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Teacher Melissa Pinkney instructs students during a Spanish class at Thomas More Prep-Marian Jr./Sr. High School in Hays, Kansas, Dec. 3, 2020. The school was in a hybrid model, with half of the students in class and the other half connecting virtually. (CNS/Courtesy of Thomas More Prep-Marian)

by Kathy Mears

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(NCR graphic/Toni-Ann Ortiz)

Editor's note: *In the weeks preceding the inauguration of the country's second Catholic president, National Catholic Reporter asked Catholic politicians, activists and scholars to offer advice to President-elect Joe Biden in a series that takes its title from Pope Francis' encyclical* Fratelli Tutti*: "Building a Common Future."*

President Joseph Biden, our country's 46th president and second Catholic president, is an alumnus of Archmere Academy, one of the many Catholic schools the National Catholic Educational Association serves across the country. A Norbertine college preparatory school in Claymont, Delaware, Archmere forms "the whole person through academic excellence, faith reflection, social development and service to others." The school creates women and men who value community, human dignity and solidarity.

Educating the whole child is not just the mission of the president's alma mater — it is the goal of every Catholic school in the country.

The National Catholic Educational Association oversees the education of more than 1.7 million students all across the country. The tenets of the Catholic faith, along with an emphasis on academic excellence, create a culture where every student is educated holistically.

Catholic school students are more likely to vote, to participate in service activities and to work hard for the common good. Catholic school graduates are leaders and people who care for others and our world.

At this point in our nation's history, our country needs more Catholic school graduates. We need more people who are willing to give of their time, talents and treasure to tackle problems facing our nation and world. We need more people who will show empathy for each other, who will work for equality and equity, for peace and justice. We need people who will work for life. Catholic school graduates are people who are committed to these things. They are people who are willing to spread the word of Jesus and knowledge of his saving grace.

We need Biden to acknowledge our graduates and their gifts to society.

Catholic schools yearn to be recognized and appreciated. With high school graduation rates of over 90% and success in raising millions of students out of poverty throughout Catholic schools' history, Catholic educators ask that Biden recognize the excellence and importance of Catholic schools.

As Biden already quotes Pope Francis and publicly shares his faith on a regular basis, it would be a natural extension to recognize the work of Catholic schools and their educators when he discusses education. This recognition would help to raise the profile of Catholic schools and the important contributions of Catholic education to our country and the world.

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During the pandemic, Catholic schools have successfully offered in-person instruction, providing children with not only an optimal learning environment, but also an atmosphere that is supportive of their social and emotional health. In this manner, Catholic schools have served the common good and afforded students with opportunities to develop their minds, bodies and spirit. Many children may suffer when they are not receiving in-person instruction, especially the most vulnerable students.

Catholic schools have met their responsibility to provide high-quality education in a physically safe environment, in places where the mental health of students is supported. We continue to work to help our students and having the president

recognize us for our efforts would be gratifying and important to all who are involved in Catholic education.

Catholic schools have benefited from some aspects of the CARES Act and we are thankful for that support. We hope that when new legislation is considered that Catholic school students and teachers are also included.

Until the pandemic, emergency relief for natural disasters was always provided to Catholic school students when it was provided to public school students. It is imperative that students in Catholic elementary and secondary schools not be penalized for attending a Catholic school. We need Biden to recognize that students attending Catholic schools are entitled to the same emergency benefits as those who attend public schools.

Biden knows the benefits of the Catholic education he received. He has referred to it in the past and we trust he will continue to discuss it as president. Catholic education needs Biden to support us. We need Biden to talk about his faith and the role Catholic schools played in developing his faith. We need him to acknowledge that Catholic schools contribute to our nation's greatness and the United States is a better place because there are Catholic schools working to educate students to search for goodness, truth and beauty in their studies and world.

If Biden can do these things, he will support us in our mission to develop saints and scholars.

[Kathy Mears is the interim president and CEO of the National Catholic Educational Association.]

This story appears in the **Building a Common Future** feature series. View the full series.