

Washington Town Hall Meetings on Catholic Education Questions and Answers

The following represents a compilation of questions from the six Town Hall meetings on Catholic Education. As there were similar questions asked at each Town Hall meeting, questions were combined based upon what was being asked and then categorized by topic. Each parish has also received a complete listing of all questions asked at their respective Town Hall meetings.

Questions and Answers on the Options Presented:

What are some of the positive outcomes of the development of a regional school system?

A: In a regional school system there is a common curriculum and the schools are not competing, instead sharing resources for additional educational enhancements.

In all options being considered, St Francis Borgia would serve as the middle school campus. Why was St. Francis Borgia selected to house the middle school students?

A: St. Francis Borgia was selected as the middle school as its size would lend itself to housing a robust middle school program.

Would the current St. Francis Borgia school building be used for the middle school or would the system build a new school?

A: The current St. Francis Borgia school building would be used for the middle school.

What would the tuition rate be for each option?

A: The cost analysis of each option was based upon a tuition rate of \$4,600 for the first child.

In option K, what happens to St. Ignatius School, St. John the Baptist School, and St. Vincent School? Why were these parish schools chosen to be eliminated?

A: In option K, St. Ignatius School, St. John the Baptist School, and St. Vincent School would remain as they currently are - parish elementary schools. Other options were created for consideration with multiple configurations of current parish schools. The pastors chose Option K to share with the parishioners and school families.

For parishes that do not join the system, such as the schools listed in option K, what is their projected sustainability?

A: At the spring parish Town Hall meetings, financial data was presented on individual parishes with financial forecasts. It is recommended that this information be reviewed at each local parish so that all parishioners and school families understand the current financial status of their parish as well as what the individual parish financial projection looks like. Going forward, it is critical that parish finance councils share with parishioners and school families the financial reality of the parish.

Would there be cost savings by keeping all schools K-8 campuses and working with a common curriculum, calendar, and purchasing?

A: As stated at the Town Hall meetings, keeping everything as it currently is will not lend itself to cost savings, even with a common curriculum and calendar. There would be some costs efficiencies on purchasing. Working as a system, there would be a higher rate of economies of scale, especially in the areas of maintenance and third party contracting.

Of the options presented, which is the most sustainable over time?

A: Having all six parish schools working together would be the most sustainable over time.

Is it possible to develop other options for a regional school system?

A: In total, there were 12 options developed for the six parish schools (Options A through K plus and additional Option B.1). The pastors chose option B and K for presentation and the Washington Steering Committee presented Option B.1.

Will the campuses of the regional school system have a common name?

A: Yes, the regional school system is one school with multiple campuses. Each campus would retain the name of the parish as the location. For example: "XXXXXX" School at St. John the Baptist Parish.

Will families be surveyed to identify interest in the regional school system?

A: The purpose of the Town Hall meetings was for the pastors to share their best thinking on the development of a regional school system to their parishioners and school families. The suggestion of a survey will be shared with the pastors and the Washington Steering Committee for consideration.

Was consideration given to combining or closing St. Ignatius and St. Vincent?

A: As stated at the Town Hall meetings, some of the options not presented involved school closures. As school closures were not the goal of the planning process, those options were not considered by the pastors and Washington Steering Committee.

Was a facilities study conducted to determine which campuses would be best suited for a K-5 campuses and middle school campus?

A: A subcommittee of the Washington Steering Committee conducted a facilities study of each parish school in order to determine which campuses would be best suited for K - 5 campuses and a middle school campus.

In option K, can any of the three parish schools not considered for the regional school system join now?

A: Yes.

What will the governance of the regional school system involve?

A: The regional school system (one school with multiple campuses) will have local oversight by the pastors and selected members of the local parish communities. The pastors will oversee the spiritual and sacramental life of the school. One pastor will be appointed to serve as the pastor designate to oversee the day-to-day operations of the school system; this will be a termed position. There will be a board of directors for the school that will have limited jurisdiction decision making in the areas of strategic planning, finances, and policies.

What schools are projected to close in 3-5 years should a regional school system not be developed?

A: A closure of a school is the decision made by an individual parish under the direction of the pastor.

Would 6-8 students enrolled in parish schools, not participating in the regional school system, be allowed to register within the system and attend the middle school campus?

A: Currently within the six parish schools, families are choosing where they wish to send their children to school. Each of the current parish schools have children attending from other parishes. The regional school system will be open to families desiring a Catholic education for their children. Families from schools not participating in the regional school system are welcome to register at any of the campus sites.

Will St. Francis Borgia Regional High School be included within the new regional school system?

A: Fr. Kevin Schmittgens, president of St. Francis Borgia High School, has been actively involved in the meetings of the pastors and the Washington Steering Committee. The regional school system will have a strong connection to St. Francis Borgia High School.

