

## Proposal for Moving our Catholic Schools Forward

*Parishes included in this proposal:* Saint Michael, Saint Peter, and Saint Paul in St. Cloud; Saint Joseph in St. Joseph and Saint Joseph in Waite Park

*Schools included in this proposal:* Saint Joseph Lab School, St. Joseph; Saint Joseph School in Waite Park; Saints Peter, Paul and Michael primary campus in St. Cloud; Saints Peter, Paul and Michael middle school campus in St. Cloud.

This proposal is the result of work undertaken by the Catholic Schools Study Group. The membership consisted of two members from each of the five parishes: Gene Funk and Dave Borgert, Saint Michael; Lynn Kaster and Mark Koch, Saint Paul; Brenda Markman and Harry Marso, Saint Peter; Laverne Feld and Matt Symalla, Saint Joseph in Waite Park; Mark Gohmann and Susan Sink, Saint Joseph in St. Joseph. The priests involved in this study and conversations are: Fr. Alan Wielinski; Fr. Joseph Feders, OSB; Fr. Bernie Gruenes and Fr. Matthew Kuhn. The chair position was split by Dave Borgert and Susan Sink.

### **Introduction**

The members of the Catholic Schools Study Group are pleased to present this proposal for the future of our Catholic schools. Throughout this project we have struggled to find a way to maintain what we love and value in our Catholic schools while facing some tough demographic and economic realities. We came together as representatives of our parishes, concerned with the needs of our parishes and responsible to the parishioners who continue to make funding Catholic schools a priority in their giving. We were not disinterested parties but chosen to be objective enough to do what is in the best interest of the parishes and, indeed, the schools. No one wants to see our schools struggle, dwindle and close. Our goal was to put forth a vision for a school system that will thrive and become a centerpiece of local education, a top choice for parents in our parishes and the local community far into the future.

The conversations we have had, especially with parent groups, have not been easy. We have been moved by the passion and commitment of parents and parishioners to their individual schools. However, in order to move forward and build on our strengths, conversations need to take place in the parishes and schools that reflect respect, patience and honesty. In our process, the study group shared information as fully as we were able, as quickly as we were able to understand and shape it. It is our sincere hope that parents, faculty and staff, as well as members of all five parishes and leaders in the community, will continue this conversation with respect and patience, focusing on the future and what we can build together, finding ways to preserve the quality of our schools while transitioning to a single school system with multiple campuses.

Additionally, although the members of this study group stand behind the feasibility of this option at this time, we cannot foresee the future. The board, administrators and pastors need to be empowered to adapt to the realities as they unfold in order to strengthen the overall position of the school created by this proposal.

## The Situation Facing our Schools

Our schools are facing the challenges of sustaining enrollment and financing education in an area where the number of school-age children is decreasing and costs of education continue to rise. Our parishes are stretched to meet the needs of all age groups while providing a Catholic school education for a dwindling number of students.

	<b>Percentage change 2000-01 to 2010-11 school year</b>
Combined enrollment K-6	-36%
Combined enrollment K-8	-44%
Combined expenses	+26%
Average expense per student K-8	+123%

## Our Goal

Provide access to affordable Catholic education for the school-age children in our five parishes for the long term. To do this, our proposal recommends ways to work together to increase efficiency and identifies ways to increase revenues by identifying partners and increasing enrollment.

## Our Vision

Our schools must:

- remain Roman Catholic and continue to integrate that identity into their curriculum and programs;
- maintain measurable, high academic standards;
- engage in more strategic planning for their financial future;
- engage in a much higher level of collaboration;
- find new ways to promote success and recruit students beyond the parish level through marketing;
- identify strong individual and corporate partners through development efforts who will provide charitable giving and sponsorship of programs;
- make efficient use of their facilities and plan for the long term.

Given these realities and our charge, the Catholic Schools Study Group considered a total of five options:

- A. Consolidate administration and accounting functions, merge schools as one system with a single identity and continue to operate on four campuses.
- B. Consolidate to three campuses with the possibility of using the fourth campus for privatized programs (daycare, afterschool programs and extracurricular activities).
- C. Set benchmarks for revenue and enrollment for the schools to reach with the option of consolidation if those benchmarks aren't met in three years.
- D. Close all schools and use parish resources to invigorate faith formation program.
- E. Continue the schools as they are with no changes.

