

New York archdiocesan Catholic high schools to become self-sufficient

NEW YORK - The New York Archdiocese has announced that the 10 archdiocesan Catholic high schools it operates will become self-sufficient, effective with the start of the 2009-10 school year in September.

Each school will be under the control of a local board of directors that also will be responsible for the school's funding and operation.

Timothy McNiff, archdiocesan superintendent of schools, made the announcement to school parents in a Jan. 23 letter.

"These high schools, like all Catholic high schools in the country, are becoming fairly complicated business operations," Mr. McNiff said in an interview with Catholic New York, the archdiocesan newspaper.

"The schools that seem to be doing very well in that respect are private Catholic high schools that have incorporated local school boards who have accepted the responsibility for the operations of the schools," he added.

Mr. McNiff said the schools will have "two layers of governance." The boards will operate the schools, but the archdiocese will continue to own each school's buildings and grounds and "will continue to support the capital needs" of the school plants.

"I think that the archdiocese will always, to the extent that it can, help the schools in the future," Mr. McNiff said.

He said teachers and other employees at each school will remain. Because each school will become "a new corporation," teachers will have to reapply for their positions but "the schools will be looking to rehire the existing staff," he said.

No change will occur in the day-to-day operation of the schools, academically or with

sports and other activities.

He also stressed that independent Catholic schools are doing well nationwide.

“When you survey Catholic high schools across the country, by and large the schools that seem to be excelling are private Catholic high schools where there is the establishment of a local school board,” he said.

“In the archdiocese, we are moving toward that type of a model,” he added. “I am confident that our diocesan high schools will have the same benefits.”

The Boston Archdiocese made a similar move in 2004, making its eight archdiocesan-sponsored high schools financially independent.

Karen Ristau, president of the National Catholic Educational Association in Washington, said the shift to self-sufficient Catholic high schools is “more common than not throughout the country.”

She stressed that schools which raise their own funds and have their own school boards are still strongly connected to their dioceses even though they are described as being independent.

The biggest challenge for Catholic high schools today is financial, Ms. Ristau told Catholic News Service Jan. 30. She said school officials, concerned about how to keep enrollment steady in the midst of an economic downturn, are looking carefully at anything in their budgets that can be trimmed in order to keep students.

When she thinks about the economy’s possible impact on schools, Ms. Ristau keeps in mind the image of Catholic schools devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

“Folks in the Gulf Coast kept those schools open; we can do this across the country,” she said.