



faith — IN THE — FUTURE™

Sustainable Catholic Education for All Who Desire It™



BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION REPORT

TO THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

January 2012

chairman's summary

Catholic schools make leaders. They educate the whole person in mind and spirit, and they play a key role in shaping Philadelphia life. The evidence is obvious: Many of our region's finest scholars, public officials, business leaders, doctors, attorneys and educators today began as students in Catholic schools. So did a great many of the one-time poor who achieved their way to a better life: people who found their dignity and their God-given talent learning in Catholic classrooms. Yet in recent years, many of our schools have struggled to survive, placing more and more stress on the entire Catholic school system, while lacking a clear plan for recovery and future growth.

In December 2010, to secure Catholic schools in the decades ahead, Cardinal Justin Rigali established a Blue Ribbon Commission and tasked it with charting a future course for Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The 16-member Commission includes educators, business leaders, pastors and other lay leaders. It had its first meeting in January 2011, and met monthly thereafter. Between scheduled meetings, various subgroups met in person or by phone dozens of times to follow through on matters discussed at the monthly meetings.

On September 8, 2011, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., succeeded Cardinal Rigali as Archbishop of Philadelphia. While the mandate of the Commission preceded his arrival by many months, and Archbishop Chaput is still learning the pastoral terrain of his new diocese, he has warmly supported our work, and we thank him for his encouragement.

The Commission reviewed current educational programs at all levels to develop a strategy to assure sustainable Catholic education and faith formation of our young people. In the course of our work, we met with and sought input from many experienced professionals and organizations including the Connelly Foundation, Business Leaders Organized for Catholic Schools (BLOCS), the Association of Catholic Teachers, the Regional Vicars and members of the Archdiocese staffs. We also had the benefit of surveying parents, teachers and pastors. In addition, by virtue of their work assignments or pro bono activities, virtually all of the Commission members were well informed on the issues and challenges facing our schools, both elementary and secondary.

The report makes recommendations in the following areas:

- **Elementary Schools** – Currently there are 156 elementary and/or regional schools. Approximately 40 to 45 of them cannot be sustained, burdened by serious annual operating deficits often in parishes with heavy accumulated debts. Most of those schools have small enrollments and do not offer the key elements of a 21st century curriculum. A detailed review of these challenged schools reveals that in K through Grade 8, 34 schools have enrollments fewer than 200 and of these, 14 have fewer than 150. Eleven other schools across the Archdiocese have more than 200 students but have demonstrated a pattern of decreasing enrollments and financial deficits and are therefore considered challenged. We urge that a partnering and regionalizing plan for these schools be implemented as soon as possible.
- **Secondary Schools** – Currently 17 Archdiocesan secondary schools serve approximately 16,000 students. Several of the high schools are currently experiencing enrollment declines and resultant financial challenges. The Archdiocesan Board of Education has approved a right-sizing plan for the secondary schools, which includes closing four high schools. The Commission supports that plan.
- **Governance** – While it is important to maintain the unique, local characteristics of the individual schools, whether they are parish, regional or secondary, the Commission strongly recommends a revised governance model to bring more uniform management to strategic issues such as enrollment, tuition and economic viability. The new governance model consists of an Executive Board of Education chaired by the Auxiliary Bishop responsible for overseeing Catholic Education, and four additional boards focusing on Elementary Schools, Secondary Schools, Religious Education and Special Education.
- **Catholic Identity** – Catholic Identity is the very reason for the existence of Catholic schools and all faith formation programs in the Church. It is the defining characteristic that sets Catholic education apart from public and private schools, as well as all other religious-based institutions. It is the force behind our long-held tradition of excellence, which provides us a competitive edge in the marketplace. The Commission offers several recommendations to strengthen and improve the Catholic Identity in our Catholic schools and in our Parish Religious Education Programs.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

chairman's summary

- **Academic Excellence** – Catholic schools in the Archdiocese should be centers of Academic Excellence for teachers and students in the 21st century. The basis for this commitment is found in the “Statements of Beliefs” published in the 2010-2014 Strategic Plan for the Office of Catholic Education. The Commission supports the goals of the Office of Catholic Education Strategic Plan and offers several recommendations to further those goals.
- **Religious Education** – The increasing number of children receiving catechesis outside of a Catholic school setting underscores the need for strong, sustainable Parish Religious Education Programs. The Commission makes a number of recommendations intended to support the work of those who exercise leadership: pastors in particular, parents who are the primary educators of their children in the faith, catechists who staff programs, and Catholic school administrators who provide collaboration with the students in the Catholic schools especially in the sacramental programs.
- **Special Education** – The Archdiocese operates four schools for Special Education that serve children who range in age from infancy to twenty-one years who are diagnosed with varying levels of disabilities from moderately and severely cognitively impaired to legally blind or deaf. These schools provide children with special needs an education that will assist them in their spiritual, academic, emotional and psychological growth. In this section, the Commission offers recommendations dealing primarily with governance and financing.
- **Foundation for Education** – Probably the biggest single issue facing Catholic parents today as they decide on where to send their children to school is the cost of tuition. The Archdiocese has been very fortunate to have significant financial help over the years from private sources such as the Connelly Foundation, BLOCS and the McCloskey Foundation. There is every reason to expect that their help will continue, but we believe the Archdiocese can take a significant step forward by establishing a new foundation dedicated exclusively to raising money to support its schools. While the short-term impact of such a foundation will likely be modest, we believe the long-term potential is substantial.

■ **Advocacy for Government Support** – In recent years, a growing movement has developed in Pennsylvania to seek support for school choice by way of a voucher system. The Commission sees this as a matter of social justice for the rights of parents and the benefit of children. It strongly supports all efforts to extend the assistance of school choice to all students seeking a quality education, whether they freely choose public, charter, private or religiously affiliated schools. Commission members believe that Catholic schools will always compete effectively – and in fact excel – in any environment where education resources are equally available to all quality providers.

We recognize that no plan or report is perfect, and this one is submitted to Archbishop Chaput with the confidence that he will review, consider, apply and, if necessary, adjust its recommendations according to his pastoral prudence and the needs of our people. Commission members are unanimous in their belief that Catholic schools have enduring value; that they glorify God and ennoble their students by their excellence; and that they have a great future – *if they are wisely led*. Commission members are equally unanimous that current financial losses cannot be justified or sustained; that our Catholic school system must be right-sized and, in a sense, re-imagined; and that strategic decisions about our Catholic schools have already been delayed too long at great cost. Now these decisions are urgent. They cannot in good conscience or sound stewardship be delayed.

We thank Cardinal Rigali and Archbishop Chaput for the privilege of having served our Church with this yearlong effort. We understand the difficulty that real change always involves. However, we believe that this report, if pursued with energy and creative new leadership, will bear fruit in a renewal of Philadelphia's great tradition of Catholic education.

Respectfully submitted,



John J. Quindlen

Chair

December 27, 2011



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

Introduction

In December 2010, Cardinal Justin Rigali established the Blue Ribbon Commission to chart the future course of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. A panel of leading business experts and educators spent the past year studying the schools, examining the trends and analyzing data at all levels, including educational programs, enrollment figures and overall finances.

Through this intensive effort, it was determined that Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia is at a crossroads. Over the past 50 years, many schools experienced a drop in enrollment and increased costs. As a result, many schools have operated at a deficit, which has required significant subsidies from the parishes and Archdiocese. Each year, a handful of schools have been forced to close or merge. To be sure, many schools continue to excel and remain strong pillars of the community. The core structure of the Catholic schools remains as vibrant as ever. However, a renewed approach is needed to ensure that the Catholic schools not only continue to survive but thrive. As such, the Commission has recommended an ambitious restructuring plan designed to bolster enrollment and finances, while enhancing educational programs to ensure that the Archdiocese continues to deliver a high-quality Catholic education and faith formation for our area youth in the 21st century. The implementation of this plan will assist the Church in the fulfillment of its mission to educate youth to be contributing members of the Church and society.



The recommendation to close or merge a significant number of parish schools will likely get the most attention. The Commission understands that such a move will cause significant pain and change in the lives of children, families and alumni. This is not a decision that was made easily or in a vacuum. Rather, this recommendation is being made with the best interest of all the students and parents who are committed to ensuring that Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia remains strong and vibrant.

