



January, 2020

Dear Parents,

We hope you and your family enjoyed a blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year. It is encouraging to begin a new decade with the blessings of family and friends.

It has been a few months since we provided an update about the progress of the Des Moines metro Catholic schools regionalization plan. Much has been happening. Our subcommittees continue to meet to finalize recommendations. During the months of October and November we hosted a parent meeting at every school. The meeting was to give a picture of the current state of the schools revealed by the data and information collected during the strategic planning process, and then a list of recommendations and solutions recommended for a regional plan for the Des Moines area Catholic schools. At the end of each presentation we held a Q & A. If you were not able to attend one of the twelve meetings, you can view the presentation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-7ojUzHL8I>. A consolidated Q and A from the meetings is included at the end of this letter. We want to thank the principals for their assistance in setting up and attending these meetings.

Superintendent Donna Bishop, Dr. Dan Ryan and Dr. Jerry Deegan met with Bishop Joensen and the pastors of the Des Moines region in November, December and January. Meeting monthly has been a huge help with sharing progress with them and getting their feedback. We look forward to more meetings going forward.

The eight subcommittees – formation, governance, academics, finance, enrollment management/marketing, advancement, and diverse community engagement – are in various stages of the final process of making recommendations to the Bishop Joensen. We want to ensure Bishop Joensen has time to process the recommendations and get his and the pastors feedback as we work to finalize some key recommendations to help move the plan along. As we stated in our parent meetings, this is a multi-year plan with some facets of the plan related to the individual schools sites while other areas are applicable to all.

Our school principals and teachers are working together to determine best practices in assessment, textbooks and resources, curriculum, and professional development. Their work will develop practices that will be shared by all staff across the schools.

The Faith Formation subcommittee has made recommendations to engage students and families in their faith journey in our schools and in our parishes. The partnership of parents, schools, parishes and pastors in forming our children is key to their faith foundation and ongoing, developing faith life.

A new hire in the Diocesan schools office is focusing on enrollment management and marketing and is working with individual schools to develop best practices and a consistent message across the metro area Catholic schools and all schools across the diocese.

We are meeting monthly with business managers from all twelve schools and feel we have made great progress on getting a consistent vocabulary of terms used in the budgeting and reporting process, a timeline for budgeting with common dates and processes for recommending a budget, and a study of purchasing of material and services to find areas where purchasing as a group would save money.

Staff of the Southwest Iowa Foundation of the Diocese, with the help of school principals and professional staff, are recruiting volunteers from all schools to support and inform fund raising processes at each site and create a stronger development and advancement process at each school. The goal is to help coordinate and enhance the messaging and fund raising taking place presently at our schools.

We will keep you posted as we continue to make progress on the plan and share more specifics as they are developed, especially around enhanced financial support for increase tuition assistance. This is a complicated process and we are working hard to make sure the plan has a firm foundation to build on.

Thanks for the input from all those at the parent meetings and the continued support and input from Bishop Joensen, our pastors, principals, faculty and staff, and parents in our effort to build on our successes to reach our goal of providing the highest quality Catholic education for our children.

Sincerely,

Donna Bishop
Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Jerry Deegan
Implementation Coordinator

Consolidated questions from Parent meetings in Oct/Nov 2019

Formation:

1. How can schools and parishes work together more to enhance the work of both? The plan includes a focus on a stronger partnership between parishes, pastors, parents and schools in the development of the faith life of students. The schools are an extension of our parishes and work is planned to bring the life and work of both closer together, supporting the parents' work as the first teachers of their children's faith life.

Academics:

1. Will the plan assist our schools to better serve students with special learning needs? The plan includes looking at what we are doing now well in schools, duplicating those efforts in other schools, and then looking to create a way to further support efforts by enhanced financial support of resources and staff. There are programs in the Kansas City Diocese in Kansas City and the Kansas City Diocese in Kansas City Missouri that are being studied as models.
2. Is the plan to stay with State of Iowa Accreditation? There is no plan to move away from the state accreditation we now have.
3. How will the new plan address curriculum standards and programs like music or art across the schools? The plan includes increased collaboration amongst local, regional and diocesan staff in all curriculum strands so that progress in each school and across all schools can be measured to ensure goals in

curriculum areas are met and appropriate staff development is provided. A study will be made of textbooks and materials used, types of assessments used during and at the end of grading periods, types and timing of standardized assessments used, and types of effective teaching and learning techniques used. The information and data will drive decisions regarding basic curriculum standards, materials chosen to use, types of assessments used, and ongoing professional development for teachers. These efforts will enhance communication, collaboration, and execution across all academic areas.

