

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE
ON CHURCH MANAGEMENT

Pope John Paul II
Catholic Academy:
A Regional Approach to Catholic Education

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REGIONALIZING TO SUSTAIN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Many individuals and communities are working diligently to ensure a future for Catholic education. Catholic schools are a tremendous spiritual, academic, and social asset—too valuable to lose.

Convinced that the future of the Catholic community will be determined, in no small measure, by the vitality of Catholic education, the Archdiocese of Boston is devoting considerable energy and resources to revitalizing its schools. Its approach is comprehensive, working where needed to improve governance and management, academic performance, faith formation, extracurricular programming, and to renovate buildings. It has prioritized its efforts, working first with schools in urban areas where needs are greater and resources are sparser. It is partnering with business leaders, local universities, and the philanthropic community to realize these ends while keeping Catholic education affordable for as many as possible.

“Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy (PJPIICA) inspires, demonstrating how individuals passionate about Catholic education can, in a remarkably short time, effect a turn around.”

The Archdiocese encourages communities no longer able to sustain parish-based schools to adopt a regional approach, with one school serving multiple parishes. Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy in working-class Dorchester is its signature effort. Opened in 2008, it has introduced new governance and management models, improved compensation, developed high-quality professional development programs for faculty, adopted a more robust approach to teaching, learning and faith formation, and renovated school buildings. Having realized some economies of scale, it can offer what many stand-alone parish schools cannot: high quality Catholic education with a large complement of extracurriculars in renovated, state-of the art buildings. Most importantly, it has stabilized enrollment in an area that had been experiencing a steady decline in the number of children enrolled in Catholic schools.

Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy (PJPIICA) inspires, demonstrating how individuals passionate about Catholic education can, in a remarkably short time, effect a turn around. They have made tremendous strides, yet Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy is still a work-in-progress. Its leaders are not afraid to innovate, searching for new ways to provide the highest quality education. Embedded in their experiences are emerging lessons about what it takes to sustain and grow Catholic education through regionalization.

SNAPSHOT: POPE JOHN PAUL II CATHOLIC ACADEMY

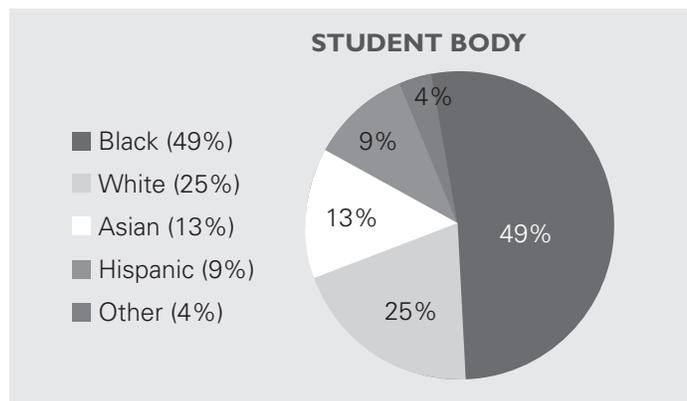
In June 2008 seven elementary Catholic schools in the Dorchester and Mattapan areas of Boston closed. Fifty-two days later an entirely new regional Catholic school, Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy, welcomed its first class.

Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy opens each morning at 6:30 a.m. and closes again at 6:00 p.m. Over 1,300 students stream through the doors at one of its four campuses. Each campus covers pre-k through grade eight and offers extensive before- and after-school programming. It is the largest elementary school in Boston, public or private. Three out of ten students in Catholic schools in Boston attend the Academy.

About 4.5 million people live in Greater Boston, a crescent shaped area wrapped around its harbor. The tenth largest metro area in the country, between 2000 and 2009 its population increased by 4.5 percent. Boston proper is home to 617,594 (as of 2010) who populate upwards of 20 distinct neighborhoods. PCPIICA draws students from many neighborhoods, but most come from working-class Dorchester and Mattapan. While Boston's population grew almost 5 percent during the past decade, the populations of Dorchester and Mattapan declined by about the same.¹

In Dorchester and Mattapan, along with nearby Roxbury, 42 percent of children live in poverty, the highest concentration of childhood poverty in the state. In some neighborhoods, 40 to 50 percent of adults lack a high school diploma.²

Like the populations of Dorchester and Mattapan, the student body of Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy is diverse: 49 percent black, 25 percent white, 13 percent Asian, 9 percent Hispanic, and 4 percent multiracial/other. Many are children of immigrants hailing from Haiti, Cape Verde, Vietnam and many other countries; only 61 percent use English as their first language at home. About two-thirds live with two parents; 30 percent live with one parent. Forty-two percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch program; the Academy provides 2.5 meals daily to a notable portion of its student body.³



¹ http://www.boston.com/yourtown/news/dorchester/2011/04/census_data_dorchester_lost_mo.html

² <http://www.tbf.org/UtilityNavigation/MultimediaLibrary/ReportsDetail.aspx?id=18970>

³ **A family of four with an annual income of \$29,055 is eligible for free lunch programming; a family of four with an annual income of \$41,348 is eligible for reduced lunch programming.**

“For 11.5 hours each day, Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy offers children a safe, nurturing environment.”

