

Wisconsin Parental Choice Program

DISCLOSURE INFORMATION

2024 – 2025



Your CHOICE for Top-Quality Education



AQUINAS CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

2024-2025 DISCLOSURE INFORMATION

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DISCLOSURE INFORMATION

The following information is being provided to all parents/guardians who apply for enrollment in Aquinas Catholic Schools (ACS) for the 2024-2025 school year in compliance with s. 118.60 Wis. Stat.

ACS schools are also governed by additional diocesan & system policies and school regulations. These policies and regulations are clearly defined in school handbooks which are distributed to the parents of all admitted students prior to the beginning of school.

Mission Statement

Aquinas Catholic Schools is a Christ-Centered family devoted to nurturing students of all faiths through educational excellence in its vibrant Catholic tradition.

Contact Information

Aquinas Catholic Schools Administrative Offices
315 11th St South
La Crosse, WI 54601
Phone: 608-784-8585

President: Ted Knutson

Enrollment Coordinator: Kathryn Schipke

Aquinas High School (grades 9-12)
315 S 11th Street, La Crosse, WI 54601

Principal: Mr. Adam Poellinger
(608) 784-0287

Aquinas Middle School (grades 7-8)
315 S 11th Street, La Crosse, WI 54601

Principal: Mr. Adam Poellinger
(608) 784-0156

Blessed Sacrament Elementary School (grades 3-6)
2404 King Street, La Crosse, WI 54601

Principal: Mrs. Kate Moll
(608) 782-5564

Cathedral Elementary School (preschool-grade 2)
1319 Ferry Street, La Crosse, WI 54601

Principal: Mrs. Tara Key
(608) 782-5998

St. Patrick Elementary School (preschool – grade 6)
127 11th Avenue N, Onalaska, WI 54650

Principal: Mrs. Angela Koblitz
(608) 783-5483

Governing Board

DEAN: Rev. Msgr. Steven Kachel

PRESIDENT: Mr. Ted Knutson

Non-Profit Status

Aquinas Catholic Schools is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization. Please see the attached IRS group ruling.

Denial of Enrollment Appeals Process

The private school shall notify each applicant in writing within a reasonable amount of time whether his or her application has been accepted. If the private school rejects an application, the notice shall include the reason.” A school may only reject an applicant for not meeting income, age, or residency requirements or for losing a random selection lottery.

A rejected applicant shall have five calendar days from the date of receipt of their notice of rejection to file a written appeal to the Dean of the La Crosse Deanery Pastors that the applicant was improperly rejected. An appeal may only consider evidence and documentation submitted the application period. Documentation not submitted during the application cannot be considered. The Dean shall respond to the applicant’s appeal within five calendar days of receipt of the appeal notifying him or her of the acceptance or rejection of the appeal.

Promotion

Aquinas Catholic Schools has rigorous standards for promotion. Students must earn promotion by demonstrating mastery of the essential knowledge and skills. Promotion decisions will be based on teachers’ recommendations, a student’s grades, standardized test scores, attendance, developmental readiness, special learning plan, and other measures. The school administrator is the individual responsible for making the final decision regarding the promotion of students.

Certificates of Promotion/Diplomas are awarded to sixth and eighth grade students who successfully meet the necessary requirements. A student on an approved learning plan may qualify to receive a Certificate of Attendance if he/she has met the plan goals, but not the general curriculum requirements. Parents/guardians will be notified prior to graduation by the administration if their child is receiving a certificate of attendance.

A. Academic Standards:

1. Grades: For promotion to the next grade, students must earn a final grade of D or above for each of the core skill classes: Reading, Writing, Religion*, History, Science, and Math. Students who have earned grades lower than D in non-core skill classes will be promoted only at the discretion of the Principal.
2. Standards & Developmental Readiness: If a student is 2 years or more below grade level in reading, writing or math, promotion to the next grade will be at the discretion of the principal.
3. Standardized Testing: Decisions to promote or retain students will also be based on performance on the WKCE, ITBS, ACT Suite and/or STAR Assessments taken throughout the year.
4. Recommendation of Teachers: The principal shall also consider the recommendation of teachers in making promotion decisions.

