

Fall Educator Gathering – La Crosse
September 26, 2025
Diocese of La Crosse's Office for Catholic Schools

Afternoon Break-out Sessions

Schoolyard Science Lab - start at 1:00 and end at 3:30.

Location: Myrick Park (Gun Shelter)

Presenter: Cindy Blobaum, Nature Place, Environmental Education Program Manager

Description: Young learners make connections between what they learn in the classroom and the real world they experience by asking questions and investigating. Learn cheap/free easy ways to extend your science lessons by using your school yard and surrounding areas as your active science lab. We will be outside!

Special Notes:

- Restricted to 25 participants
- Restricted to teachers for grades PreK-5
- Group will meet outside of the Myrick Park Gun Shelter
- Participants are expected to drive or find a ride to Myrick Park
- Plan to spend the entire two and a half hours outside

Evangelization in the Age of Polarization: Practical Tips to Foster Respectful and Productive Classroom Conversations That Change Minds - start at 1:00 and end at 3:30.

Location: Aquinas High School Classroom

Presenter: Emily Geiger, Director of Education & Outreach for the Equal Rights Institute

Description: Emily, a leader in using ERI's apologetics to foster respectful and productive dialogues about abortion, will work with you to learn how to work with high schoolers who are bombarded by pro-choice culture. Emily understands it feels impossible to have meaningful conversations about controversial issues like abortion. But, rather than resort to angry debate or just avoid the topic, Emily wants students to be able to dialogue thoughtfully. This session will be especially helpful for those classrooms where students hold diverse political and religious viewpoints. How can we foster thoughtful, compassionate, and critical thinkers who engage in difficult conversations with respect? Emily will work to help you form students into adults who think through important issues for themselves and apply Catholic values to their daily lives.

Trauma Informed Care - start at 1:00 and end at 3:30.

Location: Aquinas High School Classroom

Presenter: RaeAnn Thomas, Director, Ascension Wisconsin Employee Assistance Program

Description: Join RaeAnn her team as they work to help you:

- Define and be able to identify the different types of trauma and its prevalence
- Understand what trauma-informed care is, what it looks like, and how it is different from other interactions
- Increase understanding in how trauma-informed care principles can be used in the classroom and individual interactions

Advocacy that Pays Off: Strategies for Maximizing Your Title Funding - start at 1:00 and end at 3:30.

Location: Aquinas High School Classroom

Presenter: Abigail Pavela, WCRIS Federal Funding Director

Description: Unlock the full potential of your federal Title program funds through strategic

advocacy. This session will provide private school leaders with practical tools and proven strategies to strengthen collaboration with districts, navigate consultation with confidence, and ensure equitable services for their students. Participants will learn how to ask the right questions and take actionable steps that maximize the impact of Title funding on their school community.

Special Notes:

- Restricted to School Administrators only
- Abigail will be presenting virtually

Incorporating the Science of Reading in a Secondary Classroom (any content area) - start at 1:00 and end at 3:30.

Location: Aquinas High School Classroom

Presenter: Kristy Holinka, Viterbo University, Chair, Graduate Programs, Assistant Professor School of Education

Description: This session is a follow up to the morning session with grades 7-12 teachers. We will focus on what the Science of Reading (SoR) is, looking at the history, research, misconceptions, and how SoR relates to the secondary classroom. We will work to identify how the Science of Reading applies beyond elementary education and analyze the critical role fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and background knowledge have in adolescent literacy. Best practice instructional strategies for any content area will be aligned with SoR principles for secondary students.

Special Note:

- Restricted for grades 7-12 teachers

Half Sessions – Participants selecting the half session option must select and attend two half sessions.
– Each half sessions will take approximately one hour and ten minutes.
– The first half sessions will start at 1:00 and end at 2:10
– The second half sessions will start at 2:20 and end at 3:30

Introduction to AI

Location: Aquinas High School Classroom

Presenter: Jamie Dodge, McDonell Area Catholic Schools – St. Charles Borromeo School, Principal

Description: Artificial Intelligence is reshaping education, but Catholic schools must approach it with clarity, intentionality, and a strong sense of mission. This session will introduce teachers and principals to practical ways AI can be used effectively, efficiently, and faithfully—without overwhelming or replacing the uniquely human role of the Catholic educator.

We will focus on three key areas where AI can provide the greatest support:

1. **Lesson Planning & Curriculum Design** – Using AI as a creative assistant to generate ideas and resources while aligning everything with Catholic identity and virtue formation.
2. **Communication & Administration** – Streamlining parent newsletters, emails, and reports so more time is freed for personal connection and leadership.
3. **Faithful Discernment** – Understanding the limitations of AI, ensuring its use respects human dignity, and modeling to students how technology can be used wisely and ethically.

By keeping our use of AI focused, Catholic educators can reclaim valuable time, strengthen relationships, and stay rooted in their mission of forming disciples of Christ.

Special Note: Participants need to bring a tablet or laptop to access the internet.

Continued Best Practices for Reading Instruction

Location: Aquinas High School Classroom

Presenter: McDonell Area Catholic Schools Science of Reading Team: Abigail Talajkowski and
Vanessa Talford

Description: This is a follow-up session to morning presentation to PreK-6 Core Teachers, Interventionist, Librarians. We offering these participants the opportunity to work with Vanessa and Abigail to develop their practices and enhance their reading instruction.

Special Note:

- Restricted to PreK-6 Core Teachers, Interventionist, and Librarians

What is a Catholic Classical School (Catholic Liberal Arts)?

Location: Aquinas High School Classroom

Presenter: Jimmy Lynch, Newman Catholic Classical School – Holy Name, Headmaster

Description: This breakout session will focus on what a Catholic liberal arts education means and how it differs from modern education. We will discuss the Trivium: grammar, logic and rhetoric and the Quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. What is True, Good, and Beautiful and how to infuse the Catholic faith throughout all areas of the school.

Dress Code: Everyone's Favorite Topic – DSP 5690

Location: Aquinas High School Classroom

Presenter: Thomas Reichenbacher, Superintendent for Catholic Schools

Description: Dress code is something most of us say we do not want to discuss. So, why is brought up time and time again at faculty meetings? Let's explore the Diocesan policy (DSP 5690) and discuss the different dress codes within the Diocese of La Crosse's Catholic Schools.