The academic program runs from 7:45 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., giving Academy students an extra 45 minutes of daily instruction. But almost half the student body arrives earlier or leaves later to accommodate working parents. After school, students participate in some 30 clubs, take music lessons, and do homework. For 11.5 hours each day, Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy offers children a safe, nurturing environment.

Under the leadership of PJPIICA's board of trustees, the superintendent of schools, Dr. Mary Grassa O'Neill, the Academy director, Mr. Russ Wilson, the principals and faculty have introduced a high-quality, rigorous curriculum. Faculty emphasize the basics, focusing on mathematics and English language arts. They utilize a writing-across-the-curriculum program and a highly regarded reading program. Older students study Latin and algebra to prepare for the rigors of high school and college. One-quarter of the student body participates in a Talented and Gifted Program in math. Faculty and specialists work one-on-one with students who start to fall behind.

The Academy is known for its music program. All students participate in weekly music instruction, with all fifth-graders studying violin. After school, 263 pursue violin, keyboard, or guitar instruction. There is an Academy-wide Choir (with 50 members) and Academy-wide String Orchestra. The Orchestra is part of El Sistema, an international music program providing children from families of limited means the opportunity to study classical music. They have performed for the President of Ireland and, on three occasions, with the Boston Classical Orchestra.

The Academy is clearly Catholic. Each campus is purposefully located near a Catholic Church where students worship, including Mass on First Fridays and holy days. Pastors are involved in the spiritual life of the school and faith formation of students. Religion is taught daily in classrooms filled with religious symbols. Faculty and staff are dedicated. Many are motivated by their faith; some consider their work a vocation. The Academy welcomes children from all faith backgrounds; 64 percent are Catholic.

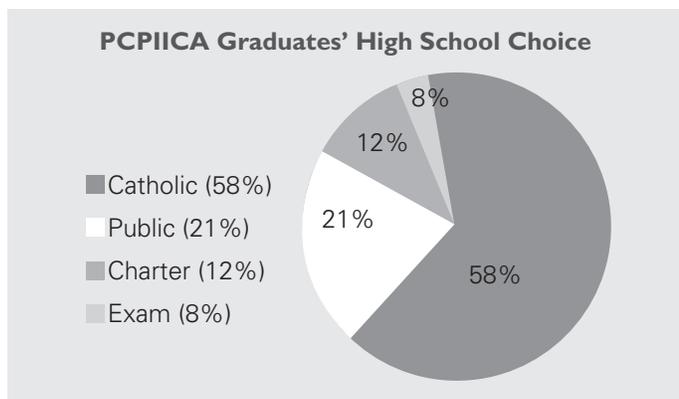
The tuition at Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy for 2011-12 is \$4,100 with discounts for siblings. Over half the families are eligible for financial aid. Among families receiving financial aid, the average annual income is \$42,000 (about 180 percent of the federal poverty level for a family of four). Those taking advantage of after-school programming pay a reasonable \$5 an hour.

Students at Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy are doing well academically, realizing year-over-year gains and outscoring their peers in Boston public schools on standardized tests. They do so despite challenges, as many enter below grade level, experience language difficulties, and find their parents (who are not fluent in English) cannot always assist with homework. Nonetheless, between 2009-10 and 2010-11 students scored significantly higher on high school placement tests, spring math diagnostics, and the eighth-grade Common Knowledge scores (which

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increased 10 percent). In 2010 the Archdiocese mandated use of the national Stanford 10 Test in every elementary school. Between 2010 and 2011 Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy saw continued improvement: an overall increase of 5 percent, with one campus ranking number two in the Archdiocese for its increase.

Three classes have graduated from Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy. Six in ten graduates opted for Catholic high schools. Eight percent were accepted to Boston's elite exam schools.



THE BACKSTORY

Catholic education is a high priority for Sean Cardinal O'Malley, head of the fourth largest diocese in the United States. At his installation, he spoke of "commitment" to Catholic education, especially in urban areas. He wants to create access to Catholic education for as many as possible, and to ensure that it is deeply Catholic and academically excellent.