Enrollment:

1. If there are empty seats in our schools how do you plan to fill them? To begin with, an enrollment manager has been hired and will work out of the Superintendent's Office. The person will work with each school individually as well as provide region and diocesan wide marketing support. The goals of the plan include identifying factors that influence school choice among targeted audiences, create a rebranding of Catholic school education with a major marketing campaign, develop strategies and timelines to ensure that accurate data and information is being collected, updated, and distributed to potential school families in a timely manner. A communication plan will be developed that will allow the good news of Catholic education to permeate the communities of both present and potential families.
2. Will every school have a preschool? A crucial element of enrollment is to provide a high quality early childhood education program at each school. Studies show a strong early childhood education program provides an early start on the learning process that enhances the child's learning throughout the school years and after. The plan provides for before and after school care, a 3 year old program, a full day of pre-K education, and transitional kindergarten if needed.

Finance:

1. Providing a high quality education requires maintaining and hiring the best teachers and staff. The study shows a wide disparity in teacher pay across the schools, almost \$14,000 difference between the highest and lowest pay. What happens to address teacher compensation in the new model? The goal of the plan is to, over multiple years, bring all teachers on to the same scale across all the schools so that schools are able to maintain and attract high quality staff and provide a the highest quality education for students.
2. How will an increase in teacher compensation be paid for? The majority of all school budgets is tuition. To ensure that schools can maintain and attract the highest quality staff and produce a high quality product, tuition must increase. But, before any significant increase, additional tuition assistance must be provided so that families who need assistance are not lost. New assistance must come from increasing tax credits as well as creating a new endowment targeted for financial assistance. A campaign will need to take place to create and grow the endowment. As a matter of the natural course, tuition will go up, but any substantial increase would happen over multiple years will only happen when new assistance funds are available.
3. How will this affect parish support of Catholic schools? Catholic schools need the support of parishes but that support has to be balanced with tuition and third source funding. The goal of the plan is to relieve the upward growth of parish support by increasing enrollment, increasing fund raising, increasing tuition revenue and financial assistance, and including all parishes in the support of Catholic grade school education.

Governance:

1. How would a region work? Having a region requires a new governance model. The model would have a board made up of pastors and lay members and whose major responsibility would be to guide and maintain policy development and approve a budget. The Bishop would have reserve powers and the Superintendent and regional Executive director would work with the board to execute policies at the

diocesan, regional and local level. Something like a school/family organization advisory council at the local school level would include the pastor, principal, PTA chairperson or Home and School chairperson, and several other individuals to help promote and support local school culture and communication.

2. What about business operations and other areas now done individually by the schools? A regional office would provide accounting, auditing, tuition collection, parish contribution, payroll, purchasing and other business operations for the region. In addition, support for development, academics, Catholic identity and enrollment management would be provided to schools in concert with the diocese Office of Catholic schools.
3. Who is in charge of hiring in this new model? Hiring of teachers and principals would take a shared and collaborative approach, including pastors and principals, regional office staff, and the diocesan staff. State law requires professional staff do evaluation of teachers and principals, but input from the pastor and other sources would be included.

Implementation:

1. When would this plan be implemented or kicked off? Elements of the plan are already underway. Enrollment management, marketing, academics, and formation have begun work. Plans for increasing tuition assistance are underway but have not been formalized as of yet. Business managers in all parishes with schools are meeting monthly to develop a common language, budgeting process, and reporting process.
2. What is the feeling of the Bishop and pastors toward the plan? There have been a number of meetings with pastors during the process over the past 18 months. Bishop Joensen and the pastors have been meeting monthly since November of 2019 and will continue to meet monthly to learn more about the specifics of the plan and to give their input in its development and execution.