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Schools grow resources through merger

By Sydney Stuart

At the end of the school year, many goodbyes take place, whether that be students graduating or moving schools or teachers retiring or taking a different job.

All students in grades preschool through sixth at St. Anthony's Elementary School will be waving goodbye to their school at the end of this school year for forever.

Columbus Catholic Schools (CCS) announced on September 18th that at the end of the 2025-2026 school year, St. Anthony's will be merging with St. Bonaventure.

Jeff Ohnoutka, who has been executive director of CCS for 3 years, led the way with this decision.

"We've been looking at this for about 3 years, and we had five possible solutions that we looked at over that time. We involved our parish councils and the parish finance committees, and we used parent surveys. We looked at a lot of different things during that time," Ohnoutka said.

Columbus Catholic Schools announced the merger through an email sent to parents and teachers. Scotus also posted a FAQ page on their website with more details about the transition.

Seventh grader Delaney Kelly graduated from St. Anthony's, and her mom teaches at the school.

"My initial reaction was shock; I thought I hadn't heard my mom right. I feel glad that the students will be able to still attend a Catholic School and keep learning about the faith," Kelly said. "I am glad they will be able to make new friends at another fantastic school and that they still get to openly talk about Jesus."

The layout for the merger will allow for two classrooms of each grade, with class sizes ranging from 18-20 students. The teachers currently at St. Anthony's will be offered the new teaching positions first. Among these positions will also be a reading specialist and programs for academically advanced students.

Freshman Jaci Harrington also attended



AMARHA BRIDGER / COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

St. Anthony's 3rd grade teacher Deb Svehla leads St. Anthony and St. Bonaventure students in a group activity on October 23rd. Prior to teaching at St. Anthony's, Svehla taught at St. Bonaventure.

St. Anthony's.

"I could see [a benefit of the merger being] that the St. Anthony's kids will meet new friends because Anthony's has such small class sizes. Also, more kids will learn the same way since it will be two elementary schools and not three," Harrington said.

The two track system was favored due to many factors including low class sizes, teacher shortages, and foreseen retirements.

Senior Helene Chard graduated from St. Anthony's in 2020.

"I was very sad to hear that my elementary school will be closing. I was surprised yet

at the same time knew their numbers had been low for quite a few years now," Chard said.

On the administrative side, Cheryl Zoucha, current St. Bonaventure principal, will enter a new role as head of family engagement and campus ministry for all Columbus Catholic elementary schools. Amy Sokol, the current St. Anthony's principal, will become the principal of the new combined school.

"My biggest hope is that we can take all of the great things of St. Anthony's and merge them with the great things happening at St. Bon's and then create an incredible school," Sokol said.

To help the students from both schools get to know each other, Sokol and Zoucha have organized opportunities for students to meet one another through games and activities. St. Isidore's and St. Bonaventure have also held open houses for parents to come in and look at the schools.

"I'm excited about meeting new people. I love people and I love building relationships. I'm looking forward to meeting new people, and just being that person, that instructional leader for the teachers but also that friend for the new students that I will meet," Sokol concluded.

Legacy leads Columbus community events



PHOTO COURTESY REECE VASINA

Legacy members join together for their Groove and Grub event at Frankfort Square this past summer. Other projects they are working on include a drive-in theater and a drone show.

By Lillian Miller

From ice skating rinks to drive-in theaters to tri-school intramurals, exciting activities for high school students seem to be far from reach in the small towns of Nebraska. A common complaint in Columbus is there are no activities for the high school students. A group striving to fix this problem is Legacy.

The Legacy Youth Foundation grew out of a youth survey done by the Columbus Future Fund in 2023. This group is a unique opportunity for youth-led community en-

gagement. K.C. Belitz, a Legacy advisor, described the vision of the organization.

"They simply want to make Columbus an even better place to live," Belitz said. "I hope the members see Columbus as a place where they can make a difference. What we're really working toward is creating a place where these students can impact their community!"

Since Legacy is student-led, the meetings are unique to their organization. Two-year Legacy member and Scotus senior Jillian

Rusher joined Legacy because her sister was a part of the original group that formed it two years ago.

"Meetings are really a group effort," Rusher said. "Everyone is in charge of different projects, and throughout the meeting, we share where we're at with them. Legacy has been able to give the teens in the community a voice, showing how to take charge and help an event come to life."

Events the group has organized in the past, such as the Groove and Grub and the Back to School Bash, not only provided entertainment, but also supported local businesses.

Junior Lydia Dostal enjoys how Legacy balances fun with community impact.