Indeed, there is much more to this proposal than just the closing or merging of schools. The moves are part of a broader plan designed to strengthen the remaining schools and enhance the educational programs. The plan includes the formation of a governance model that will provide greater oversight and efficiency to the management of the schools. More support will go into the Parish Religious Education Programs (PREP) that serve tens of thousands of students who attend public schools but come to the parishes to receive their sacraments and Catholic faith formation. The plan also calls for establishing a foundation with a goal to raise significant, on-going support for our schools. While the restructuring may bring some short-term pain, the broader plan is expected to result in stronger and sustainable schools that are better positioned to deliver the high quality education that parents want and students need in order to compete in the 21st century.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

Blue Ribbon Commission Members

John J. Quindlen, Chair

Thomas J. Colligan

Charles P. Connolly, Jr.

Gerald T. Davis

Rev. Msgr. Edward M. Deliman

Eleanor Dezzi

Sister John Evelyn DiTrollo, IHM

Sister R. Patricia Fadden, IHM

Frank A. Farnesi

H. Edward Hanway

Rev. Msgr. Daniel J. Kutys

Miguel Leon, Esq.

Rev. Msgr. Joseph T. Marino

Sister Theresa Maugle, SSJ

Gerald Parsons

Sister Helen Wiegmann, SSJ

Sister Janet Baker, RSM,
Facilitator

BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION REPORT

TO THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA · JANUARY 2012

Mission: To strengthen Catholic education for the 21st century.

1 Overview	2
■ Historical Perspectives	
■ Guiding Principles	
■ Essential Elements of Catholic Education	
2 Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses	8
■ Enrollment Trends and Finances	
■ Restructuring and Transition	
■ A Commitment to Excellence	
3 A Foundation for Education	18
■ Background	
■ Review of Other Diocesan Models	
■ A Foundation for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia	
4 Parish Religious Education Programs	20
■ Background	
■ Enrollment Trends	
■ Recommendations	
5 Special Education	24
■ Background	
■ Recommendations	
6 A Plan for Better Governance	26
■ Executive Board of Education	
■ Governance Model for Elementary Schools	
■ Governance Model for Secondary Schools	
■ Governance Model for Religious Education	
■ Governance Model for Special Education	
■ The Role of the Office of Catholic Education	
7 Advocacy for Government Support	34
■ Background	
■ Current Support and Concerns	
■ Advocacy	
8 Implementation	37

1 ► overview

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The first Catholic school established in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia was at St. Mary Parish during the late 18th century. During the 19th century, Bishop Kenrick (1830-1851) encouraged the establishment of Catholic schools and St. John Neumann (1851-1860) made the establishment of parish elementary schools a priority. By 1860, there were 17 parish elementary schools in Philadelphia.

By 1911, enrollment in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese topped 68,000. It continued to grow rapidly through the first half of the 20th century, as the broader population increased and many immigrants settled in Philadelphia. In 1959-60, Catholic school enrollment peaked at 271,088. During that time, many parish elementary schools helped to define the city of neighborhoods and the surrounding suburbs. Indeed, many Philadelphia area Catholics identify themselves by the parish or high school they attended.

Over the past 50 years, many of the Catholic schools experienced a steady decline in enrollment. This trend is not unique. The same trends and challenges exist in many other cities and Catholic dioceses, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest. The steady decline in population has resulted in the painful closure of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese almost annually. This is not a new development. In fact, since 1964, more than 125 elementary schools have closed and 11 have opened. Seven high schools have closed and another seven have consolidated, while only two new schools opened.

Despite the drop, Catholic schools remain a strong and integral pillar of the Philadelphia region. The Archdiocese currently operates 156 elementary and 17 high schools. The current enrollment is 68,000—the same level it was in 1911. An additional 17 private Catholic high schools and 18 private elementary schools enroll 12,148 students. Another 51,000 Catholic students attend public schools, but receive Catholic faith formation classes in parish settings. Some 200 children with special needs are served in four schools of special education within the Archdiocese.

The decline in enrollment is due to a confluence of factors. The overall population of the city has declined. In addition, many of today's young Catholic families that remain have fewer children than previous generations. For example, from 1990 to 2009 infant baptisms in the Archdiocese declined from 21,600 to 11,700 or some 46 percent.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

However, the drop in enrollment is not just a Catholic school problem. Philadelphia's public schools have experienced similar steep declines in enrollment and large financial deficits. Tens of thousands of empty seats have prompted the public school district to undertake a plan that calls for closing schools.

At the same time, the Catholic schools face increased competition from private and public charter schools. For example, in the city alone, there are 67 charter schools with an enrollment of 34,000 students. Many of the charters offer the safety and discipline that traditionally attracted families to Catholic schools, but the key competitive advantage of the charters is that they are tuition free.

Likewise, the number of priests and men and women religious declined significantly resulting in fewer religious personnel to staff the schools. Accordingly, the need for increased lay personnel has resulted in significantly higher operating costs for salaries and benefits. The increased costs combined with the decrease in enrollment has brought about a higher per-pupil cost and forced tuition increases. The financial pressures have made it difficult for many schools to add educational programs that many families want, including art, foreign language and technology, while delivering a quality education at an affordable cost.

The increased economic challenges and greater diversity of educational options have also persuaded many families to choose public schools over parochial schools. Meanwhile, the growing number of Catholic children attending public schools has increased the importance of Parish Religious Education Programs. In fact, almost as many students are in Parish Religious Education Programs (51,000) as there are in the Catholic schools (68,000). The Commission makes recommendations with respect to these programs elsewhere in the report.

Enrollment History

1911	68,041
1951	168,795
1961	250,005
1971	217,563
1981	157,669
1991	118,635
2001	103,315
2011	68,070

This chart details the Archdiocese's Catholic school enrollment over the last 100 years.



overview

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Early in its deliberations, the Blue Ribbon Commission members agreed to certain principles by which they would approach their work. Central to all of these principles is the core value for maintaining the Catholic identity throughout all educational efforts. The Commission agreed that the following would form criteria for initiatives:

Creating a Catholic identity in our youth is the distinguishing hallmark of Catholic education setting us apart from all other educational institutions, thus its sustainability is crucial to the mission of the Church.

All reasonable efforts must be made to assure that the opportunity for a high quality, affordable, Catholic education is available to all who desire it.

Archdiocesan education strategies must recognize that Catholic schools play a key role in faith formation as well as the opportunity for evangelization.

All efforts must demonstrate a priority for Catholic children while at the same time recognizing a commitment to all who desire a Catholic education, especially those in urban and under-served communities.

The structure, location and extent of both Catholic elementary and secondary schools should be designed to ensure quality, affordability and access for those who desire a Catholic education.

Various alternatives to the traditional parish elementary school should be considered including, but not limited to, regional schools, multi-parish schools and independent schools.

The Archdiocese's commitment to those in the inner city and other under-served communities should reflect a need-based approach that establishes various educational alternatives and seeks funding support from diverse sources.

Investing in resources to ensure successful Catholic faith formation and education for those children who attend public schools is as important as investing in parish and regional schools.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

In addition to these principles, the Commission seeks to preserve the following essential elements of Catholic education.

Catholic Identity

Teaching Catholic beliefs and moral values clearly is the defining characteristic that sets a Catholic education apart from its peers. Such teaching instills moral principles and ethical character in students. Those ideals remain a key competitive advantage of Catholic schools and remain a top priority. If anything, given increased global change and complex societal influences, teaching students a message of faith that is rooted in the Gospel is needed now more than ever.

Students celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation throughout their elementary and secondary years as well as a variety of prayer services and devotions of the Church as they unfold throughout the liturgical year. Students are also given guidance, opportunities and responsibilities to bring their faith alive through a host of service assignments and outreach projects. These enable students to realize that faith and work, and faith and life are not separate entities but woven together to provide a firm foundation from which to learn how to become Christian leaders and contributing members in a global society.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

1 overview

Academic Excellence

At their core, Catholic schools are known for rigorous teaching of the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic while instilling strong religious and moral values that guide students throughout their life and produce upstanding citizens. Many Catholic school graduates have gone on to excel and take leadership roles in almost every facet of society. The Commission's goal is to implement a plan to ensure that Catholic schools remain in position to maintain the academic excellence for which they are known while adapting to the demographic challenges, cost pressures and educational demands of the 21st century.

As such, Catholic education in the Archdiocese is committed to the continuous improvement of all core academic areas to better prepare students to meet the challenges of the future. Curriculum and assessment practices shape the core academic areas of learning. Staff and faculty development implements a framework to build rigor and relevance into all instructional designs. Finding ways to bolster that effort should be part of the plan going forward.

