

Q&A for the Des Moines Diocese Strategic Plan

Many questions will be raised during this process. Below is an initial list of questions and answers, some specific for the schools in the Des Moines area when talking about a regional system, others that apply to all schools in the Diocese. More questions and answers will come up and will be added to the list during the process.

1. Are we really going to move ahead with this plan? The Bishop has given his full support and endorsement for the plan. An Implementation Coordinator has been hired to lead the process of implementing the Des Moines Regional Plan. An Implementation Committee will be formed then focus groups will be formed to address specific areas of the plan. A timeline will be produced to guide the work going forward. The Implementation Coordinator, Implementation Committee and Focus groups will gather data, define issues, do research, make recommendations, determine resource needs, and recommend a timeline for going forward. The final result will be a detailed plan to put the recommendations of the strategic plan into action over the next 5 years. Work will also take place on supporting the execution of the plan in other schools in the Diocese as well.

2. 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.

3. Will the new Des Moines Regional 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 where schools are not adequately resourced now will be added on behalf of all schools (e.g., marketing and advancement). The goal is to create a model that moves schools from subsistence existence to a thriving mindset.

3. Will schools close? No. No schools are anticipated to close and that has never been a topic of discussion. Parishes with schools at their site will continue to have a school. The goal is to support all schools to get better.

4. Do administrators or teachers take a pay cut? No. The system will make possible more competitive pay, which will be possible as efficiencies are achieved, new development initiatives get underway, additional tuition assistance is provided, and the tuition revenue plan is implemented.

5. How will this be paid for? The plan has many facets and some will take more funding. One of the most important areas to address early on is to increase tuition assistance. The Catholic Tuition Organization, funded by tax credits, will need to continue to grow as a part of this effort. A diocesan wide capital campaign to support tuition assistance at all schools will be necessary early in the process. How much this will be has to be determined as work continues. On-going and enhanced fundraising efforts at each school as well as continued parish support at a level that is manageable for each parish going forward will be essential.

6. Talk of a need for tuition increase to help fund enhanced teacher compensation can be concerning. Will the cost of a Catholic Education be beyond my ability to pay for it? Additional tuition assistance from a variety of areas described above is necessary to support a raise in tuition. It is important our schools are able to attract and maintain the highest quality staff and competitive compensation is the key. Our goal is to provide excellence in the faith-integrated teaching/learning process provided by staff committed to the mission. Additional revenue from tuition, supported by enhanced tuition assistance are key elements in the plan.

7. Will this plan change the role of the pastor who is required to do so much in the current model? Operating a school has become much more complex over the years and the cost of operating a school has dramatically increased over the years. Asking pastors to fill the wide variety of roles required to operate a parish and school is not realistic. Work will be done to better define the role of the pastor as it pertains to the operation of the schools so his role as spiritual and faith leader in the parish and school can be accomplished more effectively.

8. What is meant by a regional school system? Currently, our Catholic grade schools in the Des Moines metro are each attached to one parish and the parish is responsible for the entire operation the school. A regional system enhances the operations of the school by collaboration amongst the schools in key areas. A system allows for greater collaboration in faith formation efforts, marketing of schools, enrollment management, K-12 academic alignment, financial and human resources, advancement, facilities planning, and governance. Catholic schools around the country are forming regional systems. New York Catholic Schools are creating a system of schools, St. Louis Catholic Schools are creating a system, Sioux Falls O’Gorman Catholic School System in Sioux falls, South Dakota has existed for many years, Holy Family School System in Dubuque, Iowa was created several years ago, and Carroll Kuemper Catholic School System in Carroll Iowa has been in existence for some time. These are just a few. Many more diocese and Catholic schools around the country are working to strength and secure the future of their Catholic schools by creating systems.

9. Will we lose local control of our Catholic school? Local schools will need to have a local advisory group to assist in strategic planning, operation and oversight of their school. As the system develops, some operations may be regionalized so that all schools benefit. As collaborations develops in the areas mentioned above, local schools will be able to focus their attention and efforts on producing the highest quality Catholic education for the students.

10. The plan contains so much. How will all this be accomplished? This is a 5 year plan. Just like any good plan, not everything will be accomplished at the same time or all at once. Decisions have to be made regarding key priorities that will be addressed early on. The work of the Implementation Committee, Focus Groups and meetings with constituents will help determine what those priorities are and how to develop a plan to move forward.