

STRATEGIC CLOSURE AND CONSOLIDATION OF CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS IN THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

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The viability and the future of the Catholic Church are dependent on the attendance in the church pews. Many of those attendees are a product of Catholic education, which has slowly diminished as we see a decrease in enrollment trends in the United States. Catholic education is truly essential to the future of the Catholic Church. According to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (2002), one goal of a Catholic school is to educate academically, socially, and in all other areas to ensure the student's personal and professional success in the world. The second goal is to transmit the faith to the next generation (National Conference of Catholic Bishops). Students who attended Catholic schools for at least eight years were more likely to participate in the life of the church on a consistent basis. (DeFiore, L., Convey, J., and Schottloffel, M. *Weathering the Storm*)

As the schools in the Diocese of Rockville Centre are an integral part of the ongoing of the churches, the Diocese of Rockville Centre has committed itself to fulfilling the commitment to the faith and academic excellence to the students and families of the Diocese. As part of their commitment, the Diocese created a Strategic Plan to ensure that Catholic schools are fiscally strong, sustainable, affordable, and accessible. In creating the plan, the Diocese examined the challenges and opportunities that they are faced with and created benchmark goals that are measurable and attainable and provide strategies to achieve success.

The Diocese of Rockville Centre was formed in 1957. To understand the structure of the Education Department in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, the following is a breakdown of the governance of the Diocese of Rockville Centre today:

The Department of Education in the Diocese of Rockville Centre is an incorporated 501c3. The Most Reverent William Murphy is President; Sr. Joanne Callahan, OSU, is the Superintendent; and Steven Cheeseman, Ed.D., is the Associate Superintendent. The Diocese has Parish Elementary Schools, which are an extension of the Parish Corporation. The Educational Charter is through the Kennedy Directory whereby the Pastor is the Chief Officer and the Principal is the Educational Officer. The schools fall under the direction of the Diocese of Rockville Centre where the Most Reverend William Murphy is the President.

As Long Island's population boomed, so did Catholic education. By the 1960s, the Diocese had 92 elementary schools with 78,000 students. Today there are 53 elementary schools (less the six that closed as a result of this plan) with 32,000 students. Part of the reason for this decline is the shift in demographics across Long Island as families are faced with the difficult economic environment on Long Island, and the Diocese is faced with the increased secularization of American society. (Table 1) The decrease in enrollment is not restricted to Catholic elementary schools as the public schools across Long Island are seeing the same decline. (Figures 1 and 2) Enrollment has been steadily declining and parishes have had difficulty providing the level of financial support required by the schools. Examination of the data have left no choice to the public school counterparts but to reorganize and consolidate which led to the decision on the part of the Diocese to do the same if they are to continue to exist.

As the decades passed, the Diocese realized that something needed to be done. The first initiative was in the late 1980s when the Diocese undertook its first review of the schools. Since that time, several studies have been conducted as the Diocese understands that self-examination and review is an efficient response to the challenges that each new decade has brought to them.

In 2004 the Catholic Elementary School Study was conducted and from that study both the Elementary Education Commission of the Diocese of Rockville Centre and the Tomorrow's Hope Foundation were formed. The Elementary Education Commission has worked closely with the schools to improve programs and promote effective and efficient management best practices. The Tomorrow's Hope Foundation has worked to ensure the excellence and continuance of Catholic schools on Long Island by increasing awareness of the value of a Catholic school education and by providing scholarship and program funding for the needs of students and schools. Since its inception in 2005, the Tomorrow's Hope Foundation has distributed more than \$8.4 million in aid, assisting over 6,100 children, and continues to provide approximately \$2 million in scholarship aid annually, as well as support for programs and emergency facility repairs. (Strategic Plan for Catholic Elementary Schools)

In June 2010, Bishop William Murphy created the Bishop's Advisory Committee on Catholic Education. The Committee's responsibility was to examine the challenges facing the schools in the Diocese and provide a framework for overcoming them. Over the course of the next 18 months, the committee sought input from all of the stakeholders in the Diocese including pastors, principals, teachers, parents, and business and community leaders. As a result of this input, *The Strategic Plan* was developed. The plan identified

six important strategic elements that must be addressed to preserve and enhance the schools:

- **Strong Catholic Identity** - In the Diocese of Rockville Centre, Catholic identity is the defining characteristic and essential element in Catholic schools.
- **Educational Excellence** - Schools in the Diocese of Rockville Centre continue to build on the tradition of academic excellence that has historically been one of its strengths.
- **Effective Organization and Governance** - A well-organized and effective system of shared governance coordinates leadership at the parish, regional, and Diocesan levels and promotes the consistent implementation of policy.
- **Collaborative Leadership** - The synergistic leadership of pastors and principals in the Diocese of Rockville Centre fosters successful schools that work closely with teachers, parents, and students.
- **Responsible Stewardship** - Leaders throughout the Diocese maximize the time, talent, and treasure available to secure the future of Catholic schools. All are called to collaborate in this mission.
- **Vibrant and Effective Communications** - Catholic schools in the Diocese of Rockville Centre are engaged and well respected in their communities and have vibrant and effective means of communicating their success with families, alumni, and the wider community. (Strategic Plan for Catholic Elementary Schools)

