

Consortium plans education summit

Approximately one year after its launch, the Mid-Atlantic Catholic Schools Consortium will gather educational leaders from across the region and around the country for a Sept. 19 summit designed to help shape the future of Catholic education in the Mid-Atlantic.

The invitation-only event will be held at the University of Maryland University College Inn and Conference Center in Adelphi – bringing together 160 clergy, educators, laity, benefactors and national experts to discuss four issues: Catholic identity, funding, leadership and governance.

The Annapolis-based consortium is a collaborative body made up of the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Dioceses of Arlington, Richmond, Wheeling-Charleston and Wilmington. The dioceses serve more than 115,000 students in more than 340 Catholic schools.

“The summit will allow our local participants to meet with some of the best minds across the country and come up with recommendations to move us forward,” said Dr. Mary Ellen Hrutka, the consortium’s executive director.

Dr. Hrutka said she expects practical proposals will flow out of the summit that will be enacted in the coming years. Reports will be prepared that flesh out the ideas discussed at the summit, she said.

Within the last year, the consortium has already taken steps to strengthen Catholic education and leverage the consortium’s size to save money for Catholic schools.

The consortium has received grants from foundations and is working to help educators navigate the bureaucracy and take advantage of the federal e-rate program that allows non-profit private schools to receive discounted telecommunications services, Dr. Hrutka said.

A pilot project focused on the e-rate program will provide training for principals in the Archdiocese of Baltimore to make sure they know how to use the e-rate program, she said. The project will eventually be expanded to other dioceses.

“It’s part of our strategy to make sure all of our students receive every public benefit to which they are entitled,” said Dr. Hrutka, noting that the consortium also plans to help dioceses become more active in securing state benefits in their legislatures.

The Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington, together with the Diocese of Wilmington have been very successful in the last several years winning support for a state textbook/technology program benefiting students in nonpublic schools. Those kinds of efforts could be replicated elsewhere, she said.

A leadership institute to help train future administrators is being formed, and a Web site has been established for the consortium, she added.

An energy-saving program used in the Archdiocese of Baltimore that helped schools purchase energy at a discount was expanded to other dioceses, according to Dr. Ronald J. Valenti, superintendent of Baltimore Catholic schools and chair of the consortium's board of directors.

In August, the consortium published a 17-page monograph, "Courageous Renewal: Catholic Schools in the Mid-Atlantic Region," which lays out the challenges facing Catholic schools and commits the consortium to meeting those challenges.

Dr. Valenti said the consortium is being watched closely by diocesan leaders in other parts of the country.

"It's a unique kind of movement that doesn't exist anywhere else," he said. "It's a way of working collectively to address our common challenges."

For more information, visit www.midatlanticcsc.org.