B. Behavioral Standards:

The Principal reserves the right to request that a student repeat a grade level for lack of maturity or repeated actions that interfere with his/her learning or the learning of others. Students will almost certainly be retained if they are suspended either in-school or out-of-school for 15 days or more.

C. Attendance:

Students who have 10 or more absences or excessive tardies may be retained at the discretion of the Principal. It is crucial that students be in school and on time consistently to obtain the necessary skills to move to the next grade level.

* Should the parent of a WPCP student make a written request to the child’s teacher or principal to have the student opt-out of religion classes, the religion coursework will not be required for promotion.

Transfer of Credits

Aquinas Catholic Schools will consider accepting school credit from other institutions to the extent that coursework at the previous institution is properly documented and in accordance with the academic standards of Aquinas Catholic Schools. Home School courses will need to be verified with an official transcript from a national or regional accredited program and will be accepted only after approval by the Principal. Courses that are offered at Aquinas High School during the school year cannot be taken elsewhere unless approved by the Administration. Students may apply to the Principal in advance for high school credit for courses taken at area colleges only when a comparable course is not offered at Aquinas High School. All final determinations for the acceptance or rejection of transfer credits shall be made at the discretion of the school's principal.

Graduation

The privilege to participate in a graduation ceremony is granted to students by the Administration. Students in grades six, eight, and twelve that violate a school policy may be withheld from participation in the graduation/commencement ceremony by the school Administration on or before graduation day.

To receive a high school diploma, twelfth grade students must satisfactorily pass courses to earn a minimum of 26.0 credits and receive the recommendation of teachers. Students and parents should consult the curriculum guide for course descriptions, prerequisites, and course fees. The following are mandatory credit requirements:

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

(26 credits including 23 required credits)

4.0 credits in Religion (Annual retreat required)*

3.5 credits in Social Studies

3.0 credits in Science

3.0 credits in Mathematics

2.0 credits in one International Language

1.0 credit in a Fine Art (Art, Music, Drama)

1.5 credits in Physical Education

0.5 credit in Health

0.5 credit in Computer Applications

3.0 credits in Electives

Freshmen, Sophomores, and Juniors must take 7 classes each semester with a minimum of 7 credits per year.

Seniors must take at least 7 classes per semester and a minimum of 6 credits per year if taking 2 AP classes.

With advance administrative approval, students on a special learning plan may be eligible for a modified Basic Diploma.

Each year of attendance at Aquinas High School students are required to participate in a class retreat. Students must attend four retreats in order to graduate. Students are responsible to make up any missed retreats due to illness before they graduate. Students should check with Campus Ministry for assistance.*

* Should the parent of a WPCP student make a written request to the child's teacher or principal to have the student opt-out of religion classes, the religion coursework & retreat will not be required for promotion. However, the student will still be required to complete a total of 26 credits for graduation.

Non-Harassment Policies

All students and staff of Aquinas Catholic schools are entitled to learn and work in an atmosphere that is **safe** and free from harassment. Harassment and bullying are inconsistent with our Christian mission and atmosphere. No student or employee shall be subject to harassment. Any student or employee who engages in harassment shall be subject to severe disciplinary measures. Aquinas Catholic Schools does not tolerate any language or behavior that constitutes harassment or bullying, such as, but not limited to:

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted sexual advances, unwelcome physical contact of a sexual nature or unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. “Unwelcome verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature” includes, but is not limited to “the deliberate or repeated making of unsolicited gestures or comments, or the deliberate, repeated display of offensive, sexually graphic materials which is not necessary for school purposes.”

Verbal Harassment

Verbal harassment is defined as any unwanted oral or written comments, which make a person feel bad or unsafe. Examples: Teasing to cause embarrassment, threatening to cause harm to the person, teasing about an individual’s clothing, hairstyle or appearance, etc.

