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## ***Media Release***

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### **Archdiocese of Milwaukee Announces New High-Performing Educational System Designed to Strengthen Urban Milwaukee Catholic Schools**

*Called Seton Catholic Schools, the independently chartered and governed 501(c)3 will deliver the resources, tools and infrastructure to drive growth and enhance nearly 10,000 students' educational and spiritual journeys*

**MILWAUKEE** – The Archdiocese of Milwaukee today announced the formation of a transformational educational system committed to helping urban students overcome social and academic challenges and empower them, their families and educators to achieve their God-given potential. Called Seton Catholic Schools, this independently chartered, financed and governed network of Archdiocese of Milwaukee Catholic elementary schools will provide the highest caliber academic instruction and spiritual formation for nearly 10,000 kindergarten through eighth grade students throughout Milwaukee.

Two veteran leaders with deep experience in education and change management will lead Seton Catholic Schools. Don Drees, formerly managing director at Accenture, has been appointed president of Seton Catholic Schools, and Dr. Bill Hughes, former managing director of leadership development for Schools That Can Milwaukee, director of the School and Instructional Leadership Program at Alverno College and former superintendent of the Greendale school district, has been appointed chief academic officer.

For generations, Catholic schools have been a cornerstone of Milwaukee's neighborhoods. Yet today, far too many of those neighborhoods are in crisis and the needs of students have changed. Recognizing the role strong schools play in building healthy neighborhoods, Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKI formed a task force in early 2015 of community, educational and religious leaders to conceptualize and implement an entirely new model for serving urban Milwaukee's families and improving academic outcomes among students. Following months of analysis, deliberation, planning and prayer, Seton Catholic Schools was formed.

“Catholic education is a priority for our community and for our Church. We need to take action now to strengthen it,” Archbishop ListECKI said. “The Church has a responsibility to do more to support children and families in Milwaukee and Seton Catholic Schools has the ability to positively impact our

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community. I strongly support Seton Catholic Schools and believe it will make a difference in our schools, our parishes and in the community, and I deeply thank all who have been involved in its formation, most especially John Stollenwerk, who has long been a driving force for advancing the reach and impact of Catholic education.”

When fully operational, 26 elementary schools will be part of the Seton Catholic Schools network. The first cohort will include nine elementary schools and will begin operating under the Seton Catholic Schools umbrella at the start of the 2016-17 school year. Full rollout is expected by the 2018-19 school year. Vital to the success of Seton Catholic Schools are the following core strategies:

- Raising the academic achievement of all students to ensure they are progressing at a rate that is equal to or higher than the best urban schools in the nation;
- Increasing the teaching resources in the classroom and expanding learning tools and curriculums designed to foster continued academic progress for all students;
- Reducing the administrative burden on school leaders to be no more than 10 percent of their time, with finance, facilities, human resources, technology and other functions managed instead by a team working on behalf of the entire Seton Catholic Schools system. This will allow principals greater time to lead and mentor their educators, and allow educators to dedicate more uninterrupted time to their students;
- Integrating the Church’s Catholic identity into the school experience in a more robust, consistent and engaging way. Every school will enjoy a rich sacramental life where Catholic traditions are visible and pastors are a regular, engaged presence in the classroom;
- Engaging with parishes, parents and communities in a more comprehensive way through defined engagement plans and local school advisory committees; and
- Creating more compelling training and compensation platforms for the valued teachers and principals who dedicate their life’s work to forming the community leaders of tomorrow.

At its essence, Seton Catholic Schools is moving away from the traditional parochial model and instead forming a network of high performing schools guided by a strong governance structure and managers with deep experience in education and complex operations. Drees, Hughes and their teams will lead the full implementation of this strategy. Oversight and governance will be provided by a board of directors, led by Kris Rappe, retired Wisconsin Energy Corporation chief administrative officer and active community leader. Archbishop ListECKI and Dr. Kathleen Cepelka, superintendent of Catholic Schools, will be among the leadership represented on the board of directors, which will also include business, educational and civic leadership from the area.

“While the needs of our communities have changed, our traditional school model has remained largely the same,” Drees said. “Thanks to the visionary leadership of Archbishop ListECKI and Dr. Cepelka, our community of faith has reimagined how we can better equip our schools to successfully prepare more children of diverse backgrounds for the future workforce. We believe this network of Seton Catholic Schools will do just that.”

Seton Catholic Schools is modeling its educational approach after the best performing urban schools. It will add teaching resources to the classroom to strengthen the teacher’s ability to increase student academic growth rates. All schools will have specialty classes (i.e. art, music) and coordinated before and after school programs as well as summer programs. As a network, teachers and school leaders will

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collaborate across schools and more easily share resources.

“Traditionally, families choose a Catholic school not just for academics, but also for the spiritual and personal growth that comes from a faith-based education. Seton Catholic Schools will work to not only improve the academic growth of our future leaders, but also instill a deep respect for others, self-discipline, responsibility for our actions and impact on the world, and an ability and willingness to recognize the presence of Christ in themselves and others,” Hughes said. “I am so very grateful for my time at Schools That Can Milwaukee, which I believe prepared me very well for the challenges and opportunities inherent in launching a startup and expanded my skill set in the most current instructional and leadership strategies that are increasing student achievement and engagement in urban and suburban schools. I very much look forward to continuing a strong partnership between them and Seton Catholic Schools well into the future.”

An active capital campaign is underway to raise the necessary funds to fully finance the launch and support long-term operations of Seton Catholic Schools.

**About Don Drees, president, Seton Catholic Schools:**

During his 30-year career, Don Drees has been a leader in transformational change within the corporate, nonprofit and education sectors. Prior to joining Seton Catholic Schools, Drees served as a managing director at Accenture, where he led numerous transformational change programs, as well as directed sales, finance, human resources and legal initiatives for a number of *Fortune* 500 clients. Drees was brought on as the program director of Seton Catholic Schools to lead a design team of principals, school and parish finance leaders and nonprofit leaders through a reengineering process to institute best practices for academics, spiritual formation, governance, finance and development throughout this network of schools. His hands-on experience working with the Archdiocese as program director on the conceptual design of Seton Catholic Schools has positioned him to guide its efforts to both transform urban Catholic education and meet Milwaukee’s critical education needs.

**About Dr. Bill Hughes, chief academic officer, Seton Catholic Schools**

Dr. Bill Hughes is joining Seton Catholic Schools as chief academic officer from Schools That Can Milwaukee (STCM), where he previously served as managing director of leadership development. During his four years at STCM, Hughes provided coaching support to school leaders and helped launch an innovative school leadership development program in partnership with Alverno College. Dr. Hughes began his career in Catholic Schools, starting as a teacher at St. Jerome School in Columbus, Wisconsin. Over a distinguished 30-plus-year career, Dr. Hughes has served in numerous educational and administrative roles, including serving as the superintendent of the Greendale School District for over 16 years, where he is widely-credited for leading the district to become the highest ranked in student achievement and financial management in the Metro Milwaukee area. Dr. Hughes also served as a principal in the Mequon–Thiensville and Boscobel Area Schools, also recognized for increasing student achievement. At Seton Catholic Schools, Hughes will direct and lead principals across the Seton Catholic Schools network, while managing the development of a comprehensive academic and assessment program. The effort will involve professional development and accountability measures, all focused on improving student achievement.

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