Sustainability

The long-term sustainability of Catholic education is threatened by naturally occurring shifts in social, economic and demographic patterns. Adjusting the delivery of Catholic education to align it with the available resources is needed to assure its future in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

The plan to close or merge a number of schools at once should strengthen those that remain, positioning the schools for better long-term sustainability, while reducing the annual need to close a handful of schools. Stability in the schools will eliminate the threat of closure that hangs over some schools and position the remaining schools to grow, improve and invest in the future. Moving from a vicious to a virtuous cycle will also help make the schools more competitive and attractive to prospective families.

Accessibility

Two of the most important dimensions parents consider in choosing a school are price and proximity. Catholic schools have thrived in part by offering a high-quality education at an affordable price. Increased education costs combined with decreased revenues, have forced parishes and the Archdiocese to contribute more and more revenue to supplement the cost to maintain the schools. To be sure, the tuition alone does not cover the costs to run the schools. In fact, in the last ten years, parish subsidies to schools have increased from an average of \$255,450 per school to an average of \$319,162 per school—an increase of 24.9%. That rise in subsidies is not sustainable.

The plan to reduce the number of schools should boost enrollment to healthy levels at the remaining schools. Although that will not cause a drop in current tuition costs, this move will increase revenues and enable the schools to invest in educational programs and maintain affordable tuition levels in the future. The proximity of the schools is another key draw for many parents. In determining which schools to close, the Commission worked hard to ensure that there would be access to a school at a neighboring parish. Of course, any closures will require providing information, outreach and guidance to help parents and students with a transition to a new school.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

2 ► analysis of strengths and weaknesses

ENROLLMENT TRENDS AND FINANCES

The Commission did an extensive analysis of the existing schools and programs to guide its decision. The following is a breakdown by county of the number of schools in the Philadelphia Archdiocese:

Total number of secondary schools: 17

Philadelphia: 8

Bucks: 2

Chester: 1

Delaware: 3

Montgomery: 3

Total number of elementary schools: 156

Philadelphia: 57

Bucks: 20

Chester: 16

Delaware: 29

Montgomery: 34

Special Education Schools: 4 Programs in 3 locations.

Our Lady of Confidence at St. David and Bishop McDevitt

St. Katherine Day School at St. Katherine and Archbishop Carroll

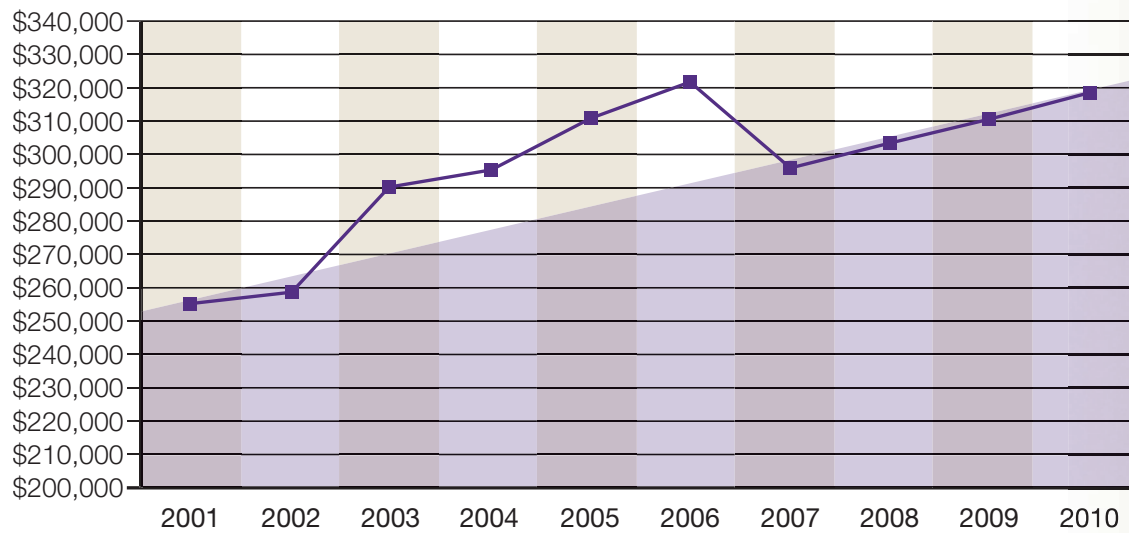
St. Lucy and Archbishop Ryan at Holy Innocents

Early Childhood Programs: 4

Wayne, Parkesburg, Strafford and Rosemont

The Commission also analyzed the finances of each school, the amount of subsidies and the enrollment trends. The Commission found that many of the Catholic schools receive large subsidies from the parish in order to operate. As enrollment declines, those subsidies increase. Many schools operate well below their enrollment capacity. That is not a sustainable path. The chart to the right shows the average subsidy from our parishes to our schools, followed by a chart that shows enrollment trends and finally a chart that visually demonstrates the cost per pupil and tuition differential.

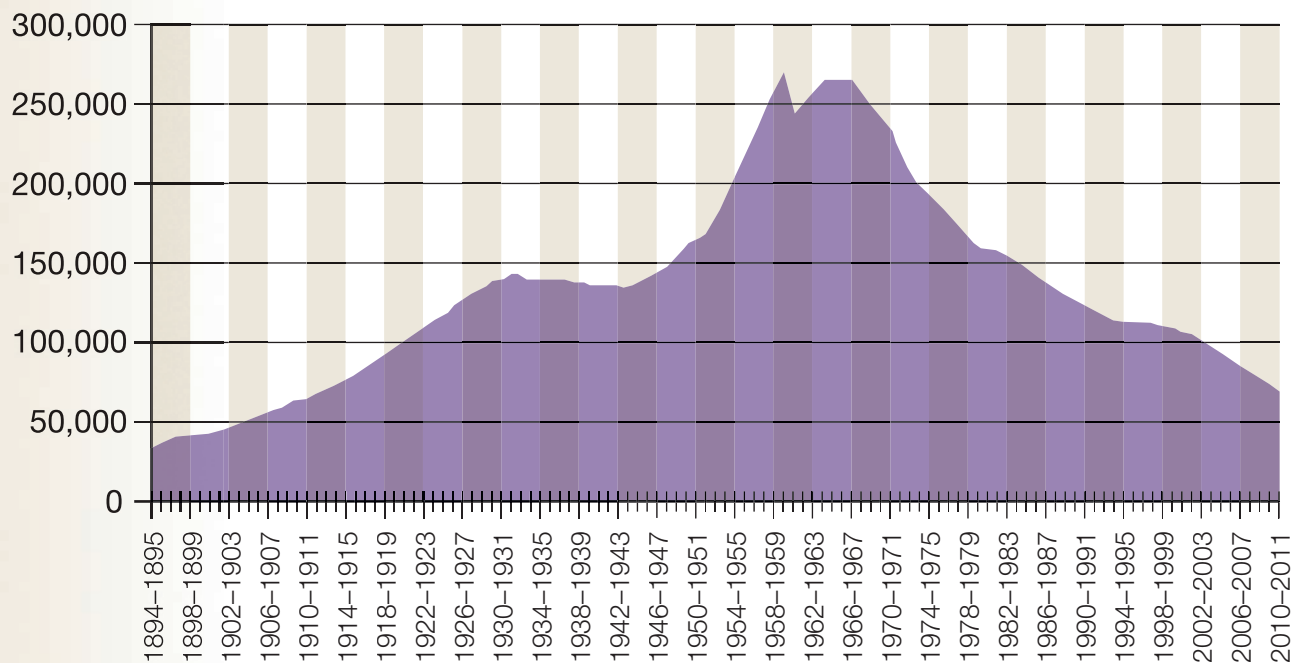
Average Parish School Operational Subsidy



