

Strategic Planning for Catholic Schools Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph Presentation of Key Findings

The U.S. bishops have stated, “We are convinced that Catholic schools continue to be ‘the most effective means available to the Church for the education of children and young people’ who are the future of the Church.”^{1} Recognizing this, the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph began a planning process in the spring of 2008 to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for its Catholic schools. The goal of this process and plan is to ensure the long-term viability and vitality of Catholic school education in the Diocese.

Extensive data was collected and analyzed from many sources in the Diocese and the broader community. On-site visits with the leadership of each diocesan, parish and consolidated school and numerous interviews with church leaders and others were conducted. An objective assessment and common understanding of the current reality related to Catholic schools in the Diocese is an essential element for plan development and decision-making. The key findings presented here will provide a basis for the subsequent recommendations and decision-making.

{1} *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, “Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium”, 2005.

Key Findings

A. Mission and Catholic Identity

1. During on-site visits, the Catholic identity of the schools was clearly evident from the visible religious images and symbols, the displays of student work and the participation of students in prayer and liturgy.
2. Pastors and principals spontaneously spoke about the mission of the school, its importance and their commitment to it.
3. Pastors and principals attested to the dedication and commitment of faculty and staff to the school’s mission. Conversations with teachers supported this.
4. Students taking the ACRE test scored above the national average in all areas tested related to Knowledge of the Faith and the Pillars of the Catechism.

B. Enrollment

1. Catholic elementary school enrollment declined by 1,336 students or 16% from 2002-03 to 2008-09. During this period five schools closed or merged.
2. Ability to recruit new students and retain those enrolled are both factors in the enrollment decline.
3. Except in the Central City pod, the majority of students enrolled in an elementary school are children of registered parishioners of the sponsoring parish(es). In schools where 100% of the students are parishioners, the parish is either a very rural parish or a tithing parish.
4. Since parishioners are the most likely potential students in most parishes, the decline in the number of baptisms and the declining school-age population will require attracting a greater market share of the available pool of students just to maintain enrollment at the current level.
5. PreK and early childhood programs are important sources of students and revenue.

6. Enrollment in the four diocesan high schools declined, while private high school enrollment increased from 2002-03 to 2008-09. Most of this enrollment increase can be attributed to the opening of Cristo Rey High School with enrollment at the three other private high schools remaining relatively stable despite the higher tuition charged at these schools.
7. While elementary school and private high school enrollment show some increase in Hispanic enrollment, it does not reflect the increase in this population.
8. About 5% of June 2007 Catholic elementary school graduates attend Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas. Almost all of these students attend Bishop Miage High School. Another 30% of elementary school graduates did not attend a Catholic high school. This number is greater than the 2007-08 freshman class of 345 of the four diocesan high schools.
9. Marketing efforts are strongest among the high schools, but overall marketing efforts are limited, lack consistency and focus almost exclusively on recruitment.
10. In 2007-08, 48% of elementary students enrolled in some form of formal religious education in the Diocese were in Catholic schools. The remaining 52% (nearly 8,000 students) were enrolled in parish religious education programs and are a potential pool of additional Catholic school students.
11. Significant pre-school and school-age population growth through 2020 is projected for Cass, Clay and Platte Counties where fewer Catholic schools are located.
12. Public school districts of Chillicothe, Chilton, Independence, Kansas City and St. Joseph have experienced elementary and high school enrollment declines since 2004-05 and no increase is projected through at least 2011-12.
13. Median family income in 7 of the 13 cities where Catholic elementary schools are located is below the average for the State of Missouri. The average elementary tuition for two students from a Catholic family under the tuition model is 8% of the average median family income for the State of Missouri.

C. Academic Program

1. Elementary and high schools offer a comprehensive program.
2. Most schools had up-to-date textbooks and other resources.
3. In many schools, consultants observed the use of technology by teachers and students to enhance the teaching/learning process. All schools had computer hardware and software and other resources for technology.
4. The FIRE program is a very valuable program which enables schools to educate students with special needs.
5. Teachers are credentialed and one-third have advanced degrees. Overall, principals indicated they were able to attract and retain good and dedicated teachers.
6. While schools must consistently plan for continuous academic improvement, student scores on the ITBS and ACT national standardized tests indicate student achievement above grade level on ITBS and above the State and national averages on ACT.

7. When enrollment declines, there is often a need to reduce expenses which can negatively affect the variety of programs offered, the educational resources available, the ability to update and maintain technology and the ability to attract and retain excellent teachers.

D. Finances

1. While the tithing model is the most prevalent of the three funding models used, there are many variations in the way it is implemented. This model has not provided sufficient income for some school parishes causing them to move to some type of tuition model. Each model has strengths and weaknesses.
2. While parishes sponsoring schools contribute a significant portion of their income to these schools, many parishes make no financial contribution to this ministry.
3. In some schools charging tuition, tuition increases have not been consistent and have not kept pace with increased expenses. The inconsistency makes it difficult for parents to reasonably predict the cost.
4. High school tuitions are considerably higher than elementary school tuitions and, except in the Northland, tithing to one's parish does not affect high school tuition rates.
5. The funding provided by the Central City School Fund has been about \$1.4 million each year since 2001-02. This funding is critical for central city parents to enable them to enroll their children. Without this assistance these schools could probably not attract sufficient enrollment and funding. There is indication that the need extends beyond the central city.
6. All schools rely on some level of fundraising. All high schools and a few elementary schools have a development program. Questions arise regarding the compatibility of these efforts with each funding model.
7. It appears that for most school parishes, contributions have not increased sufficiently to keep pace with the increase in parish support to the school. Some school parishes have outstanding debt to the Diocese.
8. While schools have established endowments with the Endowment Trust Fund for Catholic Education, few have any plan or strategy for regularly adding to the endowment.
9. The four diocesan high schools depend on tuition as their primary source of income. The availability of tuition assistance is critical to their ability to attract and retain students. Fundraising and development efforts are also important sources of income at the high schools.
10. The Diocese contributes \$678,000 to the support of the diocesan high schools. This allocation comes from the Bishop's Annual Appeal. The allocation has remained constant for many years.
11. Teacher salaries in the Diocese are 79% of the average starting and Step 5 salary of four major public school districts. The percent is higher at the Masters level. Salaries need to be sufficient to attract and retain excellent teachers.
12. Funding for needed capital repairs and improvements is projected to be at least \$15 million over the next ten years, but few parishes or schools have capital reserves or sufficient income to fund this.