With the number of schools and students shrinking precipitously, in 2005 he called for renewed commitment to Catholic education—what some have described as an "extreme makeover." The Cardinal called upon the expertise and generosity of the laity. As a key first step, the Cardinal and Catholic Schools Office (CSO) convened the 2010 Committee for Catholic Education chaired by Mr. Jack Connors, Jr., founding partner and chairman emeritus of Hill, Holliday, Connors and Cosmopolos, a top-twenty advertising firm. The committee included clergy, principals, leaders from local Catholic universities, religious congregations, and the business community.

“Among elementary schools, 35 percent faced serious challenges and roughly 15 percent did not look viable.”

The 2010 Committee hired two consulting firms. Meitler Consultants, Inc. studied well over one hundred elementary schools and high schools, while McKinsey and Company examined dozens of private Catholic schools and schools owned by religious orders. They provided the 2010 Committee with detailed information about governance, enrollment, market share, finances, human resources, marketing, development efforts, and facilities. Key findings were troubling. Enrollment in Catholic elementary schools had plummeted 22 percent in five years, partly as a result of the sex abuse crisis that rocked the Archdiocese in 2002. Among elementary schools, 35 percent faced serious challenges and roughly 15 percent did not look viable. Only a quarter were in good financial shape. About half faced financial challenges; the remaining were financially troubled. Forty percent of the buildings were in good shape, 40 percent needed substantial capital investment, with the rest deemed unsuitable.

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The 2010 Committee digested consultants’ reports, studied best practices, interviewed stakeholders, and in 2006 issued The 2010 Initiative: A Strategic Plan for Catholic Schools with key recommendations:

- Re-organize schools, moving from parish-based to regional models where needed.
- Encourage two new governance structures, a parish-based and a regional model with lay participation.
- Improve school management.
- Improve teacher compensation; provide high quality professional development opportunities.
- Enhance and standardize the curriculum and faith formation programming.
- Use up-to-date technology in all classrooms.
- Consolidate and renovate buildings.

In 2007 Connors and others funded a new development organization, the Campaign for Catholic Schools (CCS), tasked with raising the substantial funds needed to implement The 2010 Initiative. As of February 2012, a total of \$59.5 million has been pledged, including a \$15 million leadership gift from The Yawkey Foundations and four \$1 million gifts from major corporations who believe urban Catholic schools are an effective approach to education for Boston’s children.

See Jack Connors address the 2010 Leadership Roundtable annual meeting at <http://theleadershiproundtable.org/TLR/aboutus/2010-annual-meeting-jackconnors.html>

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The Campaign for Catholic Schools “only went where invited” and pastors in the working-class town of Brockton asked first. Inspired by The 2010 Initiative, pastors merged three struggling schools with a combined enrollment of 350 to form Trinity Catholic Academy. Opened in 2007, Trinity Catholic Academy now enrolls 546. It has two campuses; the lower campus covers preschool through grade 3, the upper grades 4 through 8. Increased size has allowed for new programming, including a Talented and Gifted program, fine arts, music, and sports. Local business leaders spearheaded efforts, raising \$1.6 million for start-up costs and \$10.4 million for renovations.

Other communities have moved toward the regional model. Two schools in the town of Lawrence merged; Lawrence Catholic Academy enrolls 510. In Quincy, three schools became Quincy Catholic Academy; it enrolls 375. Neither Academy required CCS funding. In the meantime, CCS has provided modest support for St. Ann School in Gloucester and South Boston Catholic Academy (formed from two schools), helping to ensure a more vital future for each.

THE SIGNATURE SCHOOL: THE POPE JOHN PAUL II CATHOLIC ACADEMY

Creating Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy required immense effort on the part of many. Absent that effort the footprint of Catholic education in Dorchester and Mattapan would have continued shrinking and might have eventually disappeared.

Eight pastors were already discussing prospects for Catholic education, meeting with Archdiocesan leaders to consider what it would mean to join The 2010 Initiative. The discussions were not easy; such discussions rarely are. In Dorchester and Mattapan, long-time Catholic strongholds, parish and school affiliation matter dearly. A closed school can mean loss of identity and connection to family histories. Catholics in Boston had already suffered the brunt of the clerical sexual abuse scandal and a host of parish mergers. No one wanted to shutter a Catholic school, but the futures of the schools were questionable.

Seven pastors eventually opted for The 2010 Initiative model and regionalization, knowing it would be difficult for parishioners, alumni, faculty, staff, current students and their families. It would also be challenging for the pastors themselves as regionalizing required yielding their canonically-defined responsibility for the schools to a regional board and director. In the new model pastors would be spiritual leaders for the school, closely involved with faith formation and catechesis, and sit on the board of the Academy.