Physical Harassment

Physical harassment is defined as any unwanted behavior of a physical nature. Physical harassment often is a legal issue and is defined as battery, assault, or disorderly conduct. Examples: Pushing, striking another student, or any action causing physical harm.

Intimidation

Intimidation is defined as any unwanted threats to cause harm. Examples: Telling someone to “watch your back,” warning that someone else is going to “beat you up”, etc.

Racial or Ethnic Harassment

Racial or Ethnic harassment is defined as any unwanted comments regarding a person’s ethnic or racial makeup. Examples: Ethnic or racial slurs, name calling, etc.

Disability Harassment

Disability harassment is defined as any unwanted comments or actions regarding a person’s disability, be it physical, learning, mental, etc.

Hazing

Hazing, initiation, and intimidation are expressly prohibited. No student should ever be subjected to ridicule or made to participate in humiliation, and/or degrading activities. Any student involved in these activities will be subject to suspension. Every incident should be reported to a faculty member, counselor, or the Administration.

Bullying

Bullying is deliberate or intentional behavior using words or actions, intended to cause fear, intimidation or harm. Bullying may be repeated behavior and involves an imbalance of power. The behavior may be motivated by an actual or perceived distinguishing characteristic, such as, but not limited to age; national origin; race; ethnicity; religion; gender; physical attributes; physical or mental ability or disability; and social, economic or family status.

Bullying behavior can be

1. Physical (e.g. assault, hitting or punching, kicking, theft, threatening behavior)
2. Verbal (e.g. threatening or intimidating language, teasing or name -calling, racist remarks)
3. Indirect (e.g. spreading cruel rumors, intimidation through gestures, social exclusion and sending insulting messages or pictures by mobile phone or using the internet – also known as cyber bullying)

Aquinas Catholic Schools strives to provide a safe, secure and respectful learning environment for all students. Bullying has a harmful social, physical, psychological and academic impact on bullies, victims and bystanders. Aquinas Catholic Schools will consistently and vigorously address bullying to maintain the standards of a Christian community and ensure that there is no disruption to the learning environment and learning process.

Bullying behavior is prohibited in all school buildings and grounds, vehicles and property owned, leased, or used by the school system, and at school-sponsored activities. The school system reserves the right to address bullying that occurs outside of these venues if it affects or is likely to affect the learning environment.

Any school staff member or individual who observes or become aware of acts of bullying shall report these acts to the principal. Students who are either a victim of bullying or are aware of bullying involving another student are encouraged to report the conduct to the principal. Reports of bullying may be made verbally or in writing and may be made confidentially. All such reports will be taken seriously and will be investigated.

If it is determined that students participated in bullying behavior or retaliated against anyone due to the reporting of bullying behavior, the principal may take disciplinary action, including, but not limited to detention, suspension, expulsion and/or referral to law enforcement officials.

Electronic evidence (pictures, calls, writings, blogs, and texts) of bullying may result in either in-school or out of school suspension depending on the severity of the evidence. If done during school time, this offense will also be considered a electronic device offense and the device will be held according to the electronic device policy.

Student Reporting of Harassment

Any student who believes that s/he is the subject of harassment or bullying should immediately notify their teacher, the (high school) Dean of Students, and/or the Principal. All teachers and staff who receive a report from a student of harassment or bullying must notify the School Principal who will investigate all claims of harassment thoroughly. No student shall receive any retaliation or disciplinary action for reports of sexual harassment made in good faith. The school can initiate an investigation with or without a complaint or complaining party in any case in which a staff member observes or becomes aware of any potentially harassing behavior.