### **Benchmarks for Evaluating Success**

- Grow and maintain class size of 15-20 for K-2 and 20-28 for 3-6;
- Structured reduction of the parish subsidy so that parishes can address other needs;
- Build endowments to a healthy level to provide scholarships;
- Maintain an operating budget not dependent on fundraising;
- Utilize fundraising for endowments and extracurricular activities only.

### **This Catholic Schools Study Group recommends Option A: Consolidation of Administration**

- Consolidate the schools under one identity: i.e., All Saints School
- Continue to operate at four campuses
- Appoint a single school board with representation from all five parishes
- Hire a single senior administrator (principal or superintendent)
- Hire a marketing/development person to build awareness and raise funds
- Consolidate business manager and accounting functions in one office
- Establish a single tuition structure
- Establish a single salary structure
- Coordinate to offer a single curriculum
- Consolidate purchasing for materials, lunch programs, etc.
- Open enrollment to all parishioners to any of the schools
- Maximize the capacity of our preschool programs
- Maximize the capacity of our after-school programs
- Increase collaboration with Cathedral High School for curriculum development, staff development and access to database and other tools for fundraising and marketing to provide for a more seamless educational experience from K-12 for our students

*Note on 7-8 grades:* Saints Peter, Paul and Michael currently run a middle school. It is the understanding of our study group that the pastors and educators in the St. Cloud area have been engaging in discussions regarding the future of middle school education. Reports from that discussion suggest they prefer consolidating 7-8 grades into a single school. We heard concern from parents about the level of contact between middle school students and high school students at John XXIII. We recognize the value of having a single junior high, and sincerely hope that attention will be paid to this concern. The study group supports consolidation of 7-8 grades to John XXIII. We believe the St. Cloud area schools need to move to a model of increased collaboration at all levels, and we do not want to compete with John XXIII for students. We hope our consolidated school will benefit from increased collaboration with Cathedral High School and John XXIII.

The projected savings achieved by this proposal according to current figures is \$40,000-\$60,000. In other words, investment will continue at the current levels or even increase slightly in the near term, with the belief in returns through increased efficiencies and enrollment increases.

### **Investments required by this proposal**

To be successful, the option outlined in this proposal requires:

- Investment in a marketing/development professional to raise funds and identify private companies and/or individuals to participate financially in our Catholic schools. This person could also take the lead on integrating the three schools in terms of identity and outreach (communications);
- A concerted effort by parents, staff and parishioners in forging a joint identity, including visits to all the schools, efforts to identify and maintain the strengths of individual schools and ongoing opportunities for collaboration and social interaction.

### **Timeline for implementing this proposal**

- Identify and appoint a new board for the single entity to be in place by February 2011.
- Recruit a strong leader to serve as the chief administrator with the goal of having a person in place by March 2011. We recommend an expanded search with assistance in this process from the diocesan office of Catholic Education Ministries (CEM).
- Organize under a single structure (corporation).
- The business office should set up a single system of accounting to track costs, contributions and expenses, and a formula for parish contributions and tuition should be established as soon as possible. A single tuition structure should be put in place for the 2011-12 school year.
- Make a clear plan for managing staff consolidation.
- Organize a unity/transition committee to oversee and plan the details of the consolidation.
- Organize a series of opportunities for parents and children from all five parishes to interact and learn about the various campuses in Spring 2011.
- Educate the public in a positive way about the consolidation plans.
- Hire a professional to oversee marketing, recruitment and development to be in place by August 2011.
- Engage parents and staff with Cathedral High School, CEM, and local leaders to develop a vision for a successful Catholic school system in the St. Cloud area.

It is the desire of the Catholic Schools Study Group that the Catholic schools in the St. Cloud area thrive, not just survive. This has been accomplished in other mid-sized city systems throughout the country. With the strong Catholic heritage and identity in our area, we believe we can provide a quality Catholic education that is identifiably Roman Catholic and academically excellent. It will take a unified effort and a single vision.

We believe there is a window of opportunity of three years in which to implement real change, before some or all of our schools will be forced to close. We would like to use this time constructively, to build a system that is a model for the rest of the diocese and the state, of how Catholic schools can remain vibrant and important choices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.