

Growing Together: Best Practices for Catholic Schools

Practice Area: Regionalization
Archdiocese: The Archdiocese of New York
Superintendent: Timothy J. McNiff, Ed.D.

The Need:

The Archdiocese of New York's schools faced a set of challenges common to many parish-based schools across the nation including declining enrollment, cost to educate exceed tuition, increased instruction/administrative costs and depleted financial resources. The Catholic school model of "one parish, one school," that had successfully served us for more than 200 years was no longer sustainable for the majority of our elementary schools. As a result, regionalization – transitioning most elementary schools from a parish-based to a more sustainable regional model – was initiated.

The Goal:

The overall structural goal was to strengthen Catholic schools by using various governance models: regional, parish-based and partnership.

The Process:

Reconfiguration

- The Archdiocese of New York made a bold acknowledgment that there was an urgent need to live within their means. 92 schools in nine newly incorporated 501(c)(3) Catholic school regions. 38 schools remained parish-based, adhering to a sustainability agreement with the archdiocese. Six schools joined a separately funded Partnership for Inner-City Education region. 15 elementary schools operate privately. 29% of schools were closed preceding regionalization.

Regionalization

- Each region is governed by an educational corporation with a two-tier board structure, with the Cardinal and his advisors at the Member

"It is time to recover our nerve and promote our schools for the 21st century. The current hospice mentality – watching our schools slowly die – must give way to a renewed confidence."

Timothy Cardinal Dolan, The Catholic Schools We Need, America Magazine, September 13, 2010

level, and the Board of Trustees made up of 10-20 talented laypersons and clergy. The trustees are specifically tasked in the by-laws with responsibilities under four main committees: Catholic Identity, Strategic Planning, Finance, and Fundraising/Development.

- The regional offices are responsible for providing administrative, operational, financial/HR, and academic support to the schools within the region.
- The superintendent's office has authority for and is responsible for oversight of the school regions, providing support to the regional offices, as well as initiating and implementing system-wide programs.
- Regionalization additionally resulted in the creation of a new office, the Global Regional School System Treasury Office, which has authority for and provides support to the financial element of each regional office.

Reinvestment

- The Archdiocese of New York continues to evaluate and strengthen its regionalization model, primarily by exploring the questions: "How do we leverage the resources we have, and how do we make it more effective?" A key part of the answer to these questions has included substantially more scholarship and financial aid money, as well as the creation of a centralized Enrollment and Tuition Office within the Superintendent of Schools' Office.

“We took a system of schools and created a school system”

Michael J. Deegan, Deputy Superintendent of Schools

10 Best Practices in the area of Regionalization:

1. Work with your pastors.

Working in collaboration with pastors deepens and strengthens Catholic identity and missionary zeal. Because a priestly presence is essential at all Catholic schools, Cardinal Dolan encouraged all pastors to participate in the life of the community of every Catholic school. A pastor from each region’s Catholic Identity Subcommittees serves on the Archdiocesan Catholic Identity Advisory Council which serves to provide a needed focus and actionable strategy for the schools throughout the school year.

2. Articulate the role and obligation of the parishes.

The success of a regionalized structure is dependent upon every parish supporting a Catholic school, not only in funding, but also in promotion, – even if it is not located on the parish grounds.

3. Plan to grow your staff.

The creation of the regional offices, as well as increased staff centrally, is essential for providing adequate support to the schools.

4. Provide ongoing leadership formation

Our focus is to help school leaders nurture a school culture which is uniquely Catholic, supportive of the overall mission of the Church, academically challenging and in a learning environment where the Incarnation can happen each day.

5. Streamline academic standards and provide adequate resources.

The Archdiocese of New York has adopted the Engage NY curriculum. Our instructional team, including the Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Staff Development, her associate, and seven regional instructional specialists, create resources to support teachers in planning, teaching, and assessing according to the academic standards in the

curriculum. These resources are housed on our website and teachers and principals receive regular training on these materials during professional development sessions. These standards and resources provide coherence throughout the system.

6. Implement professional development.

Learning to teach well, like any other professional pursuit, is a lifetime process. Professional development should be offered throughout the year to teachers, principals and even parents as part of community outreach and engagement. Ongoing professional development is supported by a team of instructional specialists (one per region) and instructional coaches.

7. Message professionally and proactively.

Managing the message starts with professional and proactive outreach. Consistent talking points, public relations templates and accessible interviews make the relationship with media streamlined. In addition, the superintendent’s website is a key point of contact for families, available 24/7.

8. Integrate marketing and enrollment strategies.

Our goal is to grow new and retain current students through engagement, follow-up, marketing and financial aid. Develop enrollment goals and execute plans to meet these goals. The central office also manages the admissions application processes.

9. Get involved in public policy.

By staying on top of and getting involved with national, state and local public policy initiatives, the Archdiocese is able to support families through advocacy and funding opportunities.

10. Trust in God.

As Catholic schools we are able to act creatively and take risks because of the certainty of Christ.

For More Information:

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