Consequences for Harassment

The following steps will be taken, as appropriate to the reported incident, when dealing with incidents that involve harassment to any degree:

- A clear account of the incident will be recorded and given to the Principal.
- The Principal (or his/her designee) will interview all concerned and record incident.
- Parents will be informed through a phone call and/or letter.
- If the Principal determines that a violation of the school's harassment or bullying policy has occurred, punitive measures will be used as appropriate and in consultation with teachers and parents but not limited to:
 1. Official warning
 2. Conference with parents
 3. Exclusion from certain activities or privileges, e.g. recess
 4. Detention out of classroom
 5. In-school suspension
 6. Out-of-school suspension
 7. Expulsion

Suspension and Expulsion Procedures

The major objectives of discipline are to teach respect for the rights, dignity, and safety of all individuals, as well as respect for laws regulations, and respect for public and property rights. Student behavior that disrupts the learning environment, or threatens the health, safety, and/or welfare of students and staff will not be tolerated. Minor offenses will be handled by the classroom teacher. Repeated offenses and those of a more serious nature will be referred to the school principal.

Student or parent conduct which is inconsistent with Catholic faith and morals and/or which causes scandal, impairs or threatens to impair the reputation of the Church or its schools, is grounds for disciplinary sanctions up to and including immediate expulsion.

Suspension:

Suspension is a disciplinary action to be used in more serious or continued infractions of the behavior code. The Principal or Dean of Students (high school) have the authority to suspend students from classes and/or school for up to ten school days after investigating and determining that such a suspension is necessary to enforce school rules, promote discipline, or prevent interference with the learning environment. A suspension may begin immediately or at the discretion of the Principal or Dean of Students. Parents will be contacted regarding any suspension. Suspension from the classroom may be either in-school or out-of-school, as determined by the principal. In either case, the student is responsible to complete all work and/or tests immediately upon return to the classroom setting. The principal shall have the discretion to determine whether work completed during a suspension may or may not be awarded academic credit. The principal may also suspend a student from participation in extra-curricular activities as a consequence separately from, or in conjunction with, a school suspension. Any of the following reasons may be, but are not limited to, cause for suspension:

1. Truancy.
2. Smoking or chewing tobacco on school property.
3. Violations of the Aquinas Catholic Schools Drug and Alcohol Policy.
4. Disrespect or defiance of an adult in a position of authority.
5. Obscenities, either oral, written, or gestured.
6. Destruction of school property.
7. Actions seriously disruptive to class conduct.
8. Inappropriate writing, drawings, etc.
9. Behavior that endangers other students or staff.
10. Any threat, verbal or written, that would endanger the safety of students, staff, or facility. The above threat to person(s) or building will result in the immediate suspension of the student. Upon investigation of the incident the student will either be allowed to return to school upon completion of the out of school suspension or if necessary to be considered for dismissal or expulsion from Aquinas Catholic Schools.
11. Theft.
12. Possession or computer access of pornographic, violent, sacrilegious, or otherwise offensive items on school grounds, at school activities, or on school buses.
13. Unauthorized and/or improper use of school computers and equipment.
14. Unauthorized entry into an elevator or possession of an access key.
15. Loitering in the neighborhood before/after school or otherwise causing a disturbance for the neighbors.
16. Giving a false report to an administrator.
17. Possession or use of a weapon, explosive, or look-alike weapons.
18. Disruptive behavior on school buses.
19. Fraudulent use of lunch ID numbers.
20. Harassment.
21. Fighting.
22. Cheating.
23. Excessive amount of disciplinary referrals.

Dismissal and Expulsion:

Dismissal is the indefinite or temporary termination of a student's privilege to attend Aquinas Catholic Schools. Expulsion is the permanent termination of a student's privilege to attend Aquinas Catholic Schools. Both are a very serious matter and only the principal or president has the authority to dismiss or expel a student. Any student expelled or withdrawn may not be on the property of any Aquinas Catholic School or be present at any school functions without the permission of the Principal or President. Any of the following may be, but are not limited to, cause for dismissal/expulsion:

1. Use, possession, buying, or selling drugs or alcohol in the school or on school grounds, during an off school grounds extra-curricular activity, or on school buses.
2. Possession or use of a weapon, explosive, or look-alike weapons.
3. Bringing a weapon, explosive or look-alike weapon to school.
4. Fighting or injury to a student or staff member.
5. Serious destruction of school property.
6. Insubordination or failure to comply with instructions or directions given by the school staff.
7. The use of indecent or abusive language or gestures to any of the staff or students.
8. Behavior that adversely affects the status of the school.
9. Behavior that deteriorates the morale of other students or the staff.
10. Behavior that endangers the safety of other students or staff.