Today the Catholic Church stresses the importance of engagement of the laity. How have the laity been involved in the planning and development of a regional school system?

A: The laity have been actively involved in the planning and development of options for a regional school system in the Washington Deanery. Each parish chose two lay representatives to serve on the Washington Steering Committee, some of which were also parents of school-aged children. Finally, the laity of each parish community were engaged in the process through Town Hall meetings in the April/May 2018 and January 2019.

Explain the different models of regional school systems that have been developed within the Archdiocese of St. Louis, and currently, how many regional school systems have been developed?

A: Corporate Model (1) - Holy Cross Academy - Currently 5 parishes supporting with 4 school locations. There is 1 middle school with 3 K-5 campuses. This structure has a separate lay president of the corporation that runs the day to day operations. Over time, one location has closed and one parish with a new location has been added.

Partnership Model (2) - South City Catholic Academy (SCCA) & All Saints Academy (ASA) – Both of these “regional” schools are operated in partnership with the Archdiocese and the Archdiocesan Regional Director runs the day to day operations of the schools. SCCA is one location. ASA is 3 locations.

Seton Regional School (SRS) started with two parishes and two locations. One was a middle school and one was a K-5. Over the years, the enrollment decreased to a point of only having one location. Recently, another parish joined SRS and decided with their low enrollment numbers that the best option was to join SRS and send their children to the single SRS site. A pastor designate works with the principal to operate the school and 3 parishes subsidize the school operations.

Holy Child (HC) is a partnership between two parishes with one location. A pastor designate works with the principal of the school.

Enrollment Questions:

What should families do for the 2019-2020 school year enrollment?

A: Families need to complete the registration paperwork at their current school site. At this time, no registration fees will be collected. It is imperative that families complete the registration paperwork on time in order to take advantage of tuition assistance from the Archdiocese of St. Louis (ex: Alive in Christ).

How and when will the decision be made on K-5 student placement?

A: After the Town Hall meetings conclude, the pastors will reconvene to make a decision. Once that meeting date is established, it will be published.

What will the placement of K-5 students look like in each option?

A: Families may choose to attend the K-5 campus at the parish school they currently attend or families may choose another K-5 campus.

What will the class size be in the regional system?

A: Class size will be determined by total enrollment within the regional school system. Classes are not projected to be larger than 25 students to a class.

What does the development of a regional school system do to the overall Catholic pupil enrollment in the Washington Deanery?

A: The hope of the pastors and the Washington Steering Committee is that the regional school system will attract additional Catholic students to Catholic education.

What will the development of a regional school system do to the PSR enrollments at the parishes?

A: The current PSR structure will remain in place. As it is now, PSR families are welcome to enroll in a Catholic day school. As this is a family choice, it is not possible to predict what effect the regional school system would have on PSR enrollments. It is desirable to have PSR in every parish.

If the family's home parish was not involved in the regional school system, would parents have the option to choose to enroll within the system instead of their parish school?

A: Yes.

What is the anticipated loss of Catholic students in the Washington deanery due to the development of a regional school system?

A: Based on the data from Holy Cross Academy, the attrition was minimal and the regional school has not lost enrollment experienced by parish schools in the same period.

Are all current students in the parish schools guaranteed a spot within the regional school system?

A: Yes.

In the presentation given during the town halls, an increase in enrollment from 880+ to 937 over the next three years was projected. How does that match the enrollment decline over the last ten years?

A: It was based on the current enrollments in the early grades including Pre-School. We often have families leave a school after Pre-school.

Personnel/Staffing Questions:

What would the role of the pastors be in the new regional system? Will they maintain an administrative role in the regional school system?

A: The pastors in a regional school system become a governance board with oversight of the entire system. The pastors give certain decision-making responsibilities to an appointed board of directors in the areas of strategic planning, finances, and policies. As it is currently, the pastors continue to ensure the spiritual and sacramental life of the school. One pastor is chosen as the pastor designate for an appointed term. The pastor designate assists with the day-to-day operations of the regional school system. All of the pastors have oversight of the spiritual and sacramental formation of students.

What are the numbers of faculty and staff members needed for each option?

A: The projected number of faculty and staff members needed for each option are as follows:

Option B: 42 classroom/homeroom teachers, 5 learning consultants, 18 specialty teachers

Option K: 26 classroom/homeroom teachers, 4 learning consultants, 12 specialty teachers

Option B.1: 39 classroom/homeroom teachers, 5 learning consultants, 18 specialty teachers

How were the number of faculty and staff members needed for each option decided?

A: The projected number of faculty and staff members needed for each option were decided by the projected enrollment numbers and the educational programs for each option.

Who will be hiring administrators? Who will be hiring faculty and staff?