These six areas are critical to the efforts to create a future in which Catholic elementary education continues to thrive in the Diocese. Bishop Murphy said, “This Strategic Plan will make our schools stronger academically, stronger in terms of faith

formation and stronger at preparing students to go out into the community as men and women of fine character who can make a difference.” The Bishop added, “It will help us to identify and take advantage of the many opportunities that lie ahead in order to provide Catholic education that is academically excellent and spiritually engaging as well as affordable and accessible.” (Strategic Plan for Catholic Elementary Schools)

The following is a timeline of the Strategic Plan and its implementation:

- June 2010 – Bishop Murphy forms Bishops Advisory Committee on Catholic Education (BACCE)
- July 2010 - November 2010 – BACCE gathers research needed to begin plan
- January 18, 2011 – Draft strategic elements presented to planning committees for review and comment (committees look for consensus on the vision, not the implementation)
- February 2011 – July 2011 – Representatives of Pastors and Principals (BACCE) review, edit and receive feedback on draft elements of strategic plan for comment
- September 2011 – Strategic Plan is presented to pastors and principals, and is published and implemented
- Late Fall 2011/ Winter 2011 – Vitality studies completed and recommendations for mergers and closures are announced
- September 2012 – Full implementation of the plan as well as surveys conducted to determine the degree of implementation of the plan at each school

As a result of *The Strategic Plan* the following has occurred:

- 6 of 53 Elementary schools closed at the end of 2011-2012 academic year. The Diocese of Rockville Centre is closing six of its 53 elementary schools on Long Island at the end of the 2011-2012 school year.
- St. John Baptist de La Salle Regional School (Farmingdale)
- St. Catherine of Sienna School (Franklin Square)
- St. Ignatius Loyola School (Hicksville)
- Sacred Heart School (North Merrick)
- Our Lady of Perpetual Help School (Lindenhurst)
- Prince of Peace Regional School (Sayville)

Along with the aforementioned schools, Bishop William Murphy asked five schools, three in Suffolk County and two in Nassau County, to form a "strategic collaboration."

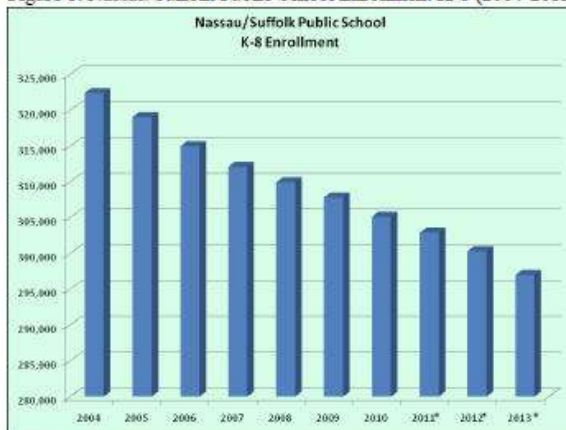
To ensure the long-term success of *The Strategic Plan*, the following monitoring system has been put in place: an implementation survey which is a 60-question survey to parents, pastors, teachers, principals and board members. Additionally, in September of 2013 modifications or adjustments to plan goals will be announced in light of continuing reviews of progress on measures of success and adjust planning. It is through all of these efforts that the future of Catholic Elementary Schools will continue to exist.

Table 1: Projected Change in population 2010 - 2015

Township	5-9 year olds	10-14 year olds
Huntington	-7.1%	-9.6%
Oyster Bay	-8.3%	-13.2%
North Hempstead	-5%	-11.7
Hempstead	-7.2%	-12.2
Babylon	-5.5%	-7.4%
Smithtown	-6.4%	-7.2%
Islip	-5.2%	-7.2%
Brookhaven	-3.1%	-5.9%
Riverhead	1.7%	-1.1%
Southampton	-1.7%	-4%
Easthampton	-1.6%	-4.9%
Southold	-0.2%	-4.7

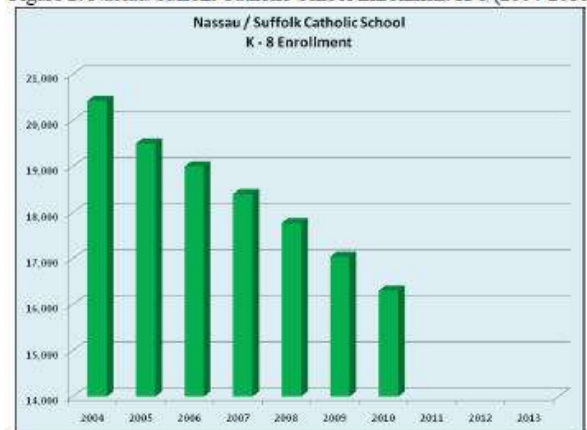
Source: Dr. Jonathan Hughes, St. John's University

Figure 1: Nassau/Suffolk Public School Enrollment K-8 (2004-2013*)



*projected enrollments
Source: Western Suffolk BOCES Bi-County Public School Enrollment Report, March 2011

Figure 2: Nassau/Suffolk Catholic School Enrollment K-8 (2004-2010)



Source: Diocese of Rockville Centre Education Department Enrollment Reports 2004-2010



The Bishop's Advisory Committee
for Catholic Education

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Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia
Diocese of Rockville Centre

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