With that difficult decision made, in November 2007 an implementation team led by Kathleen Driscoll (then head of the Campaign for Catholic Schools, now Secretary for Institutional Advancement at the Archdiocese of Boston) went into action. There was a sense of urgency: children who left closing schools in June 2008 needed a new Catholic school to enter by fall. That school would offer the very best in education and faith formation in renovated, state-of-the-art buildings. The implementation team had ten months to deliver.

Creating a school from the ground up in ten months was daunting. While The 2010 Initiative provided something of a playbook, the implementation team had to execute on every facet of operations: governance, structure, identity, management, staffing, enrollment, instruction, religious identity, location, facilities, and financing. During the summer two campuses would be completely renovated, with other campuses to follow as funding was secured. All campuses would be technologically updated.

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Philanthropic gifts—\$5 million from The Lynch Foundation and \$15 million from The Yawkey Foundations—made the work possible. The gift from The Yawkey Foundations is believed to be the largest single gift to a diocese for systemic educational reform.

The implementation team kept stakeholders informed in the twelve months before opening PJPIICA. Parents, teachers and principals were surveyed. Meetings were held with parents and staff at all schools. Team members met with civic leaders and visited Boston City Hall. Pastors kept parishioners informed. The closing of the schools and opening of the Academy were covered in the Catholic and secular press. Communications were sent to parents in seven languages. Students voted on the name of the Academy, their uniforms and the school crest.

seven parochial schools

St. Ann St. Gregory St. Mark St. Kevin Blessed Mother Teresa St. Peter St. Angela

&

**POPE JOHN PAUL II CATHOLIC ACADEMY
EST. 2008**

one academy with four campuses

Neponset Campus Lower Mills Campus Columbia Campus Mattapan Square Campus
Former St. Ann Former St. Gregory Former St. Margaret Former St. Angela

TIMELINE

- 2005: Cardinal O'Malley calls for revitalization of Catholic education
- 2006: 2010 Committee convened
- 2006: McKinsey and Company and Meitler, Inc. study Catholic schools
- 2006: 2010 Initiative issued
- 2007: Campaign for Catholic Schools launched
- 2007: Three Catholic schools in Brockton close and Trinity Catholic Academy opens
- 2008: Seven Catholic schools in Dorchester and Mattapan close Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy opens

Governance and management

Following the vision of The 2010 Initiative, Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy is canonically sponsored by the Archdiocese of Boston and operates under a board of trustees responsible for operations, including human resources, programming, budgets, marketing, and enrollment, among other things. The Academy has its own 501(c)(3) designation. The regional director of the Academy reports to the board which currently includes Archdiocesan representatives (including the Superintendent of Schools and the Chief Development Officer), four local pastors (vital to ensuring the Catholic identity of the Academy), business leaders, community leaders as well as parents. Its education subcommittee has been helpful in enriching the curriculum. The board is expanding, adding members to bolster the Academy's financial position, academics, and presence in the community.

The leadership team at Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy consists of Mr. Russ Wilson, the regional director, and the principals from the four campuses. His regional team includes a director of guidance/nursing, director of fine arts, director of advancement, director of facilities, business manager, two tuition coordinators, communications coordinator, payroll administrator, accounts payable administrator, and operations assistant.

The services of the "back office" create some economies of scale. Instead of four, there is now one website, newsletter, application, financial aid form, brochure, and marketing effort. Agendas for morning assemblies are shared. Principals are freed up to focus on instruction and work with faculty and students. Economies of scale also make it possible to offer what few smaller, parish-based schools can offer, e.g., Latin instruction, a high quality music program, and (as described below) a major professional development program for faculty.

Structure and identity

The Academy consists of a regional office and four campuses. The four campuses could have been structured along age cohorts (i.e., all pre-k and kindergarten in one building, middle school in another, etc.), but parent feedback indicated a strong preference for pre-k through grade 8 at each campus to make transportation easier.

Managing four campuses can be challenging but the case for multiple campuses is strong. Foremost, no single building was large enough to accommodate the entire student body. Using four campuses, each near public transportation, maintains access to Catholic education for families throughout Dorchester, Mattapan, and beyond. Having a few hundred students at each campus allows faculty and staff to get to know their students and families better. But note: the original plan included a fifth campus in an entirely new building, but with four campuses operating slightly under capacity the case for raising an additional \$14 million was insufficient.

