

### **Catholic School Planning Group Surveys:**

The Catholic School Planning Group for our five parishes thanks all those parents who filled out and sent in surveys in response to the surveys we mailed out. We received 306 completed surveys, a majority of them from parents of students attending our Catholic schools (St. Joseph Lab School, St. Joseph Waite Park and Ss. Peter and Paul).

The completed surveys gave us some good information. It has always been clear to us that parents at all three schools love their schools and are committed to them. When our facilities committee visited the schools in the spring, it was obvious that all the schools are great places to learn, with engaged students, teachers, staff and principals and wonderful curricula. The priests and others have affirmed what a blessing it is to have the school Masses each week and the presence of the children on the church property during the school year. The surveys, including lengthy testimonials from parents, reaffirmed this about all the schools. They are strong communities and parents value the support as well as the opportunities they and their children receive. We are all on this committee because we believe in the value of Catholic schools.

The trend in what parents value from Catholic schools ranks three items at the top: 1) Christian morality and values; 2) excellent academics; and 3) small class size. What surprised us was how many parents said that parish identity was not a strong factor in their decision to send their children to Catholic School.

As we balance the contribution of parishioners to the school with other needs of the parish, the disconnect between parish life/identity and participation in the school is worrisome to members of the committee. The expectation of running a church-based school attached to a parish is that the parents will participate in parish life and bring their children to Mass on Sunday, be actively nurturing the faith at home and have a commitment to support the church and its school through financial contributions, both while their children are in school and after they have graduated. The numbers show both ends of the spectrum: Catholic school parents are among the most active in our parishes and also among the least active. With fewer and fewer parishioners sending their children to Catholic school and seeing parish membership as central to their identity as Catholics, the relationship between schools and churches has changed over the decades.

There is no question that non-parishioner parents and their children, as well as less active parishioners and their children, make great contributions to the schools—we would not be operating without them! These folks also come to the schools because of values-based education, and all parents should be concerned about the quality of the education provided. These are positive values and we are quite glad our schools are focused and able to provide them at a level that keeps attracting students from around the area. Our charge is to look at the relationship between the parishes and the schools and be accountable to the parishioners we represent.

It is also clear to us that too many of the parishioners who choose other school options are not hearing the word about how great our schools are. They answer “Unsure” to questions about the school, ranging from the quality of the education and faith training to

how much it is costing the parish to run the school. Because sending children to Catholic school is no longer a strong part of parish identity and does not seem to be a serious consideration for many parishioners, more marketing and active promotion of the school is needed to get the word out about the benefits of our schools.

**Tuition cost** continues to be the number one concern for both parents sending their children to our Catholic Schools and those who chose other school options (home school, various public schools, other private schools). As you will see, our tuition costs are matched by the parish contributions, providing a large investment based on per-student cost. Tuition still only covers approximately 30% of the costs of providing a Catholic school education in our area.

**Uncertainty about the future** is also a key concern for parents. We recognize that the process of charting a future for our Catholic schools has gone on for too long without a decision. We are charged with making a recommendation to the bishop by the end of 2010. We are working diligently to collect information and grapple with it honestly and sincerely to do what is best for our parishes and in the long-term interest of our schools.

## **Demographics and Financials**

At the end of looking over the responses from parents and the financial data we've been able to collect and organize, we are able to share with you some more specifics about what we've learned. We have collected more financial data than what is presented here, but these are the essential facts related to our discussion.

### **Demographics:**

1. The total number of students at our three schools in grades K-6 is 543. (The total including pre-school and 7-8 is 685.)
2. The current student per teacher ratio ranges from 12.5–13.4.
3. The students enrolled in our Catholic schools represent between 4-7% of the total parish population.

### **Costs:**

The cost of a Catholic school education at all three schools is quite comparable. The total cost for educating K-8 students in our schools ranged from \$5,345/student to \$6,100/student. The differences in cost can be traced to efficiencies provided by enrollment size.

### **Percentage of Contributions to Total Cost:**

1. Tuition percentage of school expenses ranges from 39–43 % of total cost.
2. Parish investment and other financial assistance accounts for between 30–36% of total cost.
3. The rest of the cost is made up for by fundraisers, endowments and other income.
4. The parish investment ranges from 24-36% of the parish's total income.

**Next Steps:**

In August, committee members will meet with the school boards at all three schools. We have also extended invitations to meet one-on-one with the school principals, although those meetings have not been scheduled. Within the first few weeks of schools starting, we hope to have further conversation face-to-face with parents and others interested in this process.