If a student is to face disciplinary action that could result in dismissal or expulsion, the following will occur:

1. Parents will be phoned and the student will be immediately removed from school.
2. The principal shall make a recommendation to the President and Dean of the La Crosse Deanery Pastors.
3. A meeting with the Principal, Dean of Students (high school), parents, and student will take place within five days after the student's removal from school.
4. The administrator will present to the parents the evidence which prompted his/her decision to dismiss/expel the student. If the student is to be dismissed, the parents shall be notified of the terms for reentry.
5. The parents are given the opportunity to respond in writing or withdraw the student before the disciplinary action is finalized.
6. The Diocesan Superintendent of Schools will review the evidence and approve or overturn the dismissal/expulsion

Appeals

In order to appeal an expulsion/dismissal parents shall follow the Diocesan Administrative Recourse Procedure detailed in this booklet and school handbooks.

Administrative Recourse

Any grievance by a parent/guardian against the school or its employees shall be resolved through Diocesan Administrative Recourse. Diocesan Administrative Recourse shall constitute the exclusive method for resolving such disputes and parents are bound by its determination as final and binding upon them. No dispute shall be submitted to Diocesan Administrative Recourse unless, within 30 days of the occurrence giving rise to the dispute, the first step of the Diocesan Administrative Recourse is commenced by the parent/guardian.

Outline of the chain of authority to be followed in resolving disputes:

1. Teacher/Employee
2. School Principal
3. Ted Knutson, President of Aquinas Catholic Schools
4. The Very Reverend Monsignor Steven Kachel, Dean of Aquinas Catholic Schools
5. Thomas Reichenbacher, Diocesan Superintendent of Catholic Schools
6. Most Rev. Gerard W. Battersby, Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse

Procedure in the Diocese of La Crosse:

When one of Christ's faithful judges himself or herself injured by the decision or action of a person exercising pastoral or administrative authority in the Diocese of La Crosse, he or she, first, is to confront the person in question with the grievance to seek resolution and reconciliation with the person. If the party who judges himself or herself injured is not able to achieve reconciliation by conversation with the authority involved, he or she may present the grievance to the school principal within 30 calendar days of the time of the alleged injury.

If the grievance remains unresolved or the grievance is with the school principal, the party may present the grievance to the President of Aquinas Catholic Schools. At this level and at successive levels, the recourse is to be made in writing and is to state the facts of the conflict and the reason or reasons why the party judges himself or herself injured. The president will seek to reconcile the two parties. At this level and at the successive levels, those in the chain of authority may seek the assistance of others, especially those respected for their ability to reconcile; but the authority remains responsible for seeking the resolution of the conflict. The president is obliged to respond to the recourse within fifteen calendar days from the time he receives it. Once the president has given his response to the recourse, the conflict is considered reconciled, unless the president's response is appealed to the dean within fifteen calendar days from the date the parties in conflict receive the response.

If reconciliation is not achieved with the president's help, or the grievance is against the president himself, the appeal is to be made to the local dean who by office has special responsibility for promoting harmony of pastoral action and unity of Church life in his deanery. (*cf. Can. 555, 1, 10:2, 20*) The dean is obliged to respond to the recourse within fifteen calendar days from the date he receives it.

If reconciliation is not achieved on the deanery level the appeal is to be made to the Diocesan Superintendent of Catholic Schools. If the grievance is against the dean in the exercise of his office of dean, then the appeal is to be made to the Diocesan Bishop directly. The Diocesan Bishop may carry out the work of reconciliation himself or he may name another to act for him in the matter. In the latter case, the Diocesan Bishop makes his own response to the person named. The Diocesan Bishop is obliged to respond to the recourse within 15 calendar days from the date he receives it. If the grievance is against the Diocesan Bishop, the legislation in the Code of Canon Law is to be followed. (*cf. Canon 1732-1739*)

The penalty for a violation of a school or diocesan policy or regulation is to be enforced during the recourse procedure. However, a request can be made to the Diocesan Superintendent of Schools to speed up the recourse procedure. This request can be made by the school, employee, student or parent affected. The request can be granted or denied.