The Academy took the name of Pope John Paul II who travelled through Dorchester during a 1979 trip to Boston. In order to foster a new, shared identity for the Academy, the four school buildings were called "campuses" and given geographic identifiers: Lower Mills, Neponset, Columbia and Mattapan Square. New uniforms were adopted, based on student preferences. Early on faculty and students were prone to identify by their old schools ("I'm from St. Kevin's") but they increasingly identify by "Pope John Paul II" and their respective campuses.

Staffing

Principals and teachers from the seven schools that closed in Dorchester and Mattapan were invited to apply for positions at Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy. Those who did understood that teaching at PJPIICA would not be business as usual. A more robust curriculum and standards were in the making, with greater accountability for

teachers linked to student performance. Most reapplied. About 80 percent of the current faculty worked at one of the closed parish schools.

The Academy's size supports staffing levels conducive to professional development. The parish-based schools could only support one teacher per grade, while the Academy maintains two sections per grade at each campus. (There are 8 first-grade teachers, 8 second-grade teachers, etc.) Isolation has given way to support and collaboration. As one principal put it, "I love that it's not just us." She can partner with other principals on common issues, while her faculty can work together, sharing resources, solving problems, and developing lessons.

Instruction

The 2010 Initiative calls for academic excellence: assessment of student progress against defined learning outcomes, enhanced and expanded programs, as well as programs to help teachers and administrators provide high quality, Catholic education for all students.

Given latitude, the director, principals and faculty at Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy have built a strong curriculum coupled with assessment. They have implemented writing-across-the-curriculum program, the John Collins reading program, and reading recovery efforts for those falling behind. Each classroom is technologically up-to-date. Classrooms for grades 4 through 8 are equipped with a promethean boards, while pre-k through grade 3 classrooms use "ladybugs," digital cameras that produce 3-D images to facilitate instruction. Each school has a resource room for students needing assistance.

Students entering PJPIICA have a smaller "word bank" than their suburban peers. To build vocabularies essential for learning, all students (even pre-k) learn "root families," while students in grades 6 to 8 study Latin once weekly. For example, they may not fully understand what microbiology is but they have a head start for they know that "micro" means "small," "bio" means "life," and "ology" means "study of." PJPIICA's Latin instructor works one day per week at each school.

To ensure instructional excellence, Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy established a Professional Development Institute for faculty. According to Superintendent Mary Grassa O'Neill, teachers are "hungry" to learn more about the craft of teaching. Courses are offered year round, Monday to Thursday, from 3:15 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Most are peer led with nearby Catholic colleges and universities providing support. Up to four classes are offered daily on an array of topics: use of technology, curriculum mapping, teacher leadership, reading and writing strategies, effective assessment, religious topics, etc. Though teachers are not compensated for participating, 85 percent did so in 2010-11. (Teachers receive modest stipends for leading courses.) In 2011-12, 100 percent of PJPIICA faculty have participated. Faculty members from nearby Catholic schools have started attending.

Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy is taking steps to introduce merit-based pay for its staff, a strategy called for in The 2010 Initiative. Merit-based increases are to reflect excellence in teaching, professionalism, student and parents' satisfaction, as well as test scores. The director, however, points out that he has a very strong faculty and significant across-the-board pay increases have been introduced since 2008. With the funds available, he has only been able to provide nominal merit pay awards. He hopes to do more in the future. In the meantime, The Yawkey Foundations instituted a competitive excellence-in-teaching award. Based on input from students, parents, faculty and principals, it recognizes up to five teachers annually, each with an award of \$5,000.

PJPIICA's 27 community partners significantly enhance the quality of instruction; partners include Boston College, Emmanuel College, Lesley University, The New England Conservatory, Junior Achievement, St. Vincent de Paul, Strong Women Strong Girls, The New England Aquarium, among others.

Student enrollment

During its first four years, Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy has enrolled over 1,300 students—about the same number as the total enrollment of the seven closed schools. Though leadership had hoped for larger numbers, it is relieved that they have stopped enrollment decline. At capacity, PJPIICA could accommodate 1,600 (with 20 children in pre-K classes and 25 in primary through grade eight).

In closing the parish schools and opening the Academy, it has been important to remember that many parents are immigrants. For many, English is not their first language. As schools were closing, leaders took care to assure families that their children would have a school to attend in the fall. Multi-lingual communication was helpful during the transition. Today, key communications are sent in English and Spanish, with hopes of adding languages in the future.

Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy's marketing efforts are multifaceted. Local churches are partners in promoting the schools, while the Academy uses its website, local newspapers as well as billboards to invite new families to consider enrolling. The Academy benefits from a half-time staff person, funded by the Catholic Schools Foundation, who works with Hispanic families. It is currently studying new ways to recruit minority students.