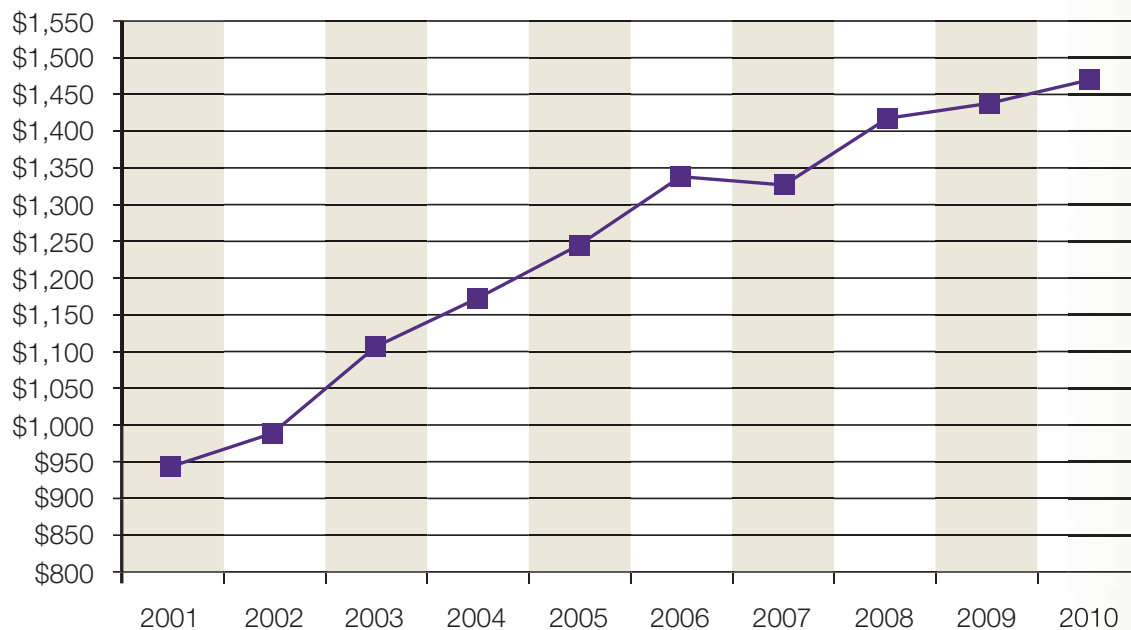
Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

2 ► analysis of strengths and weaknesses

Total Enrollment



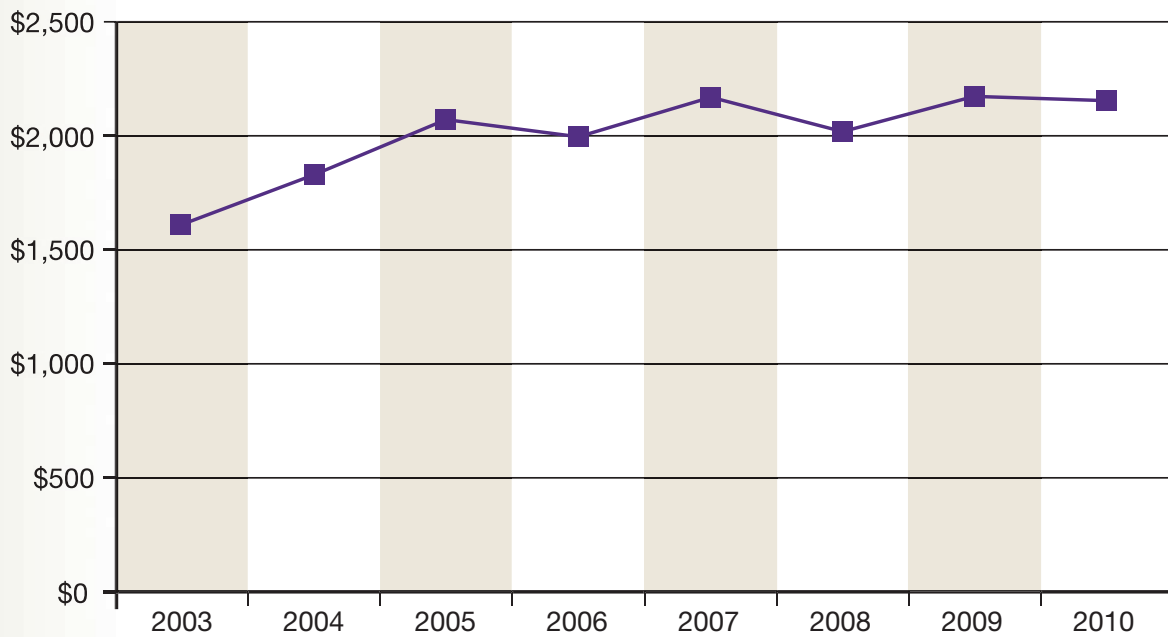
Parish School Cost / Pupil vs. Tuition Differential



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

2 ► analysis of strengths and weaknesses

High School Cost / Pupil vs. Tuition Differential



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

RESTRUCTURING AND TRANSITION

The Commission invested a great deal of time and analysis in examining the strengths and weaknesses of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese. The goal was to determine the best course of action for the schools in the future. The Commission's meetings, discussions and analysis produced a broad plan that includes the closure of a significant number of schools.

Parish Elementary Schools

The Blue Ribbon Commission examined the state of the 156 elementary parish and/or regional schools. A large number of these schools (approximately 40 to 45) are not financially viable, experiencing annual operating deficits often in parishes with substantial accumulated deficits. Most of those schools have small and diminishing enrollments, and many do not offer the key elements of a 21st century curriculum. A detailed review of these challenged schools reveals that in Grades K through 8, 34 schools have enrollments fewer than 200 and of these, 14 have fewer than 150. Eleven other schools across the Archdiocese have more than 200 students but have demonstrated a pattern of decreasing enrollments and financial deficits and are therefore considered challenged.

With respect to elementary schools, the Commission recommends:

- That the model school program for elementary schools, designed by the Office of Catholic Education, be immediately adopted as the blueprint for these schools.
- That this model, which ensures that each school offers the core curriculum areas in addition to art, music, world language, advanced math, technology, library, physical education and a resource room, be adopted promptly so that a partnering and regionalization plan may be implemented.
- That the concept of mission schools be committed to and designed with a permanent source of funding identified to serve the needs of urban and disadvantaged communities that desire a Catholic education but are unable to afford one.
- There are currently several different models of mission schools operating in the Archdiocese. Local Catholic universities, Business Leadership Organized for Catholic Schools (BLOCS), religious orders and the Archdiocese have collaborated to create these mission schools and this effort could be replicated to sustain the commitment of the Archdiocese to serving the needs of urban communities, especially at the elementary level.

2 ► analysis of strengths and weaknesses

This future model for rationalizing elementary schools establishes three optimal school size categories (A: 250+, B: 500+, C: 700+) and outlines consistent core program elements including art, music, world language, advanced math, technology, library, physical education and resource room. This will ensure that our schools provide a competitive, quality and value-based offering to all our students.

The Commission has reviewed this plan with the Office of Catholic Education (OCE) and OCE supports it. The result of implementing this plan would be:

County	Current # of Schools	Sept. 2012	#A*	#B*	#C*
Bucks	20	15	11	3	1
Chester	16	14	12	2	0
Delaware	29	22	17	5	0
Philadelphia	57	39	24	12	3
Montgomery	34	22	15	3	4
Total	156	112	79	25	8

*A=250+, B=500+, C=700+

Secondary Schools

Currently 17 Archdiocesan secondary schools serve approximately 16,000 students. The Blue Ribbon Commission has found the same financial and enrollment issues that affect our parish elementary schools are having an impact on the high schools. With respect to secondary schools, the Commission recommends that:

- The high school rationalization plan recently approved by the Archdiocesan Board of Education be adopted and implemented for the 2012/2013 academic year.
- A proactive approach be taken with the remaining high schools to ensure programs and resources devoted to marketing, development and programming integration with Catholic elementary schools be pursued consistently across the system and made a part of senior administrators' evaluations.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

- As physical assets, previously utilized for educational purposes are disposed of, that consideration is given to utilizing some of the proceeds for current and future educational needs such as tuition assistance, program expansion and deferred maintenance. In addition to providing needed financial support for remaining schools, this commitment would bolster public confidence in the Archdiocese's commitment to Catholic secondary schools.

The result of implementing this plan would be:

County	Current # of Schools	Sept. 2012
Bucks	2	1
Chester	1	1
Delaware	3	2
Philadelphia	8	6
Montgomery	3	3
Total	17	13

Transition

Closing any school is difficult and causes upheaval, confusion and pain under the best circumstances. The best way to minimize the negative effects is by being transparent about the goals and providing clear, consistent communication. To that end, the Commission developed several recommendations to provide for a smooth transition. They include:

- The clergy provide a statement that expresses a common purpose for all parishes of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Develop the concept of equality by stating that each parish has a mission to offer Catholic faith formation to all of its parishioners through either an active Parish Religious Education Program, a regional or parish school, or a home-based Family Religious Study Program.
- All pastors collaboratively and constructively support Catholic education and faith formation in all elementary and secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. All school and parish leaders work to further the integration of parish life into the school.
- All pastors, school leaders and members of the newly designed Governance model receive professional development and education on the mission and vision of the Archdiocesan elementary and secondary schools. All qualified personnel design or select an assessment tool to assist schools in evaluating the effectiveness of the religion curriculum, instruction and faith formation, in the schools and Parish Religious Education Programs.

