

Archdiocese details plans for K-8 school on West Side

During a [conversation about urban education](#) with Bank of America Chairman and CEO Brian Moynihan April 26 at the Center Club, Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore surprised many in the room when he said the archdiocese hopes to establish on the city's West Side the first new Catholic school in the city in 57 years.

"Unfortunately, there is currently no Catholic school in West Baltimore," he said. "West Baltimore is a great part of our city, but it has a lot of needs to it."

He said the process is in the fundraising stage to build a pre-K to grade eight school for about 500 students. He proposes to name the school after Cardinal William H. Keeler, a former archbishop of Baltimore who was a great champion of education.

The "21st-century school" would be located near the University of Maryland BioPark with connections to other organizations in the community to help underserved students and families. He said he wants to put it in "a neighborhood that has a great chance of flourishing."

The project has \$13 million in pledges toward a goal of \$18.6 million.

James Sellinger, chancellor for education, said the archdiocese noted a void in Catholic education on the West Side as one of the take-aways from a master plan study for schools.

The archdiocese engaged consulting groups to look at the facilities and educational effectiveness of the city schools and those in the near-in perimeter.

“As a result of that master planning study, as you know, we closed a few schools,” Sellinger said. “However, we set up an ambitious plan to drive investments in the remaining schools across the study group.

“One of the things that we did realize when we did the study, was that there was a huge hole in the West Side of Baltimore and with the closure of Seton Keough High School, Holy Angels Catholic School, which is co-resident on that campus, needed a new home,” he said.

The plan to build a new school on the near West Side will be the new home for Holy Angels School, as well as help “plant a flag” in the neighborhood, Sellinger said.

The selected location for the planned Cardinal Keeler Regional Community School was formerly the site of a public school and is now vacant. The archdiocese worked with the City of Baltimore to identify the parcel, along Martin Luther King Boulevard between Lexington and Saratoga streets.

As part of the master planning study, “we evaluated our schools on their educational facility efficacy,” Sellinger said. “And when you think about 21st-century schools, you need to make sure we have the right resources and learning environments – cafeteria, gymnasium, science labs, maker spaces where we can put technology like robotics as well as 3D printing, and have all the resources in place for the school to flourish.”

He said the property will also have green space to provide students a place to have outdoor recreation.

He said it is important to link with civic partners such as the University of Maryland and the Southwest Partnership to position the school to address the needs of the community.

“It’s not only bringing the archdiocese with its education and its Catholic Charities and parishes together to support that area but it’s also bringing the skills to bear from University of Maryland, from their school of social services and pediatrics as well as the BioPark, which is really seeing strong growth of new companies in that area,” he said. “They’re looking for a nonpublic school alternative for their children.

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“It is well positioned with good partnerships that will help us make the school a success.”

One of those partnerships comes in the form of the lead gift from Jack Dwyer, chairman of the board of Capital Funding Group. “I have always believed that a solid education creates the foundation for our community’s future success through our youths,” Dwyer said in a statement to the Catholic Review.

“My wife Nancy and I decided to make a \$3 million commitment to the Archdiocese of Baltimore through my bank, CFG Community Bank, to start the fundraising in hopes to raise enough for the school. Equally important was to stimulate private investment in the West Side of Baltimore, which has been neglected for years,” he said.

Dwyer said he is passionate about the project because he was raised with a Catholic school education and that the schooling and after-school recreation helped keep him on a positive path.

Commitment to the community - not just location - drives the partnership between the school and the University of Maryland, Baltimore, according to Dr. Jay Perman, UMB president, noting, “we have a social conscience and our hearts are in it.”

“It’s not as if we’re on one side of Martin Luther King and everybody else that needs opportunity is on the other side. And, you know, it does matter to us what happens in

the community,” Perman said. “We’re part of that community and to the extent that education improves the community it will be good for our university.”

He said UMB and the archdiocese have not made any formal agreements about programming in the school, but that the university has arrangements in place with other West Baltimore schools that include the presence of social workers and social work students to provide services. “We have that kind of program in a variety of schools in Baltimore where we do things that deal with the social determinants of health, that deal with mental health,” he said.

Education and health go together, Perman said. “People who are educated – and well-educated starting in childhood – tend to be healthier individuals.”

The archdiocese won’t break ground for the new school until the full cost of the project is pledged or in hand, Sellinger said. The archdiocese also plans \$2.5 million endowments each for tuition assistance and for facility maintenance, so that the school does not have to carry any debt.

Tuition support will come from the archdiocese’s Partners in Excellence program and the continuation of the BOOST (Building Options and Opportunities for Students Today) scholarship program, which helps low-income families with tuition at nonpublic schools.

“If all the stars were to line up, hopefully we’d be ready for September of 2020” to open the school, Sellinger said.

The Cardinal Keeler School may be the boldest initiative to come out of the schools master plan, but some work has already begun. “We have quite a few schools that need to be upgraded to 21st-century standards,” he said.

He noted that St. Michael-St. Clement in Overlea was upgraded, including the total

renovation of Labouré Hall. Plans are underway for upgrades at St. Francis of Assisi and St. Casimir schools. Air conditioning has been added to St. Mark in Catonsville and Archbishop Borders in Baltimore.

“The needs are immense,” he said. “The master plan is a 10-year plan. It calls for the needs of about \$86 million of additional facility condition improvements as well as educational facility improvements.”

Sellinger said the schools office would work closely with the archdiocesan development team and parishes and schools to “fashion projects that will improve the educational facility efficacy.”

Updated June 4, 2018, to clarify that the university near the proposed campus is the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

Click below to listen to a Catholic Baltimore radio broadcast that discusses the Cardinal Keeler School and urban education.