Facilities

In determining which closed schools would be used for Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy, three criteria were paramount: condition of the building, proximity to students, families and transportation, and close access to a Catholic Church.

In the summer of 2008 two of four campuses were completely renovated in 52 days by Suffolk Construction of Boston; other campuses got cosmetic improvements and technology upgrades and will be fully renovated as funds are raised. Renovations to date include a new middle school wing at one campus and a new gym, cafeteria, and early childhood wing at another. Work has been completed on time and on budget.

Despite changes, the Catholic Church's use of closed school buildings has contributed to stability in the area. (Some were closed in 2008, some prior.) Seeking larger facilities, Cristo Rey Boston High School took over one closed school and quickly became popular with Academy graduates. The Archdiocese can now offer residents of Dorchester and Mattapan a full complement of Catholic education, from pre-K through high school. With \$4.5 million from the Campaign for Catholic Schools, one school was completely renovated and became the Teen Center at St. Peter's. Run by Catholic Charities, the Teen Center provides academic assistance, opportunities for recreation, and counseling support for hundreds of young people. The Archdiocesan Office of Urban Affairs has plans to use another school for affordable housing. Another school is now home to the Compass Schools, a private special education day school for youth with emotional, behavioral, and learning disabilities. Only one of the recently closed schools remains unused.

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Financing

The per pupil cost at PJPIICA is \$5,800—less than half the per pupil expenditure in Boston public schools. Despite the difference, the Academy is providing quality education.⁴

It would be difficult to cut costs. Salaries and benefits account for about 80 percent of operating expenses. The 2010 Initiative calls for increased compensation for Archdiocesan principals and faculty; between 2008-09 and 2011-12 average faculty salary at PJPIICA increased 31 percent from \$28,566 to \$37,311. Yet Boston’s cost of living is one of the highest in the nation and the average salary for those in Catholic schools is less than half of that of those in Boston’s public schools. (In 2010 salaries for Boston public school teachers averaged \$84,894.⁵) Dedicated faculty and staff make Catholic education in Dorchester (and many other places) possible.

Tuition for 2011-12 is \$4,100, \$1,700 less than the cost per pupil. Tuition is discounted for siblings. There are 691 families who enroll, on average, two children. The Academy collects approximately \$3,500 in tuition per child. Using FACTS, a national organization, it brings in all but 2 percent of total tuition revenues, a remarkable amount that speaks to the commitment of parents.

About 67 percent of families request financial aid and 52 percent receive it. Again, PJPIICA uses FACTS to determine eligibility. Support comes from the Campaign for Catholic Schools, the Catholic Schools Foundation and other school revenues.

The Archdiocese would like all schools to cover 85 percent or more of operating expenses through tuition, but realizes this will be challenging in many urban areas. PJPIICA currently covers almost two-thirds of operating expenses through tuition. If the Academy were to enroll 1,600 students, tuition revenues would obviously cover a larger portion of operating expenses. But even with full enrollment, it may not be able to reach the Archdiocese’s ambitious goal.

Philanthropy will always play an important part in Academy revenues. The Campaign for Catholic Schools is committed to the Academy but gradually scaling back support on a planned basis; it has decreased its contribution from a high of \$2.4 million to \$1.3 million for 2011-12. CCS has also provided PJPIICA with two-year funding projections so it can budget accordingly.

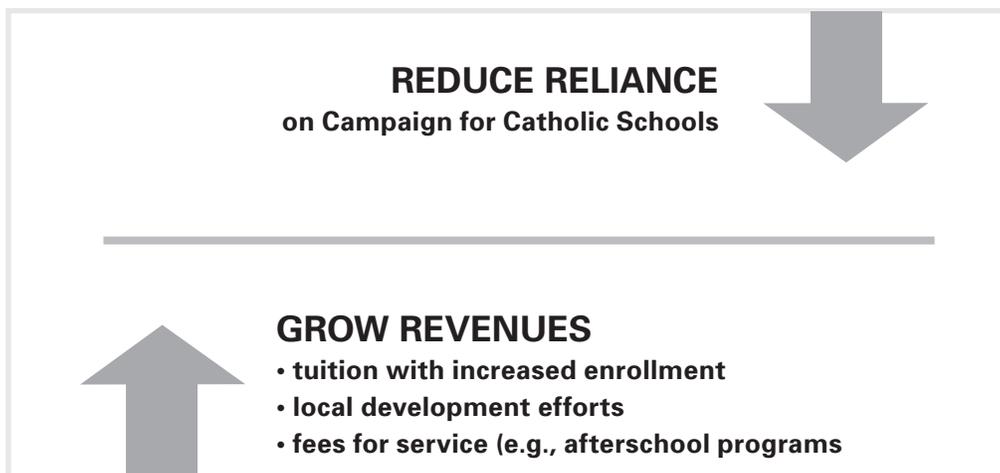
⁴For 2010 per pupil expenditure in Boston Public Schools was \$16,666.