2 ► analysis of strengths and weaknesses

A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

Despite the challenges a commitment to excellence remains. The Archdiocese stands firm in its commitment to support a rigorous education for its teachers and students in this 21st century. The basis for this commitment is found in the office's "Statement of Beliefs" published in the 2010-2014 Strategic Plan for the Office of Catholic Education (OCE) in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

“

Catholic schools are committed to academic excellence, fostering the intellectual development and growth of faculty and students as all embrace learning attitudes of the 21st century. Student learning in our Catholic schools begins with a rigorous curriculum presented in a learning environment that supports high levels of student engagement where ever-evolving technologies and 21st century skills are integrated with information relevant to the present as well as the future. Students in our Catholic Schools need to be given frequent opportunities to think critically, work collaboratively and make appropriate choices in an academic climate that allows for growth in each student's ability to express learning in creative ways.

”

For these reasons, the Commission supports the goals of this Office of Catholic Education Strategic Plan and offers the following to support its ongoing execution:

- The OCE will utilize appropriate external resources and organizations to ensure that curriculums, teaching methods and professional development for faculty and staff are “leading edge” and promote continued excellence and growth.
- The OCE will adopt and implement the Common Core State Standards in all of the core areas of learning.
- The OCE will integrate innovative technologies in the area of assessment, as well as further design ways to “connect assessment to instruction to research-based practices.”
- The OCE will provide ongoing training for the staff developers, principals and faculty members in the formation of “Professional Learning Communities.”
- The OCE will further the Strategic Plan goal to develop “next practices” and determine schools where these innovative practices will be implemented and monitored.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

3 ► a foundation for education

BACKGROUND

Perhaps the biggest single issue facing most Catholic parents today as they decide on where to send their children to school is tuition costs. Other criteria are important, such as academic excellence and location, but cost is the most critical for the average family.

As presented elsewhere in this report, more and more families have had to forego a Catholic school education because of rising costs. While we expect efforts to contain costs to continue, it is likely that tuition will continue to increase, hopefully at a slower pace, but increase it will. There have been efforts throughout the country, including Pennsylvania, to level the playing field for parents wanting to send their children to non-public schools by offering financial aid.

The Commission recommends further augmenting those efforts by establishing a new foundation to support Catholic schools in the Archdiocese. Such a foundation is not a new idea. Similar foundations exist throughout the country and are very effective.

REVIEW OF OTHER DIOCESAN MODELS

For example, the Catholic Foundation of Northern Colorado, established in 1998, currently underwrites Catholic school teachers' salaries at a level of roughly \$1 million annually to make them more professionally attractive and competitive. This past September, the Mayor of Los Angeles announced that the local Catholic Education Foundation was launching a \$100 million campaign to raise funds for Los Angeles Catholic schools.

Chicago is home to the Big Shoulders Fund, which was founded by a group of business leaders in 1986 to provide support for inner-city Catholic schools in Chicago. The fund has raised more than \$200 million since its founding, and currently awards \$10 million to \$12 million a year in grants and scholarships. Funds are also provided for special education programs, instructional equipment, faculty support and facility improvements.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

A FOUNDATION FOR THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

The Commission recommends taking steps immediately to launch a similar fund based on these and other models. Indeed, the Archdiocese has been very fortunate to have significant financial help over the years from private sources such as the Connelly Foundation, BLOCS and the McCloskey Foundation. There is every reason to expect that their help will continue, but we believe the Archdiocese can take a significant step forward by establishing a new foundation exclusively to raise money to support its schools. While the short-term impact of such a foundation will likely be modest, we believe the long-term potential can be substantial.

We believe a foundation could open the door to support from new major foundations and donors, both local and national, and both Catholic and non-Catholic, whose focus is support of education broadly. We also believe, for example, that because of their heritage many local Catholics, including those of modest means, who might otherwise not be contributors, would find it appealing to contribute to a foundation supporting Catholic schools.

Locally we have shared this idea with the Connelly Foundation, BLOCS and the McCloskey Foundation and have received their enthusiastic support. We believe there is every reason to expect them to be active supporters of a foundation once one is established.

The Blue Ribbon Commission recommends creating a foundation that not only addresses tuition assistance but also aims to renew, strengthen and enhance our schools. An overview of the foundation is as follows:

- We aim to be leaders in math and science. We will raise funds for innovation in these areas.
- Today, it is imperative that our students excel in areas such as art, foreign languages, and technology and our goal will be to raise funds to support these initiatives.
- The Church has always taken special care to serve those who are underserved. Mission schools and schools of special education will be hallmarks of this duty, making it imperative that the foundation support these schools.
- Our study has shown that middle class families are struggling to give their children a Catholic education. We aim to help these families that comprise the majority of our parishioners through greater tuition assistance.
- Many of our Catholic children will be educated outside of a Catholic school. Their education and Catholic formation is equally important. Our parishes will continue to need competent and well-trained religious educators, and for this, we will raise funds to support Parish Religious Education Programs.



parish religious education programs

BACKGROUND

At this time in the history of the Church in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, the increasing number of children receiving catechesis outside of a Catholic school setting underscores the need for strong, sustainable Parish Religious Education Programs. This is an important piece of religious education that must be supported and maintained.

The recommendations of the Commission with regard to religious education are based on insights from members along with the advice of experienced Parish Religious Education professionals. The recommendations are intended to support the work of those who exercise leadership, pastors in particular, parents who are the primary educators of their children in the faith, catechists who staff programs, and Catholic school administrators who provide collaboration with the students in the Catholic schools especially in sacramental programs.

Since it is the responsibility of each and every Catholic to pass on the faith to future generations, it is absolutely necessary that everyone work together to call forth renewed excellence, energy and enthusiasm for our Parish Religious Education Programs. A Catholic school education is the best way to ensure that children are raised in the Catholic tradition. However, for those children who cannot attend a Catholic school, it is important to have a meaningful and effective Parish Religious Education Program.

ENROLLMENT TRENDS

	2000-2001	2009-2010
Catholic Schools (K-8)	69,549 (39.5%)*	43,145 (31.7%)*
Parish Religious Education Programs	53,548 (30.4%)*	49,312 (36.2%)*

*Note: Based on estimated children in that age range per baptism numbers and demographics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To serve the Catholic schools and the Parish Religious Education Programs, the Commission recommends the following:

- Establish an Archdiocesan Board for Religious Education composed of clergy, religious and laity with knowledge and experience in pastoral, catechetical and educational areas (especially directors of religious education, school principals, teachers), along with representative parents and professionals. The board will monitor the state of religious education throughout the Archdiocese, offer the Archbishop or his delegate counsel and advice as needed in this area and monitor the implementation of any Archdiocesan changes brought about because of the recommendations in this report.
- Establish guidelines for the preparation of the reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation. The guidelines should indicate that the reception of First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion should be celebrated at the same age/grade at every parish in the Archdiocese. Ideally, this should be when the child is in second grade (or in the second year of instruction). There should also be no difference within a parish between the age/grade when children in the school receive these Sacraments versus when the children in Parish Religious Education Programs receive them.
- The guidelines should indicate that Confirmation be celebrated at the same age/grade at every parish in the Archdiocese. It is recommended that the age/grade for the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation should be moved to the eighth grade in parishes where Confirmation is celebrated every year, and to seventh & eighth grades in those parishes where it is celebrated every other year.
- The Parish Religious Education Programs must provide a minimum of 40 hours of instruction per year. The programs must comply with Archdiocesan policies. The parishes should have suitable and appropriate facilities in which to conduct the programs, and therefore, special care should be given when making facility decisions.
- Faith formation, whether in Catholic schools or Parish Religious Education Programs, is most effective when it takes place in a systematic and age-appropriate manner.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

