



ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

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Clusters 23, 24 and 32 NEWS RELEASE # 5

Report of the School Feasibility Study Steering Committee

On Wednesday, January 6, 2010, the School Feasibility Study Steering Committee for Clusters 23, 24, & 32, a representative body composed of pastors, principals and parishioners from the parishes of Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Epiphany of Our Lord, Saint Gabriel, Holy Spirit, Saint Monica, Saint Nicholas of Tolentine, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Saint Richard, Sacred Heart of Jesus, Stella Maris, and Saint Thomas Aquinas parishes in South Philadelphia, gathered for a fifth meeting of the group.

Following a brief but detailed presentation by a representative from the Office for Catholic Education on the “Standards for Quality Catholic Elementary Schools,” the School Feasibility Study Steering Committee for Clusters 23, 24, & 32 separated into four subgroups which had been decided upon by the participating members at the previous meeting.

The groups were formed by using the Archdiocesan regional cluster areas for parishes, that is, Cluster 23: Saint Gabriel and Saint Thomas Aquinas, Cluster 24(East): Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Cluster 24(West): Annunciation of The Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Nicholas of Tolentine, and Cluster 32: Epiphany of Our Lord, Holy Spirit, Saint Monica, Saint Richard and Stella Maris.

The initial task of the “subgroups” was to discuss and confirm or to revise the options that each parish in the feasibility study subgroup had selected. The options involved the choice to remain open and independent or with the assistance of another parish, to close due to a parish’s inability to sustain a quality school, to close and consolidate with another parochial school, or to close a struggling parish school and form a stronger regional school. Ideally, these choices should be based on a parish’s realistic assessment of its school using the standards of a “quality Catholic elementary school” as well as a parish’s ability to meet the financial and other obligations of operating a school in the present and sustaining it well into the future.

Next, the parish representatives involved in the study process began to develop criteria (aka strategies) for the actual testing of the option chosen for their school. The development and setting of realistic criteria is very important. The School Feasibility Study Steering Committee for Clusters 23, 24, & 32 subgroups will help to develop and carefully use several levels of criteria, such as, an academic criteria, a financial criteria, a demographic criteria, a mission criteria, etc., to plan effectively and insure excellent, affordable, accessible and sustainable Catholic elementary schools for the foreseeable future. Due to several factors, such as, actual student population levels and projected enrollment losses, a drop in school and parish revenue and other overwhelming financial challenges as well as several other significant challenges, it is

possible that some of the schools involved in the study will find that their current status is not sustainable and therefore make a recommendation to that effect.

As this study unfolds, all parishioners are asked to make the school study process a daily intention of their prayers. Parishioners are also encouraged to speak with the members of the Parish School Study Committee within their parishes about any ideas, observations or concerns they may have as a result of this information or the feasibility study process. The names of your Parish School Study Committee can be located in parish bulletin or contacted through the parish pastor or rectory staff. Hearing from as many members of the community as possible is vital to this process.

The School Feasibility Study Steering Committee for Clusters 23, 24, & 32 is scheduled to meet again in early February and will meet on a regular basis to deliberate on the outcomes of the school study. At a point when fully considered options have been confirmed, parishioners will have the opportunity to review and comment on them through each parish's School Study Committee before a final recommendation is prepared. The School Feasibility Study Steering Committee's recommendations will then be presented to His Eminence, Justin Cardinal Rigali.