"We try to incorporate local businesses into our events because a goal for us is to help give back to our community," Dostal said. "Events such as the Groove and Grub and the Back to School Bash offer variety to the community to attend different events. They give opportunities to students and families to get out of the house and do something fun."

Other activities Legacy is currently organizing include a downtown holiday event, intramural sporting events to bring together all three high schools, an ice skating rink, and new family-friendly events.

"I hope we will be able to accomplish all of the big ideas we have been working toward," Dostal added. "A few of the projects have been works in progress, and I would love to see them actually come to life. I also hope we are able to spread our name and make Legacy a well-known foundation people are proud to be a part of."

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Tutoring takes off

By Lola Doerneman

A new program at Scotus has begun to help junior high students with their academics. During 9th period in an open classroom on the 2nd floor, junior high students can meet with upperclassmen tutors every day to receive instruction and assistance on their assignments. Whether it is math, reading, English, social studies, or religion, there are upperclassmen ready to lend a helping hand.

Guidance counselor intern Trevor Halligan launched this program to connect with the students at Scotus while also giving them a chance to learn from upperclassmen.

"This is a great opportunity for students to learn from students who have [already taken] the classes [they have questions about] and can help them navigate those problems," Halligan said.

Senior Peter Faltys is one of the upperclassmen who helps tutor the junior high students.

"It has been going really well. [This tutoring] provides an opportunity for the students to ask questions and get a more personalized learning experience," Faltys said.

Even though the program is new to Scotus, the turnout has been successfully consistent. With only one quarter of school underway, the program has achieved a promising start with about 6 to 8 students coming to receive assistance every day.

"It's rewarding to see [the students] make

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2025-2026
Rock Bottom Dates
October 9
November 11
December 16
February 10
March 10
April 1
May 5

Legacy

The biggest project Legacy is tackling is the construction of a drive-in movie theater in Pawnee Park, a massive undertaking led by the students themselves.

Senior Kayla Hoffman joined Legacy to stay involved in the Columbus community, so she has enjoyed contributing to this project.

“The construction of the drive-in theater has been a hard process, but Legacy is excited to get it up and running during the summer,” Hoffman said. “We are looking forward to the community being able to use it.”

Through all of their efforts, Legacy students hope to set a strong foundation for their program and their community.

“Legacy has established a reputation around the state as a group of young people who are doing incredible things,” Belitz said.

One of these “incredible things” is the upcoming downtown stroll. Junior Legacy member Brooke Krienke is helping with the planning of this annual event. The event will hopefully take place at Frankfort Square and will include choir performances in the square,

food stands, and a scavenger hunt.

Additionally, a drone show is tentatively scheduled for sometime in December.

“The person who runs the drone show at Nebraska football games reached out and said they could put together a show for [us],” Krienke said. “I’m super excited about this because it will be a good way to attract a lot of people.”

Keep an eye out for advertisements for the event!

Tutoring

connections and solve problems. They have been bringing great questions and have been learning quickly,” Faltys said.

Eighth grader Adrea Anderson has gone to receive help on algebra and has enjoyed her experience with the tutors.

“The tutoring program is nice because you can go with friends who have the same problems and work through them. The tutors show us how to work through the problems on the whiteboard, which is nice to have a visual,” Anderson said.

Each day of the week, certain upperclassmen who have a 9th period study hall or independent study are scheduled to tutor. Because of a new change to the 2025 schedule, all junior high students have a 9th period study hall, which is the perfect time for tutoring.

The tutors give these students an opportunity to get a different type of assistance on their homework. While some students may be too nervous or shy to ask the teacher questions in front of the whole class, being tutored by upperclassmen gives them a welcoming smile with no judgement.

Eighth grader Cason Pelan has greatly appreciated the new program.

“The teachers usually have other stuff to do, but the tutors give you their full attention and make studying more fun,” Pelan said. “It helps me become more successful and a better student.”

Seventh grader Annah Layman has obtained assistance on her math and history

homework.

“It’s nice to share ideas with other students and then figure it out together,” Layman said. “[Because of the help from the tutors], I have gotten better grades, and I [get my homework] done faster and more efficiently.”

Not only do the junior high students receive help, but the upperclassmen have been enjoying themselves as well. From meeting new faces and building new friendships to

reminiscing about junior high problems and challenging their intellect and patience, no parties leave empty-handed.

Junior Taylor Blaser has helped tutor and looks forward to coming more often.

“I hope I can use my knowledge to help students when they are struggling,” Blaser said. “I want them to know that it’s okay to ask for help because it means you are learning.”



Senior Jillian Rusher helps seventh grader Adele Ramaekers with a math problem during 9th period tutoring. Rusher is one of the seven upperclassmen who regularly volunteer to tutor.

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