A: A principal search committee comprised of pastors and community leaders will hire the principals. The principals and pastors will hire the teachers.

Will meetings be held with current administrators, faculty and staff to support them in the hiring process?

A: Yes. The Education Human Resources Office will assist with this process.

Will faculty be given contracts during the usual time in April?

A: Once a decision is made, a hiring timeline will be shared with all faculty and staff.

Will current faculty and staff be given an opportunity to apply within the system before individuals currently not teaching in our schools?

A: Yes.

Will current faculty and staff have input in the development of the regional school system?

A: If the decision is made to form a regional school system, principals and teachers will be involved in curriculum and program planning.

Will teachers with more experience have an equal opportunity in hiring for the regional school system?

A: Yes. Teachers will be considered for positions based upon gifts, talents, teacher evaluations, and credentials. Hiring decisions will NOT be based upon finances or if a teacher is high on the teacher salary scale.

With classroom sizes of 30 students, will there be teacher aides hired for classroom support?

A: The class size of 30 is coming from taking the number of middle school students and dividing that number by the number of homeroom teachers. This is not taking into consideration the resource and specialty teachers for the curriculum

Will all contracted employees within the system receive the tuition benefit for their children?

A: The Archdiocesan tuition benefit applies to contracted principals and teachers and will remain in place.

When hiring administrators for the regional school system, what does FTE mean?

A: FTE is a human resources acronym that means "full-time equivalent."

Parish Questions:

Can parishes make the decision to not participate in the regional school system?

A: The decision to participate, or not, in the regional school systems rests with the pastor of each parish after consultation with his parishioners.

Should parishes not participate in the system will parish families have the option to participate later?

A: Yes.

Will parishioners and school families be given a chance to vote on participation within the regional school system?

A: Each pastor will consult with his parishioners and school families in order to assist him with his decision to participate, or not, in the regional school system. The decision rests with the pastor.

Will transportation of students be provided for families with children at multiple campuses?

A: Transportation of students for families with children at multiple campuses has been identified as a need and has been discussed for consideration.

Where will the children receive their sacraments?

A: Per Canon Law of the Catholic Church, the reception of the sacraments takes place in the parish. Children in the regional school system will receive their sacraments in the parish to which their family belongs.

How will athletic programs be run through the development of a regional school system?

A: The decision on athletics will be made by the pastors and parish athletic associations.

What parish ministries will be invested in with the savings made in developing a regional school system?

A: A subcommittee of the Washington Steering Committee surveyed the six parishes on ministries they would like to invest in. Survey results indicated youth ministry, young adult ministry, and adult faith formation.

How will each parish identity be maintained within the regional school system?

A: As the school is but one apostolate of a parish, the parish identity will remain. Each pastor is responsible for the spiritual and sacramental life of their campus. Each campus will retain the name of the parish (ex: "XXXXX" School at St. John the Baptist Parish).

Will support be provided in maintaining a vibrant parish?

A: All parishes need to have a strategic plan for increasing parishioner engagement. Support in developing a strategic plan for parish life can be provided at the request of the pastor.

In the development of a regional school system, who would be responsible for maintaining the school buildings, the parish or the regional system?

A: The capital improvements are the responsibility of the parish but the everyday maintenance is the responsibility of the school system.

Why weren't all parish schools within the Washington Deanery included in the planning of a regional school system?

A: The six parishes that entered into the planning process are a geographical cluster within the larger Washington Deanery.

Will parishes part of the regional school system need to rent/get approval from the system administration to use current school buildings for parish events?

A: No. The school campuses will continue to be owned by the parishes and will be available for use for parish events.

Finance Questions:

In the three possible options, B, B.1, and K, only one projects a savings in cost. Why is consideration being given to the two options that will increase parish investments?

A: The additional costs reflects the enhancements to the program.
If the status quo continues there will be approximately the same increase without the educational enhancements.

What is the 3-5 year financial forecast of each parish in the proposed options that have an increase in cost?

A: At this time, until we know which options is selected, we have not run a 3-5 year forecast. There are too many options with too many variables to do this at this time. Once an option is selected by the pastors, we can begin to build these forecasts.

How will these options that increase total parish investment allow tuition to remain affordable and free up subsidies for churches to put toward other parish ministries?

A: In other systems across the Archdiocese, the parishes have reduced subsidy allowing for funding of additional parish ministries.

Will financial support from the Archdiocese be provided to parishes that do not participate in the regional school system?

A: Operating grants (to pay bills and personnel costs) will no longer be provided by the Archdiocese for parishes with schools that do not want to participate in alternate ways of running their school. If a parish with a school can't support itself, then it will need to close.

What will happen to parish/school fundraisers? How will these be affected by the development of a regional school system?