School Visitors

Policy for all Visitors

All visitors, parents, guardians, etc. (“Visitors”) who visit the School for any reason during the school day (i.e. volunteering in the classroom, observation, meeting with school staff, etc.) are required to enter the School through the main/front doors and report to the school office. At the office, they will be required to sign in and, upon leaving, sign out on the Visitor/Volunteer Log. In order to ensure the safety of the campus community, entrance to the School through other entrances is not permitted by Visitors.

Parent/Guardian Visitation

Parents are welcome and encouraged to participate in daily activities at the school. Parents may also observe their children’s classes provided that the observation is scheduled with the teacher in advance or the parent has received permission from an administrator to observe the class. Parents are not to interrupt a teacher during class time. Parents/guardians who wish to meet with teachers or staff must schedule such meetings in advance to ensure availability of School staff, proper supervision of students, and to allow for an appropriate amount of time to be scheduled for the meeting.

The school administration is committed to providing teachers with advanced notice of guests in the classroom. This is done as a courtesy to teachers, to ensure that the educational process is not disrupted, and as an added security measure. Parents/guardians visiting for purposes of an observation are still required to enter the visiting protocol prior to proceeding to the classroom.

Parents/guardians may be denied the opportunity to enter the School and/or to observe a class if the School administration has determined that the parents/guardians’ presence may have a negative impact on the educational process and/or would create a disruption to the School and/or presents a health or safety risk to students or staff.

Parents picking their child up at the end of the day are requested to wait until the dismissal bell has sounded to prevent any unnecessary interruptions and to permit a smooth closure to the students’ day.

Children Visitation

Students are not allowed to bring children to school at any time and visits of a social nature are not allowed. Visits of an educational nature must be approved at least 24 hours in advance by the principal. No one under the age of 18, who is not an ACS student, is allowed in the building without prior permission of the Principal.

Prospective students are allowed to visit Aquinas Catholic Schools during the school day when approved in advance. Parents of a prospective student should make arrangements through the Admissions Office for a tour or visit at least 3 days in advance.

Special Needs

Aquinas Catholic Schools will not discriminate against applicants with special educational needs during the admissions process for the Choice program. However, Aquinas Catholic Schools is required to offer only those services that it can provide with minor adjustments. Parents of students with special needs (cognitive, learning, physical, emotional, etc.) should contact the principal of their preferred ACS school during the admission process to find out what services the school is able to provide for their child and what services cannot be provided. Parents should also contact the public school district in which the private school is located for more information on the services the school district provides to children with special needs who are enrolled in the public schools and the lesser services that the school district provides children with special needs who are enrolled in private schools.

Accreditation

Aquinas Catholic Schools, and all its members schools, are fully accredited by the North Central Association (AdvancED) and the Wisconsin Religious and Independent Schools Accreditation (WRISA).

Academic Standards

Aquinas Catholic Schools follows the Diocese of La Crosse Science Curriculum which is based on the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards (<https://dpi.wi.gov/standards>) and the National Science Education Standards (<https://www.csun.edu/science/ref/curriculum/reforms/nses/>). A copy of the Diocesan Science Curriculum can be viewed at (<https://diolc.org/schools/curriculum/k-12-curriculum/>).

Aquinas Catholic Schools follows the Diocese of La Crosse Religion Curriculum, which is based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church and approved by the Diocesan Bishop. A copy of the Diocesan Religion Curriculum can be viewed at (<https://diolc.org/schools/curriculum/k-12-curriculum/>).

Aquinas Catholic Schools follows the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for all other curricular areas (<http://dpi.wi.gov/standards>).

Copy of 501(c)(3) Determination from the Internal Revenue Service

Aquinas Catholic Schools is an equal opportunity provider.