<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/finance.aspx?orgcode=00350000&orgtypecode=5&leftNavID=501&fycode=2010>

⁵http://www.bestplaces.net/cost_of_living/city/massachusetts/boston

<http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/schfin/statistics/salary.aspx?ID=035>

In the meantime, leadership is working to ensure a sustainable future through two strategies. First: build the development capacity of the Academy. In the first year, the development director raised \$250,000 from new sources. The Academy will also expand its board. They are considering other options, including what it would take to establish an endowment. Second: identify new revenue sources. Afterschool programming already nets in excess of \$100,000. With increased participation and additional programming (after school, on weekends and during the summer) this revenue stream will grow. The board is also open to investigating other income sources.



EMERGING LESSONS

Opened in 2008, Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy is still a young school. As it continues making strides, its brief history already yields insights into what it takes to make a regional Catholic school work.

Mission clarity, mission passion

Leaders in the Archdiocese of Boston, ordained and lay, believe deeply in Catholic education. With the future of Catholic education in the Dorchester area dimming, they vigorously reclaimed the mission that inspired previous generations: to educate the “whole child,” producing faith-filled, “responsible and compassionate citizens” through affordable quality Catholic education.

Jack Connors ties his efforts to the wellbeing of the Catholic Church: “While people may think that we are rebuilding a few Catholic schools, in fact we are rebuilding the Catholic faith—by dramatically improving and re-energizing the mission of the Catholic schools. Failure is not an option; no one is waiting in line behind us.”

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The 2010 Initiative: A Strategic Plan for Catholic Schools encompasses the entire Archdiocese. The plan recognizes that maintaining access to Catholic schools in urban areas will require significant, sustained effort. Leaders have already demonstrated willingness to go the extra mile—or more—to ensure families throughout the Archdiocese can send their children to a Catholic school.

Value Proposition

Catholic schools have a strong track record. Their students outperform their public school counterparts on standardized tests. Students are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, practice their faith, pursue a religious vocation and be engaged civically.

Regionalizing is a strategy to sustain Catholic education. It is also an opportunity. Starting from scratch, the leadership of PJPIICA decided to implement best practices in school management and offer the highest quality education possible. They would not simply have a bigger school: they would have a better school. “Doing extraordinary things is part of the model.” Leaders work hard to provide what parents want for their children. Faith formation is integral. The curriculum is robust, teachers are accountable and test scores are shared openly. Extracurriculars are offered. The music program makes the Academy more appealing. Before- and after-school programming is available. Buildings are attractive and well equipped.

For many parents, choosing a Catholic school entails financial sacrifice. Almost 700 families, most of modest means, are willing to invest because they believe PJPIICA offers the best education available for their children.

Research and planning

In developing and implementing The 2010 Initiative, the Archdiocese has benefitted from solid research. The reports by Meitler and McKinsey were invaluable in identifying needs and opportunities.

Leaders counsel: “Know your market. Know your competition.” The regional model is suited for areas where individual parishes cannot sustain a school. Regional schools need to be situated in well populated neighborhoods with good transportation options. Operating in urban neighborhoods means that many families will require financial aid. To mitigate this liability, regional schools need to fill many seats. PJPIICA is a case in point. The original plan for PJPIICA involved five campuses, but four campuses proved sufficient. The growing number of charter schools is a challenge. Those moving toward regionalization need a solid enrollment plan.

More recently the Catholic Schools Office has started collecting uniform financial, academic and enrollment data, using it to create a series of “dashboards” for schools. As a result, school leaders can compare “apples with apples,” note year-to-year trends, and identify which schools are performing well and which are not. The dashboards have been used to engage pastors, principals, board members, and other school leaders in productive conversations and provide workshops tailored to meet their needs.

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Governance, leadership and management

Talented, hardworking, generous people made PJPIICA possible. It continues to benefit from strong leadership and supporters.

The Cardinal recruited well. Jack Connors became involved at the behest of the Cardinal. In turn, Connors convinced two highly experienced individuals in marketing and development to head the Campaign for Catholic Schools. John Fish, a member of the 2010 Committee and CEO and President of Suffolk Construction, made sure that campus renovations were done well and completed so students could begin school in September 2008. The Cardinal also persuaded the current Superintendent to leave an attractive position at Harvard's Graduate School of Education (where she led the principals' program) to head the Catholic Schools Office.

