

# Committing to Catholic Education

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The decision to send children to Catholic school can be a complicated one. It's not only an educational choice, but it involves economic, social and spiritual considerations as well.

If you have five children attending Catholic schools like the Buss family of Plainfield, it becomes a major commitment.

Jennifer and Bryan Buss are both educators. She a professor in the College of Education department at Lewis University who just completed her doctorate; he a gifted educator at Indian Prairie School in Naperville School District 204.

Bryan attended Joliet Catholic High School when it was the all-boys school. It was the feeling of belonging to something larger, a feeling of family, he hoped he could pass on to his own children by sending them to Joliet Catholic Academy.

"I desperately wanted to have my kids have that camaraderie,"

he said. "I was very proud of being there, I loved being there."

It's not just a given that the Peyton and Madeline Buss, freshman twins at JCA, or that the three younger Buss children, all attending St. Mary Immaculate in Plainfield, will automatically attend private school each year, said Jennifer.

"Every year we evaluate it," she said. "We have to make sure the money we are spending is for what (the children) need and what they want."

So far, JCA has been everything they hoped for, said Jennifer, from the seamless transition from grade to high school, to the faculty's commitment to the students, to the school's ability to provide what each student needs in each area of education.

Peyton and Madeline had no doubt their high school choice was JCA. They wanted to stay in the smaller setting they had at St. Mary's and go on to high school with most of their friends.

"It would have been a tough



Photo credit: Kris Stadalsky

**Peyton and Madeline Buss get homework help from parents Bryan and Jennifer Buss.**

transition from Catholic school to public high school," Madeline said. "It's been a great experience to be able to grow as a person and in my faith."

Jennifer tells a story that epitomizes the atmosphere of caring at JCA and still brings tears to her eyes.

Peyton struggled to keep up with her teammates the first week of cross country. When Jennifer came to pick her daughter up from practice, Peyton had not yet completed the run.

Jennifer worried Peyton would be ridiculed by the older students. But as she rounded the last turn she was surrounded by her teammates running alongside and cheering her on.

"The seniors stood on the side for every freshman," Jennifer said. "It took my breath away."

Going from public grade school in Rockdale to Providence Catholic High School was a harder sell for the three oldest Pierce children.

Freshman Hailey, Junior Robby and Senior Brandon each wanted to go to public school with their friends from grade school. Robby didn't like the idea of a dress code, either.

Dad Jeremy Pierce, who attended Ridgewood Baptist school as a child, liked that the curriculum at Providence was over and above state standards.

"Where the kids came from (public school) they were in the low 25 percent of their class. But they have all excelled at Providence," said Jeremy. "By the end of freshman year, they are up in the 80 to 85 percent of their class."

It's not unusual for teachers to come in early or stay late to help a student, even if they don't have the student in a class, he said.

Melissa was happy to see that several of the teachers she had at Providence were still on the faculty and they easily remembered her.

All three high school students settled in, got involved in multiple activities and feel at home in their setting.

The teens and their parents went on a mission trip to Haiti with Minooka Bible Church



Photo credit: Kris Stadalsky

**Allie and Patrick Pierce (front) are eager to attend Providence. Back row, from left, are Melissa, Brandon, Hailey, Robby and Jeremy Pierce.**

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over winter break to help build a home and take necessities.

They like to bring something fun for the Haitian children, this year it was sports equipment.

Providence faculty and families not only donated bags of equipment, the school supported the kids when they had to take extra time off school right before winter finals due to a flight delay.

"The school knows education is important, but so is this life experience," Jeremy said.

The two younger Pierce children, Patrick, 11, and Allie, 10, are both looking forward to the day they can attend Providence. One big reason is to meet Coach Frank Cavallone, science teacher and hockey coach.

Everyone else in the family knows him, including Melissa who had him when she attended the school. Cavallone not only commands respect but makes education fun, they all said. They love to share their stories about him.

That's something the younger Pierce children look forward to being part of.



Photo credit: Kris Stadalsky

All five Buss children attend catholic schools. From left, Bryan, Madeline, Peyton, Preston, Jennifer and Grace. Not shown is Nora Buss.



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Brandon, Hailey and Robby Pierce have eased into Providence Catholic High School.



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