



## ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

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### Clusters 23, 24 and 32 NEWS RELEASE

#### Report of the School Feasibility Study Steering Committee

On Wednesday, November 4, 2009, the School Feasibility Study Steering Committee for Clusters 23, 24, & 32, met to begin Stage 2 of the study.

The School Feasibility Steering Committee is 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. Each of the parishes has also established a Parish School Study Group. The overall purpose of the Steering Committee is to work in consultation with each of the parish's School Study Committee in order to develop a plan which will ensure, in the best possible way, excellent, accessible, more affordable and sustainable Catholic elementary education within this part of South Philadelphia for both the immediate future and long term.

At the most recent meeting (November 4) of the Steering Committee, the members considered a list of options that were developed within each of the parishes study committees. These options grew out of responses to two questions presented to each parish group which concerned the resources that are necessary for the parish school to maintain or develop a quality parish school that truly is excellent, accessible, affordable and sustainable. The parish groups were also asked to consider the future of the parish school and the educational possibilities for the children of the parish, if the parish does not have the resources or ability to maintain or develop a school that meets the criteria for quality Catholic education. Using this criterion, some parishes expressed the desire and the resources ability to maintain the parish school. Others recognized they have a strong desire but may lack the ability to maintain the current parish school in such a way that it would meet the "excellent, accessible, affordable and sustainable" criterion for a quality Catholic school.

#### **Standards for a Quality Catholic Elementary School:** **"Excellent, Accessible, Affordable and Sustainable"**

The quality of "**excellent**" addresses developing a school that is complete and educates the "whole child." According to the Standards for Quality Catholic Elementary Schools (Office of Catholic Education) this is achieved when the school has a strong Catholic identity, a principal and faculty who are practicing Catholics with religion and state certifications, Middle States accredited, adequate facilities to provide a quality program, i.e., the physical space to accommodate: religion instruction, mathematics, honors math, integrated language arts, social studies, science (science lab), fine arts (music and art), physical education, technology, integration of subjects and technology across all curriculum areas through computer lab and classrooms with internet access, library, cafeteria and intermediate unit services.

The quality of **“accessibility”** is met when a school is able to be reached in a reasonable amount of time by all students who attend from the parish or parishes that make up the area served by that school. “Accessibility” also encompasses an attitudinal dimension in that it involves an understanding that Catholic education is a possibility even though a student might not be able to walk to school or attend a school within the boundaries of the local parish.

The quality of **“affordability”** focuses on the ability of the parish in partnership with school families, who are the major recipients of the services of the school, to meet the financial commitments necessary to operate the school. This is primarily achieved when the level of enrollment in a parish or regional school is such that there are enough students, i.e., families, who through tuition fees can share the fixed costs of operating the school. However, tuition fees normally do not cover the full per pupil cost for parochial education. For example, tuition for an individual student in one of the local parish schools may be \$2,500 while the real per pupil cost is \$3,500. The remaining per pupil cost, in this case \$1,000, is the amount that the parish (or parishes) subsidize the school. Simply stated, in the above example, the parish’s (or parishes’) subsidy would equal \$1,000 X the number of students. For example, in school with 300 students the parish (or parishes’) subsidy would be \$300,000. Also, local parish demographics, average household income and the parish financial stability all must figure into the concept of affordability. These are all necessary practical considerations which do not in any way disregard the need to properly evangelize the children of the parish or regional community.

The quality of **“sustainable”** recognizes the reality that it is simply not a matter of maintaining a parish school or developing a regional school as in the past, but a concerted effort and commitment is also needed to maintain the property and buildings, grow enrollment within acceptable parameters (proper class size), keep parishioners / benefactors / alumni / parents / families involved and invested, develop a plan for successful fundraising, consider present trends and market research, and find renewable sources of non-tuition income, etc. With this in mind, it is recommended that whenever possible a development and / or marketing office be established as part of a parish or regional school.

### **Comments from the Community**

An essential part of the Feasibility Study within the region is keeping parishioners informed. The flip side of this is the fact that parishioners are encouraged to discuss all contents of the News Releases with one another and to address any comments, concerns or ideas to the members of their Parish Study Groups. The names of the members of the parish groups can be found in the bulletin for each local parish. As this process of studying how best to provide quality Catholic education for the children of our parishes moves forward hearing from as many members of the community is vital.

The Regional Steering Committee is scheduled to meet again in early December and will continue to meet on a regular basis, every three or four weeks, to deliberate on the outcome of the feasibility study. At a point when fully considered options have been created, 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 Steering Committee’s recommendations will then be presented to His Eminence, Cardinal Justin Rigali.