Opening a new Academy in ten months time (including renovation of two campuses) required herculean efforts. The composition of the implementation team—highly qualified, well-known local leaders—made it possible.

The 2010 Initiative calls for greater lay participation, especially through boards. A highly functional board is a great asset for any educational institution. Today, the Academy benefits from the wisdom and generosity of its board.

Resources

Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy has strong philanthropic partners: Peter and Carolyn Lynch, longtime philanthropic leaders in Catholic education, and The Yawkey Foundations made early lead gifts to the project. Staff from the Campaign for Catholic Schools appreciatively recalls numerous meetings with representatives of The Yawkey Foundations who “made us sharpen our pencils to be sure the model was viable.” The Catholic Schools Foundation has been steady source of support. Numerous donors have contributed directly PJPIICA as well as the Campaign for Catholic Schools. The CCS also received four \$1 million gifts from publicly-traded corporations who consider support for urban Catholic education to be an investment in their future workforce as well as the community.

“The contributions of partner organizations are invaluable: they enrich students' education through faculty professional development, curricular support, and extracurricular activities.”

The Academy also benefits from dozens of partnerships—colleges and universities, nonprofits, and local businesses. The contributions of partner organizations are invaluable: they enrich students' education through faculty professional development, curricular support, and extracurricular activities.

Change management

Shifting from a parish-based model to a regional model requires new mindsets—a “conversion” as one leader described it. Some changes have occurred almost naturally. With each passing year students and faculty identify more routinely with PJPIICA rather than a closed parish school.

Other changes have required more purposeful effort. Cardinal O’Malley has exercised strong leadership in shifting mindsets. He staked out Catholic education as an Archdiocesan priority, not a local problem. He has signaled his commitment by elevating the position of superintendent to Secretary of Education and Superintendent of Schools and including her in his cabinet. The Catholic Schools Office has developed a strategic plan for the entire Archdiocese. The Campaign for Catholic Schools is a distinct, high profile part of the Archdiocesan development office.

“Leaders from PJPIICA and local parishes have an opportunity to rebuild relationships, to find fruitful, productive ways for local parishes to connect with this vital ministry and for the school community to participate more fully in parish life.”

Changing mindsets at the local level also requires focused effort. It is difficult for a parish to let go of a school—to see it close or re-open with a new name, principal, faculty members, even new uniforms for the children. Leaders from PJPIICA and local parishes have an opportunity to rebuild relationships, to find fruitful, productive ways for local parishes to connect with this vital ministry and for the school community to participate more fully in parish life.

Studies demonstrate that pastors’ commitment to Catholic education plays a significant role in sustaining Catholic schools⁶. In switching to a regional model, pastors’ support is vital. Seven pastors opted for regionalization in October, 2007. In the summer of 2008, most were transferred as part of routine pastoral reassignments. New pastors took over in the months immediately preceding the opening of the Academy. It took time for some to embrace the regional approach. Looking back, current leaders realize that the process might have been smoother if roles, responsibilities, and arrangements for the use of facilities had been defined more clearly and put in writing.

⁶ *“Faith, Finances, and the Future: The Notre Dame Study of U.S. Pastors,”*
https://shop.nd.edu/C21688_ustores/web/product_detail.jsp?PRODUCTID=802&SINGLESTORE=true

CONCLUSION

“Opening a regional school is an opportunity to start afresh and deliver on the immense promise of Catholic education.”

A parish-based approach to Catholic education no longer works in many areas. To ignore this fact and continue with a business-as-usual approach is simply “agreeing to hospice care” for Catholic schools. There are ways to revitalize struggling Catholic schools, but in many places, regionalization may prove more effective in ensuring a vital future for Catholic education in a given area.

The regional model utilizes economies of scale, allowing the Catholic Church to continue its educational ministry, especially in areas where families of moderate means need educational alternatives. It allows Catholic education to survive and even thrive—to offer the type of educational experience that many parish-based schools can no longer offer.

Ownership is key to the success of a regional school. Parishes no longer own the schools in the ways they once did, although their support remains vital. New partners are invited to join, to contribute talent, labor and resources that sustain and bolster Catholic regional schools.

Additional research on regionalization is warranted: to study multiple regional schools to understand key success factors as well as optimal financials.

Opening a regional school is an opportunity to start afresh and deliver on the immense promise of Catholic education. In the Archdiocese of Boston, Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy represents the Catholic community’s ongoing commitment to provide children with the great gift of a faith-filled education. It also offers those considering a regional approach insights into the vision, determination and resources needed to continue the Church’s educational ministry in new times and new ways.

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