

# A NEW APPROACH FOR A STRONGER FUTURE

## Catholic Schools in the Des Moines Metropolitan Area

### INTRODUCTION

Catholic schools are a critical element in fulfilling the evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church. However, it is imperative that we examine how schools operate and are funded to ensure their long-term success. The complexities of running schools and the immense cost to sustain an exceptional Catholic education raises the need to consider changes in the approach for educating and forming students.

The metropolitan area of Des Moines has 11 Catholic elementary schools with enrollment of 3,808 and one Catholic high school with enrollment of 1,406 for school year 2018-2019. Each school is an individual entity supported by one or more parishes, all pursuing a similar mission to the same population. There are parishes with families of school-age children not supporting schools. Many challenges face schools now and into the future. It is time to look seriously at how working together versus individually might produce better results given these challenges.

### THE CASE FOR CHANGE

The current realities:

- a. Enrollment has been declining over the years. From 2012 to 2018, enrollment in K-8<sup>th</sup> grade dropped 212 students or 6.4% not counting St. Luke in Ankeny and not counting prekindergarten enrollment. St. Luke is an exception, being a new school and adding a new grade each year. Prekindergarten masks the real challenge.
- b. The 11 schools in the Des Moines metro have 862 empty seats. There are six schools where enrollment is 53% to 80% of the capacity for which the school is staffed. This reduces class size but significantly increases the cost to educate students in these schools.
- c. Catholic schools cost parishes \$6.55 million annually in subsidy. This investment is not being strategically used to keep schools at the highest quality and fully enrolled. A new approach to funding brought about in a coordinated way will lead to long-term sustainability.

What could schools do together that provides advantages to the institutions, students and their families? The Blue-Ribbon Task Force has identified the following areas as benefitting from a cooperative approach:

1. Branding/marketing (including strategic communications to inform, inspire and engage)
2. Setting tuition and changing funding model
3. Funding tuition assistance
4. Fundraising/major gift initiatives/planned giving/endowments
5. Transforming teacher/administrator compensation with equity for all schools
6. Training and supporting school boards for strong governance
7. An aligned K-12 academic program creating accelerated and advanced paths for students
8. Continually exploring innovative and relevant academic programs
9. Enhancing professional development
10. Technology expertise, technical and instructional support
11. Purchasing curriculum, technology, etc.

## OUTLINE OF A NEW APPROACH

Catholic education has long been a mission of each parish, and Catholic schools have historically been established as a direct ministry of the parish. In our current time, the traditional parish model for Catholic schools is being called into question, as the model does not consistently deliver sustainable governance and adequate resources to ensure the best in Catholic education.

While some change can be accomplished within existing models, it will not be as transforming as a new model. A new model must fit the Diocese of Des Moines and accomplish these goals:

1. Retain the cultural and religious strengths schools already have and ensure long-term sustainability.
2. Ensure a strong Catholic identity and strong parish connection.
3. Deliver the excellence in 21<sup>st</sup> century education that parents want and can see as superior to public schools and other options. All students will graduate with even stronger academic programs across all grade levels and especially in middle school. All students will be educated in a climate that delivers faith formation and preparedness for life.

The details of a new model will be continually shaped as a new approach is designed. The following is a general overview:

### **Catholic Identity and Faith Formation:**

- Faith formation provided for all teachers/staff.
- Faith sharing and prayer is integral to school culture.
- Each school community of faith is an extension of the local parish.
- Improved faith education and serving opportunities provided.
- Staff is focused on family engagement and outreach through school programs.

### **Enrollment:**

- Professional marketing/communications effort will be implemented with central staff to lead the way.
- Each school has an enrollment team, guided by a city-wide enrollment plan.
- Branding and marketing will be coordinated city wide.

### **Academics:**

- Wider range of academic programs will be available to all students.
- Stronger alignment of programs with high school readiness will be implemented.
- Programs and traditions make local schools unique but will have consistency and high quality.
- Enrichment opportunities will be added for all students.
- A culture of innovation will have leadership support and necessary resources.

**Governance:**

- All parishes in the region share in the ownership of the schools.
- Parishes continue to support schools with the gifts and talents of parishioners as well as financial assistance.
- All schools will have advisory boards; and a new regional board structure will be created under a regional system network governing model.
- The system will have an executive director and leadership team. Role of pastors and principals will be redefined within the system network.

**Finance:**

- Common tuition model for all schools will be implemented with a well-funded financial assistance program adopting the newly prescribed funding model for Catholic schools in the diocese.
- Significant advancement, led by professional staff at the regional level, will work with local schools and parishes to generate significant funds for school needs and financial assistance.
- Increased assistance will be provided for middle income families.
- All parishes support Catholic schools.
- Professional business practices will be a priority.