4 ► parish religious education programs

- All parishes should assume the responsibility for hiring a director of religious education (DRE) who is a qualified and salaried professional along with staff support as deemed necessary to administer successful and effective religious education programs.
- All parishes should ensure that catechists are properly certified and that parishes assume the costs of certification. Archdiocesan outreach should be made to St. Charles Seminary, as well as to local Catholic colleges and universities, with the purpose of encouraging one or more to establish undergraduate and graduate programs designed to develop parish DREs and catechists.
- All Catholic school teachers and Parish Religious Education teachers are expected to comply with Archdiocesan certification policy. The Office for Catechetical Formation to ensure quality control as well as accessibility to these courses should constantly monitor catechist certification, including that of Catholic school teachers.
- Every pastor in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia should ensure that religious education takes place for children and young people in their parish school and those not enrolled in a Catholic school. In a Catholic school, instruction in the faith should be part of the daily school schedule.
- Every pastor has an obligation to encourage and support parents and guardians as the first and most important teachers of their children in the faith.
- Extra efforts should be made to include new immigrants at parishes. These efforts include providing instructions for the parents and guardians in their native languages and also encouraging the development of trained catechists who are members of the particular ethnic community.
- Children who participate in CYO sports must be enrolled in a Catholic school or a Religious Education Program. Exceptions are made only when the parish does not have a Religious Education Program for any particular age group (e.g., Kindergarten, senior high school). Parish-sponsored sports or social activities should be scheduled at times other than when religious education takes place.

- Tuition for Religious Education Programs will be set by the parish, keeping in mind the economic situation of the particular parish and neighborhood. No child should be denied religious formation due to finances. The pastor and the DRE can make a judgment with regard to individual situations. The Archdiocese should develop guidelines in this area.

- Parish Religious Education Programs should continue to take into consideration the particular circumstances of children with special needs when assessing their progress, as well as their readiness to receive sacraments.

- Establish a clear, consistent policy concerning home-based catechesis. In situations where parents presently home-school children for the reception of first sacraments, it is the responsibility of the pastor, or his delegate, to determine if the child or children in question (is/are) adequately prepared for the sacrament to be received and integrated into the parish celebrations.

- The religion curriculum in both Catholic schools and Parish Religious Education Programs must follow Archdiocesan guidelines. Curriculum review should occur on a regular basis. Periodic outcomes-based assessments should be a part of any such review; this could include tests, reports, etc.

- Catholic school teachers and parish catechists are to be encouraged to use 21st century learning techniques as much as possible, especially in the area of technology. The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* identifies basic Catholic doctrinal formulas that every Catholic should know. Consideration should be given to making sure that all of these doctrinal formulas are covered in elementary religious instruction in a manner both comprehensive and repetitive to ensure that every Catholic young person knows these basic doctrinal formulas prior to reaching adulthood.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

5 ► special education

BACKGROUND

The Archdiocese operates four schools for Special Education that serve children who range in age from infancy to 21 years and are diagnosed with varying levels of disabilities, from moderately and severely impaired to legally blind or deaf. The schools welcome children of all faiths, races and ethnic origins to participate in challenging and nurturing environments where students are encouraged to use their God-given gifts to become integral members of society.

The Schools of Special Education provide children with special needs an education that will assist them in their spiritual, academic, emotional and psychological growth. Witnessing to the sacredness of life, the schools empower students to grow to their fullest potential and to develop a lifelong relationship with God. The schools nurture every student through the curriculum as well as in the care offered each day. The goal of these efforts is to encourage students to become contributing members of society, as they are able, and to fulfill their responsibility of service to God and to others.

In 1989, due to growing economic costs of educating disabled children, the Archdiocese instituted tuition and fees. The Archdiocese, sensitive to the high medical expenses associated with caring for disabled children, strives to keep tuition to a minimum and works with families regarding financial assistance and payment plans.

For nearly a century, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia has been a leading force, both locally and nationally, in educating and serving students with disabilities.

1912 - The Archdiocese established the Archbishop Ryan School for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children. Current enrollment: 9. Location: Inclusion with Holy Innocents Parish and Regional School

1953 - The Archdiocese opened St. Katherine Day School as the first day program for disabled children in the nation. Current enrollment is 87. Location: Two sites: Wynnewood (ages 4.5 – 15); Archbishop Carroll High School (Life Skills Program ages 15 – 21).

1954 - Our Lady of Confidence Day School was founded for students with developmental delays. Current enrollment: 90. Location: Two sites: St. David, Willow Grove (ages 4.5 – 15); Bishop McDevitt High School (ages 15 – 21).



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

1955 - St. Lucy Day School for Children with Visual Impairments was established as one of the first schools in the United States to mainstream visually impaired students with traditional elementary school children. Current enrollment: 30. Location: Inclusion with Holy Innocents Parish and Regional School.

From 1954 to 1988, the Schools of Special Education were fully funded by the annual Catholic Charities Appeal of Philadelphia. Now each school receives direction and support from the Office of Catholic Education (OCE). The Archdiocese sets the tuition and the budget and 42 percent of the budget comes from Catholic Charities.

Benefits

The continuation of these programs is vital to the mission of the Church because they offer an opportunity to provide special education needs, while creating a God-centered atmosphere that is safe, loving and nurturing. The small class setting led by dedicated administration and certified teachers helps students reach their full potential. There is also support and guidance for the parents.

Challenges

Some parents cannot place their children in these Catholic schools because of tuition costs and limited tuition assistance. There is also an uncertain future due to budget constraints, limited funding, changing population and the reorganization of the parochial school system.

Needs

In addition to the parents' concerns, the schools have added standards to meet the needs of education including additional therapists for speech, behavioral, occupational, physical, sensory integration and music therapists. There is a need for a full-time social worker, technician for computer repairs and upkeep, and a marketing and development professional dedicated to the Special Education Schools.

Sources of Revenue

The Special Education Schools have a unique mission in our Archdiocese. Many of these special students come from poor families and need the financial assistance. However, funding is available through the state (60%) and the district (40%). It is our obligation to ensure that our students receive their share of entitled funding. In addition we must look for better funding streams. We need an advocate to go to the surrounding school districts and look into funding. If these schools close, the districts would have the legal responsibility to educate the children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the Commission recommends:

- Establishing an Archdiocesan Board for Special Education—a dedicated Board for Special Education will bring greater focus to this area and emphasize the Archdiocese's commitment to this area. This Board would be responsible for examining, evaluating and implementing the proposals set forth by the Blue Ribbon Commission.
- Offer additional funding from the foundation for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.
- Conduct a management analysis of the Schools of Special Education.

6 ► a plan for better governance

Early in the deliberations, the Commission learned a number of elementary schools in the Archdiocese have been on a path of diminishing enrollments year after year. Often by the time there is a concerted effort to help the school it is too late to turn things around. The schools would be much better served if the problems were addressed in a more timely and proactive manner. There are various reasons why this has not happened in the past, but the function of the Commission is to look forward, not backward. In that spirit, we offer the following recommendations for corrective action.

While it is important to maintain the unique characteristics of the individual schools, whether they are parish, regional or secondary, the Commission strongly recommends a revised governance model to bring more uniform management, oversight and focus to strategic issues such as enrollment, tuition and economic viability. The Governance process we recommend will assist and at times relieve pastors of some of the overwhelming day-to-day responsibilities for elementary schools without depriving the schools of high quality, professional leadership.

