

# **The Archdiocese of Baltimore Announces Rebirth of Catholic Schools**

Archbishop Edwin O'Brien announced plans to revitalize Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore at a press conference held earlier today at the Catholic Center. The plan, detailed in a new report entitled, "Preserving the Tradition, Transforming the Future: The Rebirth of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore," is a culmination of more than 12 months of analysis and input from 1,500 individuals. The report announces the consolidation 13 schools, the creation of several new academic programs and initiatives, the enhancement of educator professional development, and the initiation of a new model for how Catholic schools are governed.

"The Archdiocese of Baltimore remains as committed to the education of children-all children-as it was when the nation's first Catholic school opened on Baltimore's Poca Street more than two centuries ago," said Archbishop O'Brien. "In order to do that, however, we need to address a number of factors-mostly demographic and economic-that have long affected our schools to preserve the history of Catholic education and transform its future."

Declining school populations, measured by the 10,000 open seats in the Archdiocese's Catholic schools, rising operating costs (due to the reduced number of nuns, priests, and brothers), and the recent economic downturn have threatened the stability of some schools. For years, the Archdiocese has been supporting families and schools to manage these challenges. Since 1994, the Archdiocese has provided some \$21.5 million in scholarships to more than 21,000 students. Over the past two years alone, the Archdiocese has provided over \$10 million in scholarship aid and other direct financial assistance to students and schools.

To address the financial and human needs inherent in this situation, Archbishop O'Brien called together a team of esteemed, dedicated leaders from the fields of education, philanthropy and business more than a year ago to begin examining the

Archdiocesan school system from top to bottom. They were charged with offering strategic recommendations for sustaining a vibrant Catholic school system.

In addition, the Archbishop formed the Office of Schools Planning to support the work of this Committee and to develop a consolidation plan that addresses under-capacity. The Office was also asked to recommend new academic programs and initiatives that will help Catholic schools remain as attractive options for parents in the communities they serve.

The overall goal of this two-tiered approach was to make Catholic education, “as affordable and accessible to as many Catholic youngsters and others from our more impoverished communities as possible,” the Archbishop said in February 2009.

Accepting the recommendations of the Office of Schools Planning, Archbishop O’Brien announced that the following schools, 12 elementary (K-8) and one high school, will be consolidated at the end of the current school year:

- Ascension School, Halethorpe
- St. Bernardine School, Baltimore
- The Cardinal Gibbons School, Baltimore
- St. Clare School, Essex
- Fr. Charles Hall Elementary and Middle Schools, Baltimore
- Holy Family School, Randallstown
- St. Katharine School, Baltimore
- Mother Mary Lange School, Baltimore
- Our Lady of Fatima School, Baltimore
- St. Rose of Lima School, Baltimore
- Sacred Heart of Mary School, Dundalk
- Shrine of the Sacred Heart School, Baltimore
- St. William of York School, Baltimore

Together, the consolidated schools account for 50% of the approximately 10,000 empty seats in the Archdiocese’s classrooms, and are currently operating with combined debts totaling over \$5 million.

The Archdiocese has identified 32 Catholic elementary schools with the cumulative

capacity to receive all students from consolidated elementary schools at an average distance of fewer than three miles and with an average tuition that is \$132 cheaper than the average tuition at consolidated schools

“Our goal throughout this process has been to make our schools more affordable and more accessible by making them run more efficiently and by investing in new programs and in our facilities to make them more competitive. We feel this plan accomplishes this goal,” added the Archbishop.

### **New Programming**

Monsignor Robert Hartnett, Executive Director of the Office of Schools Planning, announced plans to create several new academic programs and initiatives including a dual language program, a science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) program at four Catholic elementary schools, and a Montessori primary program in partnership with Loyola University’s Center for Montessori Education.

The plan also calls for the creation of four Community Schools. These Catholic elementary schools will extend the breadth of their service to students and families by offering additional opportunities and services for students and their families. In addition to providing care for children before- and after- school and through summer programs, we will also be working with Catholic Charities and other community partners to assess service needs.

### **Blue Ribbon Committee on Schools**

The announcements followed a year-long study by the Archdiocese. This extensive feedback from stakeholders will also inform the Blue Ribbon Committee on Catholic Schools’ strategic plan development. Mr. Frank Bramble, a Director of the Bank of America Corporation, and Chair of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Catholic Schools, previewed some of these initiatives, which will be shared in greater detail when his Committee delivers its Strategic Plan to the Archbishop in June.

The Committee’s recommendations focused on four elements of Catholic schools: academic excellence, Catholic identity, governance and stewardship. Among their recommendations, the Committee is calling for the creation of an Archdiocesan

Catholic School Board, as well as a new governance model to assure greater school oversight and collaboration with pastors. Stressing the importance of school leadership, the Committee also will recommend collaboration with religious communities and with local Catholic universities to provide needed professional development for current and aspiring Catholic school administrators.

Addressing the Archbishops' goal of making Catholic schools more affordable and accessible to students and his desire that all parishes financially support Catholic schools, Mr. Bramble announced that the Committee supports expanding tuition assistance to students across the Archdiocese and is preparing a recommendation on enlisting parish support for schools.

### **Economic Impact of Catholic Schools**

Mr. Bramble also shared the findings of a study conducted by local economist, Mr. Anirban Basu, President of Sage Policy Group. Mr. Basu's analysis found that there are significant economic benefits to Catholic school students, their families and to the state and local economy. The report found that Catholic school graduates have much higher earnings—approximately \$225,000 over a work life—and are expected to generate nearly \$400 million in tax revenue over their careers. In addition, Catholic school graduates also support more jobs, income formation, and business sales in the broader economy and are likely to emerge as societal leaders, the study found. Additionally, Mr. Basu's analysis determined that Catholic school students save state and local governments over \$380 million each year by reducing capacity requirements of public school (preK-12) systems across the jurisdictions where Catholic schools in the Archdiocese operate.

There are currently 82 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore serving over 31,000 students. Ninety-seven percent of Catholic school students graduate from high school, 95 percent attend college and 100 percent of Catholic schools participate in community outreach. Students in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese exceeded the national average on 2009 standardized test scores in every age group tested, with most scoring in the top third of students nationally.

For more information on the plan, please visit [A Place to Grow](#).