If you hope to one day become a superintendent, Dr. Tim Uhl has some advice for you—get ready for a dynamic, multifaceted leadership role. Uhl, the superintendent of Catholic Schools for Montana and the founder of the “Catholic School Matters” podcast and newsletter, loves his job precisely because it demands expertise in several domains.

“This particular job is very attractive to me because of everything that goes into leading a school system. I get to help with policy [and the schools’] personnel, Catholic identity, curriculum, leadership, vitality, and operations,” Uhl says. “To me, that’s attractive because I have to learn a little bit about everything. That’s why I love my job—I go from one thing to the next.”
Because his work is multidisciplinary, Uhl seeks opportunities to deepen his understanding of the various factors at play in his school system. This desire to learn is what brought him to apply for the Reform Leaders’ Summit. Uhl meets often meets with the state education agency of Montana, so he wanted to know more about education policy on a state and national level.

“I felt like I wasn’t as conversant as I needed to be in the issues and challenges [of educational choice], so I felt like for me, I was curious and wanted to learn more about it,” Uhl says. “It is really important as an educator to lead by example, and to be the lead learner [in a school system] means that you have to commit to your own learning.”

At the Reform Leaders’ Summit, Uhl had that opportunity to learn. He heard presentations from experts on educational choice, connected with other diocesan and school leaders, and listened to the perspectives of teachers and those who work outside of education.

Most recently, Uhl and the 10th cohort of Reform Leaders met in Tampa, Florida, for the second of three immersion weekends. In Tampa, the cohort learned from school choice experts at Step Up for Students and visited Sacred Heart Catholic School, a Notre Dame ACE Academy whose students utilize Florida choice scholarships. Despite the Summit weekend’s busy schedule, Uhl found time to sit down with a few other participants to discuss matters of educational choice for his podcast, “Catholic School Matters.”

The podcast panel represented the diversity of the Reform Leaders’ Summit cohort. Uhl was joined by John Schoenig (director of ACE’s Program for Educational Access), Courtney Collins-Shapiro (partner at the Drexel Fund, a venture philanthropy focused on faith-based schools), Myles Mendoza (president of Empower Illinois, a statewide Scholarship Granting Organization), and Jonathan Priest (a Catholic school leader in Chicago).

In the episode, the panel discusses the landscape of private school choice in Florida and Illinois, while also considering the challenges that may lie ahead for the choice movement. The Reform Leaders’ Summit aims to develop leaders who are equipped to handle these challenges.

Schoenig says, “The idea behind the Summit is to help build a new generation of really passionate, really knowledgeable leaders in the Catholic school sector who
are willing to help in the fight for reform in education, in particular for parental choice.

“We are intentional about building the [Reform Leaders’ Summit] cohort. We really want a wide range of educational experiences. We want a wide range of ideological perspectives.”

Thanks to conversations with members of the cohort, such as those featured in the podcast, and interactions with Summit speakers, Uhl says that he has “a better sense of the landscape and the language” for the current Montana legislative session. Uhl’s new knowledge has also helped him better respond to questions asked at school board meetings.

It is clear that, as a superintendent, Tim Uhl strives to grow in the many different skills needed to manage schools effectively. Precisely because he leads educators, he makes time to educate himself. Thanks to the Reform Leaders’ Summit, Uhl believes he is more prepared to tackle the daily challenges of his demanding schedule.

“I’m really grateful to Notre Dame for putting on this program, and I’m very grateful to be a part of it,” Uhl says. “It’s been very enriching for me.”

Listen to the “Catholic Schools Matter” podcast featuring the Reform Leaders’ Summit here.

Learn more about the Reform Leaders’ Summit at ace.nd.edu/summit.

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