A: Individual parishes can continue to do its fundraisers to a) help with the parish subsidy to a regional school system b) help with a scholarship assistance fund for parishioners. The goal is for all the schools to have the necessary equipment to operate the schools, not just those schools that can raise money for “their” schools possible needs/wants.

How will tuition be determined?

A: Once a structural model is determined, a full budget will be developed. Pastors will need to determine if tuition options need to be set-up (active vs non-active parishioner, Catholic vs. Non-Catholic. Etc.) The goal is to make tuition affordable to both the families and the parish.

What will happen to endowments that have been set up and restricted for current parish schools?

A: The endowment fund agreements will have to be reviewed on a parish by parish basis to see how the document was written. Each one could be different. In some cases, the earnings can be used to help the individual parish’s subsidy to the system. Some might specifically indicate scholarship assistance, which would still be determined by the parish.

Will there be a discount in tuition for multi-student families? How will the middle school affect the multi-child discount?

A: Families that enroll their children within the regional school system and have students at any of the campuses of the system, will receive a multi-child discount.

Who will collect/disperse tuition in the regional school system?

A: Tuition for the regional school system will be collected at each campus.

Will the total parish investments be shared equally between participating parishes?

A: Until a particular model is selected, it is impossible to answer this question at this time.

Will parishes that decide not to join the system continue to be considered for grants and funding from the Archdiocese?

A: Yes.

Timeline Questions:

What is the projected timeline for the pastors to make a final decision on the regional school system?

A: Upon completion of the Town Hall meetings at each parish, the pastors will gather to discuss and make a final decision for their parishes’ participation in a regional school system.

If a regional school system is developed, when would it begin?

A: Once a decision has been made about developing a regional school system, the pastors will work to develop a timeline of implementation.

Has consideration been given to implementing the regional school system in phases?

A: It is difficult to implement a regional school system in phases because it affects every parish.

Program/Curriculum/Instruction Questions:

Will students regularly celebrate liturgy at all campuses of the regional school system?

A: As a Catholic school, the regular celebration of liturgy will be important. All campuses will celebrate liturgy at least once a week.

Who will develop curriculum?

A: The principals and teachers will develop the curriculum with support from the Washington Regional Director and the Curriculum Department of the Office of Catholic Education and Formation.

How will gaps in curriculum at the different schools be addressed?

A: As the regional school system will need to have a cohesive and comprehensive curriculum, the current written curriculums of each parish school will be cross-referenced to identify any possible gaps. A comprehensive curriculum will be developed to ensure that there is consistency across all campuses.

Who will choose what textbooks and instructional resources will be used?

A: The principals and teachers will choose the textbooks and instructional resources for the regional school system.

Will administrators, faculty and staff have input in curriculum development for the regional school system?

A: The principals and teachers will develop the curriculum with support from the Washington Regional Director and the Curriculum Department of the Office of Catholic Education and Formation.

Will all faculty and staff be certified in the areas they teach?

A: In order to maintain accreditation status in the state of Missouri, it is essential that teachers be degreed and certified in the areas that they teach.

Will before/after care be provided for families?

A: Yes, each campus will provide before and aftercare.

How will school lunches be handled?

A: Each campus will provide a lunch program. Specific details will be shared at a later date.

Will the uniform be the same for all campuses in the regional school system?

A: As this regional school system is one school with multiple campuses, the uniform will be the same for all campuses. For the 8th grade students, consideration will be given to allowing their current uniform as this is their last year of elementary school.

Will students at the middle school campus have opportunities of student leadership i.e. student council, student government?

A: Yes.

Will the middle school curriculum include electives i.e. life skills, agriculture, wood shop, speech, drama, computer coding, occupational exploration?

A: The middle school curriculum will include electives, in particular in the areas of art, music, physical education and health, and foreign language. Additional electives will always be considered and planned for through the school strategic planning process.

In the regional school system, what supports will be provided for students with special learning needs?

A: As a school within the Washington Public School District, students enrolled within the regional school system will continue to receive the supports that are currently in place through the public district. In addition, each campus will have a Learning Consultant to work with teachers in the regular education classroom on providing needed interventions and strategies.

Will summer educational programs be offered in the regional school system?

A: With the resources of so many educators, the possibility of summer sessions and Vacation Bible School will grow exponentially.

Preschool Questions:

Will preschool be a part of the regional school system?

A: Preschools will remain as parish owned and operated.

Would the St. Francis Borgia campus keep a preschool with no K-5 students?

A: Yes.

Would preschool teachers be given a discount in tuition for K-5 or 6-8 children?

A: Preschool teachers currently receiving a tuition discount through their parishes need to have this conversation with their individual pastors.

Would the regional school system house an early childhood center or a preschool center?

A: Currently, the plan is for each parish to maintain its own preschool program. Any changes would be determined by the pastors and the board of directors.