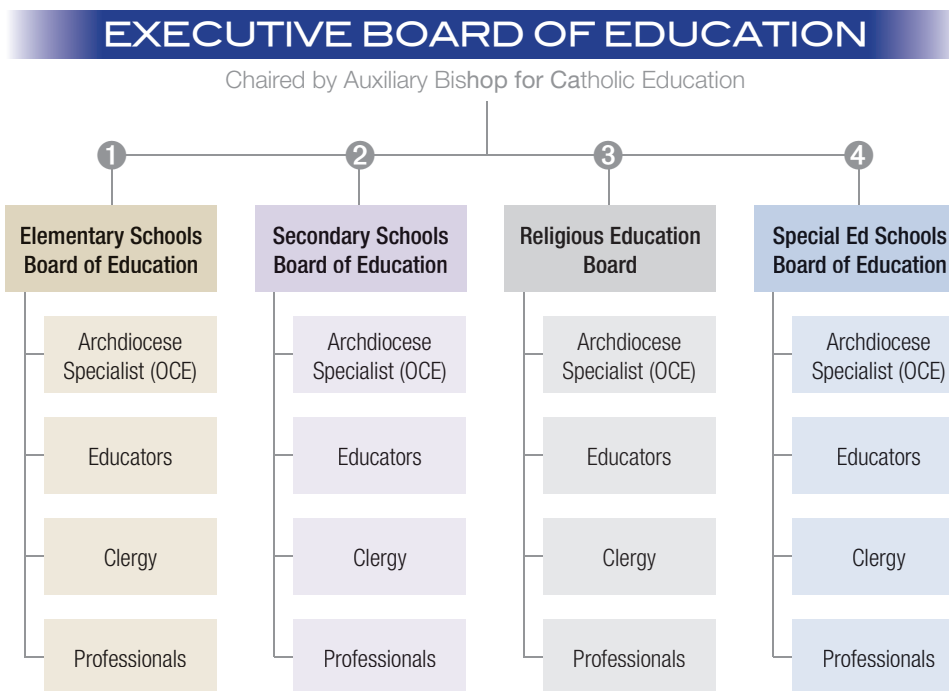
The Governance model consists of four stand-alone Boards for Elementary, Secondary, Religious Education and Special Education. Each board would report to an Executive Board of Education chaired by the Auxiliary Bishop for Catholic Education, or someone delegated by the Archbishop. The Secondary School Board has existed for many years and has functioned very well. We believe a similar structure for the other three areas should be replicated in order to bring more strategic focus, direction and emphasis on managing these institutions.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

EXECUTIVE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Executive Board of Education would be responsible for the successful coordination and execution of all strategies and governance with each of the four Boards of Education (Elementary, Secondary, Religious and Special Education). The reporting structure would look like this:



Structure: The Executive Board of Education would be structured as follows:

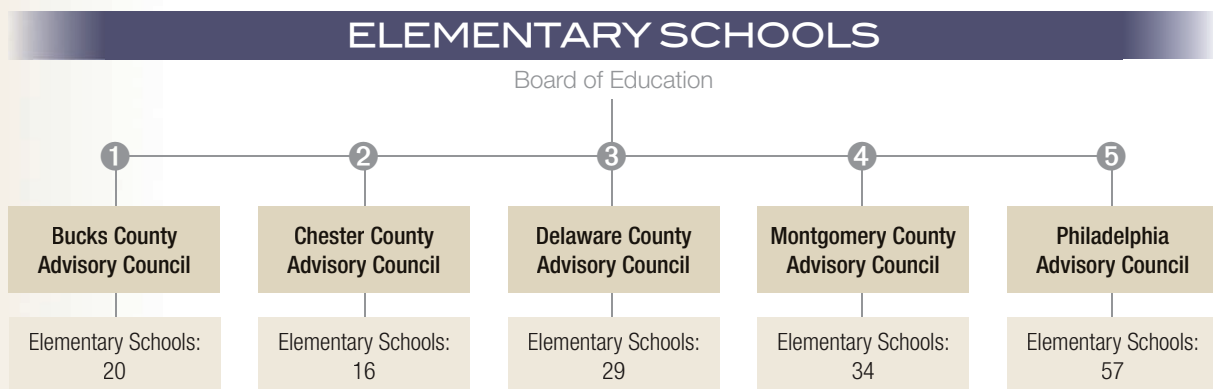
- **Chair:** Auxiliary Bishop for Catholic Education or the Archbishop's Delegate
- **One of the Co-Chairs from each of the four (4) Boards of Education** (Elementary, Secondary, Religious and Special Education)
- **Secretary for Catholic Education**
- **Chief Financial Officer (CFO)** of the Archdiocese
- **Professionals:** with planning, financial or marketing backgrounds

6 ► a plan for better governance

GOVERNANCE MODEL FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The Commission recommends the Archdiocese establish an Elementary School Board of Education.

This board would assist pastors and the OCE in developing an Archdiocesan-wide plan to assure the sustainability, affordability and accessibility of the elementary schools. The OCE will continue to assure the Catholic identity and academic excellence of the schools. A specialist from the OCE will be designated and become a member of the Elementary School Board of Education. The Elementary School Board would focus on the elementary schools providing short, mid and long-term strategic planning, development, regionalization, etc. for sustainable Catholic elementary schools. The Elementary School Board of Education would report to the Executive Board of Education. The reporting structure would look like this:



The Elementary School Board of Education will be structured as follows:

- **Co-Chair:** Layperson, appointed by Executive Board of Education
- **Co-Chair:** Clergy appointed by Auxiliary Bishop for Catholic Education
- **One of the Co-Chairs** from each of the (5) County Advisory Councils
- **Superintendent of Schools**
- **Specialist for Elementary Education:** from the OCE
- **School Principals:** 1-2 appointed by Executive Board of Education
- **Catholic University(s):** Senior Administrator
- **Professionals:** with planning, financial or marketing backgrounds
- **Parents:** 1-2

The Archdiocese should also establish a County Advisory Council in each county to provide strategic direction and recommendations to the elementary schools in each county and would focus on local issues and strategies that impact those elementary schools in their region.

Structure: The County Advisory Councils will be structured as follows:

- **Co-Chair:** Layperson appointed by Elementary Board of Education
- **Co-Chair:** Clergy from the county, assigned by the Regional Bishop
- **Parish Pastors:** (4)
- **Elementary School Principals:** (3)
- **Specialist for Elementary Education:** from the OCE
- **Catholic University(s):** Senior Administrator
- **Professionals:** with planning, financial or marketing backgrounds
- **Parents:** 1-2



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

6 ► a plan for better governance

GOVERNANCE MODEL FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

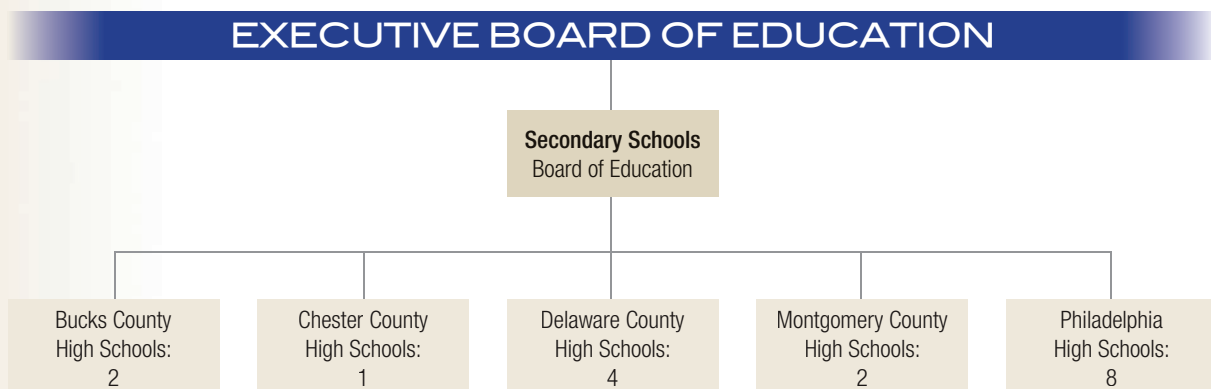
The Commission recommends the Archdiocese continue to utilize the current Board of Education structure to bring direct focus and ownership to the Secondary Schools while providing short, mid and long-term planning.

The Secondary School Board of Education will report to the Executive Board of Education and their focus will be to sustain the Secondary Schools. The Secondary Board of Education will balance and manage their budget. The Secondary School system would be responsible for maintaining a healthy balance sheet, which includes fund raising, tuition, capital projects, etc.

High School Advisory Councils: Today, each of the seventeen (17) high schools in the Archdiocese has an Advisory Council that focuses on local issues such as enrollment, development, strategic planning, capital projects, etc.

Structure: The Secondary School Board will be structured as follows:

- **Co-Chair:** Layperson, appointed by Executive Board of Education
- **Co-Chair:** Clergy appointed by Auxiliary Bishop for Catholic Education
- **Financial Officer for Secondary Schools**
- **Superintendent of Schools**
- **Specialist for Secondary Education:** from the OCE
- **Catholic University(s):** Senior Administrator
- **Professionals:** with planning, financial or marketing backgrounds



GOVERNANCE MODEL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The Commission recommends that the Archdiocese establish a Religious Education Board, which would be responsible for the development of Archdiocesan-wide strategies, related to Catechetical Formation.

A representative from the Catechetical Formation Executive Board of the Parish Directors, Coordinators and Administrators of Religious Education (PDCARE), which is the advisory group to the Office of Catechetical Formation, will serve as a member of the Religious Education Board.

