

Archdiocese will not close any elementary schools this year

CHICAGO - All 217 Catholic elementary schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago will remain open for the 2007-08 school year.

According to a statement from the archdiocese, this is the first time in 45 years that none of the elementary schools in the archdiocese will close or consolidate. The only Catholic high school to close is Archbishop Quigley Preparatory Seminary; the closing was announced last September.

Chicago's archdiocesan schools face a projected financial deficit of \$10.2 million for the next school year. The archdiocese will provide \$8.2 million in operating grants to the schools, which includes \$2.2 million in addition to the \$6 million that the archdiocese usually allocates to the schools. The Big Shoulders Fund also will provide a \$2 million grant to schools in the neediest areas of Chicago.

Nicholas Wolsonovich, superintendent of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago, said Chicago Cardinal Francis E. George wanted to "make a commitment not to close the schools" and to show that archdiocesan Catholic schools "are here to stay."

With a decrease in enrollment at Catholic schools over the past several decades, the closure and consolidation of Catholic schools has become a fairly common occurrence. Wolsonovich said the closures are a loss not only for students and parents, but for the entire church.

"These schools are important to the educational mission of the Catholic church," he said. "We believe Catholic schools are tremendously important for passing on the faith."

But the schools still face significant financial needs and he said the archdiocese is working on "finding ways of generating the extra money."

He said it is difficult for the archdiocese to provide more money when the school budget inevitably increases.

“It is going to be hard for us to add more money every year,” he said, noting that schools need to develop other resources through transitional grants and establishing stronger school boards. Wolsonovich acknowledged that some schools, like those in the inner city, might always need grants because they have fewer local resources.

Genesis, the strategic plan for Catholic schools in the archdiocese, provides resources for the schools in the areas of Catholic identity, academic excellence and financial vitality, which he said “points us in the right direction” to address many of the challenges Catholic schools face.