. “With TCCB, the structures that are in place, call for that. That is a testimony to Bishop Edward Burns, Bishop Greg Kelly and the other Texas bishops’ belief in the mission of Catholic education.”

Better Together

Stepping into a diocese that spans nine counties and features 29 diocesan and seven independent schools, Hammel

said it is important for a Catholic school system “to meet people where they are.”

“I think that is part of the evangelization that is our duty as Catholics,” Hammel said. “In the role of Catholic educators, I think that is even more true as we serve people who come to us from a variety of different backgrounds. It’s our duty to understand who they are and where they are.”

“If we’re going to truly enter into relationships with our communities,” she added, “we have to know who they are.”

One way to achieve that goal is to be a good listener, which has always been one of Hammel’s strengths.

“It’s important to me to listen to others’ viewpoints so that we can move in better directions, make better informed decisions, and have strong collaboration,” she explained. “It is important to have some unity in your vision. We’re better together. What is good for one, is good for all. I really do believe that. It’s important to me that we operate

in such a way that benefits all 14,000 students that come to our schools, both independent and diocesan.”

While relatively new to her position in Dallas, Hammel said she understands the challenges schools in north Texas face, including population growth in northern counties, resources, and tuition assistance for families in need.

“We need to address the funding piece, and that will challenge us to find creative solutions,” she said.

During her stint in Tennessee, Hammel played a major role in helping to get legislation for education saving accounts passed. She sees that as a creative solution that could benefit students in Texas as well.

“In Tennessee and other states who have passed similar measures, it’s proven to be a successful tool,” she said. “The funding from the education saving accounts can be a real boon for families who desire a Catholic education because it makes our

schools far more accessible.”

As the new year gets under way, Hammel admitted that she can’t help but be excited to be part of the Diocese of Dallas team.

“It’s well-known that in this diocese there are innovative things happening,” she said. “Now that I am here and have learned more about such programs as the HALO 139 project, I’ve discovered different pockets of people who want to work with us to find new solutions to the old problem of accessibility and affordability. It was very appealing to me to be able to come here and be part of that innovation.” I was drawn to these new ideas throughout my interview process, in fact, they drove my decision to come to Dallas.”

In her time here, meeting with administrators and faculty, Hammel said she has been impressed.

“I can see and feel their commitment to the mission of Catholic education.”