

New Year, New Beginnings

The 2010-11 Catholic school year has begun as most of our schools are now open, a cause for much rejoicing and great excitement for students, teachers, parents (especially so!) and for all of us who value Catholic education. It is especially true this school year because of the tremendous promise offered by the efforts of so many over the past year who generously labored to strengthen our Catholic school system so children for current and many future generations could receive the benefits of a Catholic school education.

Some of the benefits offered by both the consolidation plan, though painful, as well as the Blue Ribbon Committee's Strategic Plan, have already begun to bear fruit.

As noted in greater detail in this issue of The Catholic Review (see Page 3), several Catholic schools have seen their enrollment increase dramatically due to the consolidation. Where a year ago we had multiple schools in close proximity operating at a fraction of their capacity, remaining schools have seen a spike in enrollment, thereby stabilizing Catholic schools in that area.

We remain saddened for students and communities whose schools were forced to close. However, we are also gratified that our desired goal of strengthening existing Catholic schools has been met in many parts of the Archdiocese. Schools like St. Clement Mary Hofbauer in Rosedale, Our Lady of Victory in Arbutus, Cardinal Shehan in Northeast Baltimore, St. Augustine in ElkrIDGE and St. Philip Neri in Linthicum, are all on more solid footing today and are poised to lead our system's rebirth.

Just as important as dealing with the under-capacity that was dragging down many of our schools, have been the programmatic changes recommended to keep our schools not only competitive, but at the head of the pack.

Educators from St. Ambrose School recently returned from extended training for the Northwest Baltimore school's New American Academy educational model. Based on the program developed by Shimon Waronker as a doctoral student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, this program utilizes team teaching and

differentiated instruction to ensure that every child learns according to his/her needs and abilities.

The Archdiocese's first dual language program, to begin this fall at Archbishop Borders School in Highlandtown, aims to graduate each student with fluency in both English and Spanish. When our students leave Archbishop Borders, they will be prepared to learn, work and live in our increasingly diverse society.

Another positive sign for our school system is the operation of our first bus system – a new foray made possible through the generosity of Dan Schuster – and the opening of the first new elementary school in Baltimore since 1961. I was privileged to receive a tour of Holy Angels Catholic School, situated on the lower level of Seton Keough High School. Built in the 1960s to accommodate over 1,100 students, Seton Keough uses less than half the space in this mammoth and well-constructed building. Building on the collaborative and welcoming spirit that was palpable on the day I visited – parents were coming in to register during my brief time there – Holy Angels and Seton Keough look to forge a dynamic and successful partnership that could become a model for other schools in years to come.

“Holy Angels Catholic School is developing into a great place for our students and their families,” Kathleen Filippelli, principal of Holy Angels, said. “Faculty members have been working unbelievably long hours to prepare a sanctuary for our incoming students so that the children can pray, work and play together in a peaceful environment. We have met every challenge with a dedication to the gospel message of Jesus Christ and a commitment to the mission of our school. Holy Angels Catholic School is really going to be a wonderful place!”

The spirit present in Southwest Baltimore is alive throughout our Archdiocese. I have witnessed this personally over the summer months and look forward to seeing it on the faces of the children we serve as I join them in celebrating “opening day.”

Please join me in praying for our students, educators, staff and parents as they commit themselves to a year of faith, love and learning.