

# **Catholic Schools Blue Ribbon Committee Holds First Meeting on Wednesday, March 18**

The Blue Ribbon Committee established by Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien to develop a strategic plan for the long-term sustainability of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, will hold its first meeting on Wednesday, March 18, at 2 p.m. at Archbishop Curley High School. Archbishop O'Brien and members of the Committee will be available to meet with the media from 2-2:30, prior to the start of the closed-door session.

Archbishop O'Brien announced the formation of the committee last month at meetings with Catholic parish and school leaders. The committee is comprised of some of the most well-known and highly-respected area leaders in education—Catholic and non-Catholic alike, business, government, and philanthropy. Mr. Frank Bramble, Sr., who serves on the board of directors for Bank of America, is the chair of the committee, which will meet monthly over the next 12-18 months.

Other Committee members include: Dr. Andres Alonso, Ms. Maureen Creel, Mr. James Davis, Dr. Nancy Grasmick, Dr. Joseph Hairston, Mr. Owen Knott, Rev. Michael Martin, OFM conv., Rev. Joseph Muth, Ms. Pamela Sanders, Dr. Mary Pat Seurkamp, Mr. James Stojak, Mr. Casper Taylor, Sr. Helen Wiegman, S.S.J., Mr. Thomas Wilcox, and Rabbi Lawrence Ziffer.

The Archbishop announced in November that enrollment in Archdiocesan schools was down over 1,000 students—twice as much as expected.

“Our goal will be to make Catholic education as affordable and accessible to as many Catholic youngsters as possible as well as to non-Catholics in some of our more impoverished communities,” the Archbishop said during last month’s consultations with priests and educators.

The Archbishop acknowledged that while the Committee is at work on a long-term

strategic plan, some tough decisions may need to be made on those schools facing immediate and critical financial and enrollment problems.

“We must continue to meet our ongoing responsibility of addressing the real and serious enrollment and financial challenges that pose an immediate threat to some of our schools,” Archbishop O’Brien said.

Dioceses throughout the country are struggling with many of the same challenges faced by schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. The Brooklyn Diocese recently announced the closure of 14 schools and the Archdiocese of New York lost nearly 6,000 students over the past year. In November, 2007, the Archdiocese of Washington announced the conversion of seven Catholic schools to charter schools.

In a November 2008 letter to Catholics in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Archbishop O’Brien noted that 46 of 64 Archdiocesan elementary and high schools lost 10 or more students and estimated the average loss for 46 Archdiocesan elementary schools experiencing a decline in enrollment in the past year at \$87,000.

“In sum, in spite of an estimated \$3.8 million which Central Services will have extended to our schools by the end of the current school year, well more than half our schools will still be in serious financial trouble,” he wrote.

Approximately 33,000 students in 86 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore save Maryland taxpayers over \$381 million in per-pupil education expenses every year. Ninety-seven percent of Catholic school students graduated from high school in the 2007-08 school year and 95 percent went on to attend college.

It is believed that the number of Catholic schools peaked in 1965 at more than 12,000. The National Catholic Educational Association estimates that in 1965, roughly half of all Catholic children in America attended Catholic elementary schools. Today, approximately 15 percent of Catholic children are enrolled in Catholic elementary schools.

For more information about Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, visit [www.archbalt.org](http://www.archbalt.org).