**Facilities:**

- Facilities owned by particular parishes will be made available to the regional system through a building use agreement that shares cost and use of space.
- A facility review of all parish school facilities will be conducted and will produce a master facility plan at each campus in harmony with local parish plans.
- A plan will be developed in collaboration with the parishes to make capital investments that will upgrade or expand facilities where needed.

# TIMELINE FOR TRANSITION

## MARCH TO SEPT 2019

1. Feasibility of a regional school system is discussed with pastors, administrators, and board members.
2. Community leaders and donors are asked for input. The Catholic Foundation of SW Iowa is consulted and role for foundation defined. Anticipate need for a capital campaign for Catholic schools.
3. Wider consultation takes place with parents, parish communities, and various stakeholders.
4. Proposals are refined with timelines and phases.
5. Decision is made to pursue a regional school system for schools in the Des Moines metro area.

## OCT 2019 TO JUNE 2020

1. Hire a project manager to direct planning and preparations to launch the system. Establish working groups to develop plans and guide the planning process.
2. Draft an agreement stating the roles and responsibilities of the parishes, regional school system, and the diocese. State the services the system will provide to the parishes and expectations of parishes in support of the system.
3. Study facilities and determine needs for each site in context of a long-range plan for the system. Begin to build a long-range plan for facilities: building use agreements, planned uses, maintenance needs, capital improvements, and new facilities.
4. Build a financial model that will achieve goals for compensation and introduce a new tuition model, plan for development, and formulas for parish investment.
5. Set priorities and develop strategies for a capital campaign as it relates to funding for Catholic schools. Initiate a feasibility study committee to plan for a capital campaign that provides new investment for the success of the system, provides endowment funds for tuition assistance, and invests in 21st century facilities.
6. Establish a governance structure for the regional school system. The structure will include an Executive Director and board with bylaws outlining the responsibilities of the Executive Director and board members. The bylaws will also outline the board committees and their responsibilities.
7. Put together a marketing campaign.

## **JULY 2020 TO JUNE 2021**

1. Initiate capital campaign with all parishes.
2. Build the academic program. Professional development for teachers based on the academic plan.
3. Begin a three-year implementation phase allowing schools to work towards common tuition and centralize pay scale.
4. Governance fully operational including an Executive Director, central office, and a board with working committees.
5. Development plan in place and already being implemented alongside the capital campaign.

## **JULY 2021 TO JUNE 2022**

1. Regional school system is fully operational.
2. Executive Director is working with principals in creating accountability and building the program.
3. Executive Director, system board, and the central office oversees the development/fundraising, enrollment management, and finances of the local system.
4. Regional schools continue to work towards a standardized tuition and pay scale.

## QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

All kinds of questions are going to be raised. Below is an initial list. These are questions to be answered as a plan for restructuring is implemented.

1. ***How will the Catholic identity of the schools be preserved?*** The main priority in Catholic education is Catholic identity and the involvement of the clergy in the day-to-day spiritual activities of not only the parish, but also the school community. This model removes the operational activities from the clergy and prioritizes the clergy's involvement in the spiritual needs of the school community.
2. ***Will the new model save money?*** It will make possible growth in revenue to sustain quality programming and to attract and retain the best teachers and staff. Certain functions will benefit from cost efficiencies (e.g., business functions and shared programming) but other functions not being done well by schools now will be added on behalf of all schools (e.g., marketing and advancement).
3. ***Will schools close?*** No schools are anticipated to close. Parishes with schools at their site will continue to have a school.
4. ***Do administrators or teachers take a pay cut?*** The system will make possible more competitive pay, which will be possible as efficiencies are achieved, new development initiatives get underway, and the tuition revenue plan is implemented.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING AHEAD

The following recommendations are made to ensure success:

1. Raise initial seed money to be used for establishing the regional system network. An up-front investment is needed for strategic planning, strong public relations and communications, and project manager.
2. Plan well for the communications and public relations necessary to support public consultation leading to a final decision. Be willing to make some adjustments as dialog unfolds. Consider engaging professional expertise in public relations and marketing.
3. Learn from other systems that have opened around the country. Visit them. Call upon their founders and leaders for advice.
4. Hire a project manager for a period of six to twelve months to guide planning and decision making prior to the hiring of an executive director or president.
5. Determine if all schools or a smaller group of schools will join the system in the first wave.
6. Communicate the need for a capital campaign that will provide significant new investment in Catholic schools.
7. Dialog with the foundation of Holy Family School about the best path forward and how Holy Family School will be included in a total plan for the regional system. This is noted because the foundation has been very successful in supporting Holy Family School and the population served is unique to the Church's mission among schools. Consider how the governance and funding of the school should continue to ensure a significant role for foundation members.
8. Dialog with the board and administration at Dowling Catholic High School about their integral role in supporting the system and ensure Dowling is strongly connected to the system. Planning for academics, extra-curricular programming, marketing, and fund raising should be a joint effort of Dowling and the system.