

# Letters to go to families preparing them for consolidations

Families of children attending Archdiocese of Baltimore schools are being prepared for potential major transitions.

As Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien plans to announce the reconfiguration and consolidation of schools in the first week of March, a letter is being sent to families alerting them of news about registration fees. The letter is from Dr. Ronald J. Valenti, superintendent of Catholic schools, and Monsignor Robert L. Hartnett, pastor of Essex's Our Lady of Mount Carmel and executive director of schools planning.

"Because it is understandable that the thought of consolidation may raise concerns about the future of our schools, we are communicating with parents of all new and returning students of every school to assure them that students affected by the consolidations are guaranteed an enrollment at a designated Catholic school," the letter says. "To that end, students who have already registered and, who, because of a consolidation need to register at another Catholic school, will have the initial registration fee applied toward the fee at their new Catholic school."

The letter went on to say that "all registration fees paid for a student impacted by the consolidation and who chooses not to remain in a Catholic school, will be fully refunded."

Archdiocesan officials said such registrations fees are typically not refundable.

A similar letter is being sent to families of new students as well.

Mark Pacione, associate executive director of schools planning, said every school was asked to send the letter to families and was given the option of including it in its registration packets for the 2010-2011 school year.

Pacione said that the archdiocesan schools "have a lot of extra seats," and can accommodate students who transition to another Catholic school.

“We know the parents are going to be receiving materials from their schools asking them to re-register for next year,” Pacione said. “We want parents to feel comfortable in saying that ‘Catholic education is still a terrific option for my son or daughter.’ And it is. But, we’re changing, and we don’t want to ignore that. We don’t want our parents to guess.”

Monsignor Hartnett told pastors and school administrators in October that some schools would be consolidating. The total number of schools affected has not been announced.

Archbishop O’Brien has written several columns for The Catholic Review that emphasized major changes were coming. The archdiocese also hosted 10 different listening sessions with parents and teachers at various schools to discuss potential changes and to hear recommendations.

Pacione said the consolidation issue is being worked on by the office of schools planning.

The archbishop formed a blue ribbon committee of education, business and government leaders to develop a plan for Catholic schools early last year. The committee will review the consolidation plan and continue to hone its strategic plan to make Catholic schools stronger.

Enrollment at Catholic schools dropped seven percent from the previous year.

The archbishop has said repeatedly that he wants to make Catholic education affordable and available to as many children as possible. Pacione said many people are coming together to make that goal a reality.

“We’re getting closer every day,” Pacione said. “It’s a long, hard road.”