

‘Collaborative model’ is wave of future for school governance

When the academic year kicks off this fall, approximately six Catholic schools will be operating as “archdiocesan collaborative schools” – a new administrative model that archdiocesan leaders see as the wave of the future.

The model provides stronger ties to the superintendent, who has the authority to hire, supervise and dismiss principals at participating schools. Under the model, a school board acts as a deliberative body on policy issues like tuition, budget and admission policies. The principal addresses academic issues, while a pastor or pastoral life director acts as a canonical representative responsible for Catholic identity issues concerning celebration of sacraments, liturgy and Catholic outreach.

“I see an advantage in having a more tight-knit system,” said Monsignor Robert L. Hartnett, executive director of the Blue Ribbon Committee, the archdiocesan Catholic education panel that promoted the collaborative governing model.

“Under this system, you have people with an academic background handling academics, business people handling business and pastoral people handling pastoral issues,” he said. “It plays to their strengths.”

The archdiocesan collaborative model is one of four governing systems for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. The others are “parish,” “inter-parish,” and “independent” Catholic schools.

Under the parish model, the pastor is responsible for hiring, supervising and dismissing the principal. A school board advises the principal, who acts as the operating officer of the school, Monsignor Hartnett said.

The inter-parish model is typically governed by a board of lay people or a board of pastors with responsibility for the principal.

Independent Catholic schools are generally governed by a deliberative school board and are independent of archdiocesan administrative structures. Monsignor Hartnett

noted, however, that independent Catholic schools must meet certain archdiocesan standards in order to identify themselves as Catholic.

Monsignor Hartnett, archdiocesan executive director of schools planning, said the archdiocese would like to see parish schools convert to archdiocesan collaborative schools in the coming years.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel School in Essex is among the initial schools to adopt the new model. The school formerly operated separate elementary and high schools. Those are now united under the leadership of Kathy Sipes, the newly appointed president. Lisa Shipley will head the “lower school” encompassing grades pre-K-5 and Christopher Ashby will head the upper school, which includes grades 6-12.

Monsignor Hartnett, pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, said the collaborative model should streamline many functions inside schools by combining the benefits of centralization and governance, while keeping some successful elements of the parish model.

The Blue Ribbon Committee also recommended the creation of an Archdiocesan Catholic School Board, which Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien will chair. He will appoint inaugural members of the board and the members of the archdiocesan collaborative schools boards. He will also approve the appointment of all school board chairs in the collaborative schools.