The Religious Education Board will report to the Executive Board of Education. It would be structured as follows:

- **Co-Chair:** Parish DRE, appointed by Executive Board of Education
- **Co-Chair:** Clergy, appointed by Auxiliary Bishop for Catholic Education
- **Representative:** from the Religious Education Executive Board (PDCARE)
- **Superintendent of Schools**
- **Specialist for Religious Education:** from the OCE
- **Clergy:** 1-2, appointed by Executive Board of Education
- **Theological Advisor:** from the Seminary faculty or local Catholic university
- **Professionals:** with planning, financial or marketing backgrounds
- **Parents:** 1-2

EXECUTIVE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Religious Education Board



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

6 ► a plan for better governance

GOVERNANCE MODEL FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Blue Ribbon Commission recommends that the Archdiocese establish a Special Education Board of Education to work with and oversee the four Special Education Schools.

A dedicated Board for Special Education will bring greater focus to this area and emphasize the Archdiocese's commitment to its schools of Special Education and their particular mission. This Board would be composed of clergy, religious, laity, an educational specialist from the OCE as well as parents and professionals. The Special Education Board will report to the Executive Board of Education.

Structure of Special Education Board of Education:

- **Co-Chair:** Layperson, appointed by Executive Board of Education
- **Co-Chair:** Clergy from region, appointed by the Auxiliary Bishop for Catholic Education
- **Superintendent of Schools**
- **Specialist for Special Education:** from OCE
- **Principals:** (3) St. Lucy's, St. Katherine Day School and Our Lady of Confidence.
- **Teachers:** (4), one from each of the Special Education Schools
- **Development:** 1 member
- **Professionals:** with planning, financial or marketing backgrounds
- **Parents:** of Special Education students

EXECUTIVE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Special Ed Board of Education

(4) Special Education Schools

THE ROLE OF THE OFFICE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION (OCE)

The Commission recommends that the Office of Catholic Education serve as the management team for the various school organizations, report to the four Boards, and remain as one organization.

- The OCE would be responsible for day-to-day management, Catholic identity, curriculum, teacher development, etc. for each Board of Education.
- The OCE will provide one Specialist, with the appropriate educational qualifications and authority for each of the Boards: Elementary, Secondary School, Special Education and Religious.
- The Specialist assigned by the OCE will play a critical role for each of the four Boards.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

7 ► advocacy for government support

BACKGROUND

The Commission sought the opinion of the various and diverse stakeholders of the Archdiocesan schools. Some members of the Commission designed, distributed and analyzed an electronic survey in order to gather information from the identified groups (parents, guardians, teachers, administrators and staff). The participation from the stakeholders was better than anticipated and was extremely helpful in learning how Catholic Schools are perceived and how stakeholders feel about the future of Catholic education.

CURRENT SUPPORT AND CONCERNS

Parents and Guardians:

- Academically, students from the Archdiocesan schools are well prepared.
- Catholic schools are a safe environment for students.
- Parents and guardians whose children are now attending regional/merged schools were pleased – they perceived better resources in these schools.
- A major concern was the rising cost of tuition especially in difficult economic times.
- They would like more communication with and from the Office of Catholic Education.
- There was concern that Catholic schools are direly needed in the City of Philadelphia and low-income suburban areas because they offer the best options for the children.

Teachers, Administrators and Staff:

- They were proud of their service to Catholic education and felt strongly about the survival of their schools.
- They would like to be more involved in the discussions as how to ensure the future of Catholic education in the Archdiocese.
- They are very concerned about rising tuition costs.
- Like parents, they would also like more communication with and from the Office of Catholic Education.

ADVOCACY

When the formation of the Blue Ribbon Commission was announced, there was also movement in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to seek support for school choice by way of a voucher system. This was prompted by the change in the Governor's Office, the on-going financial recession, financial issues, safety issues and parental concerns in school districts throughout the State.

Elected officials from both major parties began to look at the issue of school choice and expansion of the Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program, better known as EITC. The Pennsylvania State Senate crafted Senate Bill 1, with bi-partisan sponsorship. The bill went through many revisions. It passed the Pennsylvania Senate on October 26, 2011.

Tremendous discussion and advocacy for Senate Bill 1 seemed to influence the Senate. Parents and guardians with children in poorly performing schools were very vocal about this bill. Private foundations, organizations and parent groups, along with many others, lobbied their elected officials on this bill. It is obvious that the voices of many who are concerned about the current conditions in public schools were heard. Unfortunately, SB1 failed by 10 votes in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Many of the advocacy organizations who worked tirelessly on SB1 are disappointed but not defeated. They plan to continue advocating for opportunity scholarships and the expansion of EITC. There is a strong resolve to introduce a school choice bill in 2012.

As the Commission went about its work, it became obvious that this bill would be a critical resource for parents who want to get their children out of under-performing schools and into private or parochial schools. It will also assist parents and guardians who are struggling to pay tuition.

Conversations with parents and guardians and from the responses on questionnaires demonstrate that individuals want to be helpful and be engaged. Parents and guardians would be an invaluable asset to the Archdiocese in contacting their elected officials to voice concern over how education monies are being spent, as well as being strong advocates for passage of a school choice bill. Elected officials pay attention to emails, letters and phone calls from constituents who are taking the time to voice their opinion. It is obvious that these are the people who vote and are leaders in their community.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™

7 ► advocacy for government support

We, the members of the Blue Ribbon Commission, strongly recommend the establishment of an Office of Advocacy within the Office of Catholic Education. School choice is a social justice issue. All parents and guardians, regardless of their economic status, should be able to choose a school that offers the child a good education in a safe environment with parental or guardian involvement. SB1 passed the Pennsylvania Senate, failed by only 10 votes in the House of Representatives and the Governor was poised to sign the bill. The climate is right. School choice will help maintain and grow our schools. Our archdiocese is geographically large and unbelievably diverse. This makes us unique in this Commonwealth. We owe it to our children to engage in the civic process and inform our legislators that school choice is a right so that not only the privileged can attend the best schools.

The outreach made by these parents and guardians is very valuable in this process and we feel strongly that the Archdiocese should accept their offer of advocacy. This would create stronger bonds between the families and the Office of Catholic Education. The support of stakeholders would also help parents and guardians better understand the policies and procedures needed to maintain and grow the system. For those attending our schools that are not of the faith, it would help them to understand our mission of maintaining our Catholic identity in our schools.

Based on our findings, the Blue Ribbon Commission recommends:

- Questionnaires should be completed on a regular basis to garner the sentiment and concerns of our stakeholders. We feel that this would be an effective way to get information that we may not otherwise obtain. Respondents should not be asked their particular affiliation.
- Parents, guardians, teachers and administrators should be asked to reach out to legislators to advocate for their rights.
- Clear direction should be given to parents who wish to advocate for passage of SB1 in the House of Representatives in 2012.
- Encourage parents of the school children and graduates of our Catholic schools to act as ambassadors for recruiting future students.
- Creation of an Office of Advocacy within the Office of Catholic Education.

8 ► implementation

Implementation of the recommendations in this report will be difficult and time consuming, and will require substantial assistance from both well-qualified volunteers and compensated professionals. At the same time, however, the Commission believes that timely implementation is very important, not only to get critical changes in place, but also to make it clear that the Archdiocese is intent on making the changes.

The Commission recommends that the Archbishop of Philadelphia appoint an Implementation Committee to oversee the process, and that the Executive Board of Education, referenced earlier in the document as Governance, be initiated for that purpose. Doing so would have at least two benefits:

1. It would utilize a Board that will have functionality beyond the implementation phase.
2. It would provide a mechanism to begin engaging and evaluating, and provide some new potential collaborators, both from among the laity and the clergy.

In conclusion, the Commission would like to thank Cardinal Rigali and Archbishop Chaput for having the courage and foresight to address the critical needs of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The Commission is committed to seeing the Catholic schools not only survive but also thrive. It believes its recommendations will help strengthen and reinvigorate the schools as well as the Parish Religious Education Programs. The Commission fully understands and cares deeply that some will experience pain as a result of certain decisions that will be made. However, it also believes that over time, this pain will be offset by the long-term gain. Implementing this plan will help ensure that Catholic schools continue to provide a high-quality education that meets the needs and challenges in the 21st century. The beneficiaries of these efforts will be the parents and students who remain committed to strong and excellent Catholic schools.



Sustainable Catholic Education
for All Who Desire It™



www.faithinthefuture.com