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**DIOCESE OF  
ROCKFORD**

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# PRESS RELEASE

## Diocese Announces Plans for New Catholic ‘Micro Academy’

FREEPORT--Administrators from the Catholic Diocese of Rockford and Aquin Catholic Schools announced today a new path forward for Catholic education in the Freeport area.

Diocesan and Aquin administrators have been working since September 2023 to analyze the ongoing challenges to providing quality Catholic education in the Freeport area. The primary issues today are the shrinking financial resources of the school amid the decline of population demographics in the Freeport area and dwindling student enrollment.

Aquin Catholic Schools have offered a quality education since Aquin Catholic High School was established (as Freeport Catholic Community High School) by Bishop Peter J. Muldoon in 1923 when it began with 33 students. Today there are only 44 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Enrollment for 2024-2025 is down to 18. In 2021 the Freeport Catholic Elementary School students were integrated onto the Aquin Campus to help curb costs for both elementary and secondary school education. Enrollment in grades pre-K through eighth grade is currently 83. Enrollment in pre-K through eighth grades for the 2024-2025 school year is 77.

Shrinking enrollment has led to less extracurricular opportunities for Aquin High School. Lower enrollment means less tuition and increased parish subsidies and a depletion of financial reserves. The school is depleting available reserves and is currently operating at a deficit. If nothing is done and the school is allowed to continue “as is” for the next school year, the deficit will exceed \$400,000.

These are hard realities to face and even harder to reconcile into a positive solution.

During a meeting, first with employees and then with parents, Dr. Kim White, Superintendent for Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Rockford, announced that “after much study and discernment we believe we have developed a way forward to provide the Freeport Catholic community with solid Catholic education rooted in Catholic identity and family values. So today, the Diocese of Rockford is announcing a new model that will be fiscally responsible and educationally sound, offering a curriculum

thoughtfully designed to align with core foundational academic content (Religion, English, Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science, and Study Skills) and the teachings of the Catholic Church.”

This intentionally small school, called a “Micro School” will offer both continuity for Catholic education and opportunity for growth as needed in the Freeport area.

Beginning with the 2024-25 school year, the Diocese of Rockford will open a new “micro Catholic academy” for pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The new academy, will integrate academic rigor with spiritual formation, providing a well-rounded education that prepares students for success in high school, higher education, and beyond. The small class sizes enable personalized instruction and individualized learning experiences.

Unfortunately, with only 18 students registered for grades 9-12 for the next school year, Aquin High School classes will no longer be offered. Students in grades 9-12 will be offered the opportunity to work with the diocese to attend other Diocesan Central Catholic High Schools. However, the micro school model does allow for expansion for grades 9-12 in future years, should that become feasible.

Aquin teachers and staff are being invited to reapply for positions available and for which they are qualified at the new Catholic micro academy. The micro academy will be located in the same space as the current elementary grades.

“We are excited with the spirit of collaboration and continued financial support among our Freeport parishes and the opportunities to build on Freeport’s academic legacy with an amazing new Catholic educational and spiritual experience for our students today and in the years to come,” Dr. White said in her announcement to parents and staff.

The Diocese of Rockford currently has six diocesan Central Catholic High Schools and two private Catholic High Schools and 29 Catholic elementary schools across the 11 counties in Northern Illinois which make up the Diocese of Rockford.

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Established in 1908, the Diocese of Rockford is comprised of 105 parishes in Boone, Carroll, DeKalb, JoDaviess, Kane, Lee, McHenry, Ogle, Stephenson, Whiteside and Winnebago Counties in Northern Illinois serving a Catholic population of more than 400,000. For more about the Catholic Diocese of Rockford visit [www.rockforddiocese.org](http://www.rockforddiocese.org).