



## **Q & A for the Des Moines Regional Plan**

Below is an initial list of questions and answers related to the regional system for the Des Moines area schools.

- 1. Are we really going to move ahead with this plan? If yes, when would it happen?** We are working with Bishop Joensen to update him on progress to date and allow time for him to share his thoughts and intentions. An Implementation Coordinator was hired to lead the process of implementing the Des Moines Regional Plan. An Implementation Committee and seven focus groups (Faith Formation, Academics, Diversity, Governance, Finance, Advancement, Enrollment and Marketing) were formed to work on implementation plans for each area. The Implementation Coordinator, Implementation Committee and Focus groups are gathering data, defining issues, doing research, determining resource needs. The focus groups and Implementation Committee will make recommendations to the Bishop and will recommend a timeline for going forward. No exact starting date has been set. Some work has begun to create a foundation for enhanced collaboration and communication. The committee will submit a multi-year plan to the Bishop for his approval.
- 2. Will this plan change the role of the pastor who is required to do so much in the current model?** Operating a school has become much more complex over the years and the cost of operating a school has dramatically increased over the years. Asking pastors to fill the wide variety of roles required to operate a parish and school is not realistic. Work will be done to better define the role of the pastor as it pertains to the operation of the school so his role as spiritual and faith leader in the parish and school can be accomplished more effectively. As with any relationship, being present is the most important element. The goal of the plan is to free up the pastor so he has more time to be in the school and work with parents and parishioners in his role as pastoral leader.
- 3. What is in this for parents and students? What is the benefit?** The goal for creating a region is to be able to offer the highest quality programming for all students across all schools. The strategic plan indicated that the individual parish/school model is becoming more difficult to offer excellent programs due to the complexity and cost of operations. Without robust financial and operational collaboration and support, the overall quality of our schools could be threatened. Strong collaboration in a regional model leverages resources and integrates best practices producing an excellent faith and academic education for all students and families in every school.
- 4. What is meant by a regional school system? Why can't we just stay with the parish model we have now?** Currently, our eleven Catholic grade schools in the Des Moines metro are each attached to one parish and the parish is responsible for the entire operation the school. A single

parish operating its own school has become more costly and more complex over the years. The requirements to keep focused on providing an excellent, faith-based education, while also managing enrollment, marketing the school, raising funds to provide tuition assistance, maintaining solid business operations, and maintaining a competitive compensation program, is more complicated than in the past. A regional system brings the eleven grade schools and Dowling Catholic together in a system and enhances the operations of the schools by collaboration amongst the schools. A regional system allows for greater collaboration in faith formation efforts, marketing of schools, enrollment management, K-12 academic alignment, financial and human resources, business functions, advancement, and governance. Many Catholic parish schools around the country are in the process of forming regional systems - New York Catholic Schools and St. Louis Catholic Schools - and others have had a regional system in place for some time - Sioux Falls O’Gorman Catholic School System, Holy Family School System in Dubuque and Carroll Kuemper Catholic School System in Carroll, Iowa. These are just a few. Many more diocese and Catholic schools around the country are working to strength and secure the future of their Catholic schools by creating systems.

- 5. Will there be a new building built for a regional office or operations?** There are no plans for a new building for a regional office. Utilization of a current space and/or personnel would be in line with finding efficiencies as the plan develops.
- 6. Will schools close?** No schools are anticipated to close and that has never been a topic of discussion. Parishes with schools at their site will continue to have a school. The goal is, through enhanced collaboration, to provide support for all schools to continue to be better.
- 7. Will we lose local control of our Catholic school?** Most regional systems have a regional governing board with multiple committees that provide leadership and planning for the system. Local schools will need to have a local advisory group to assist in providing feedback and volunteer support for the operation and support of their school. As the system develops, some operations (business/finance, HR, purchasing, enrollment management, marketing) may be regionalized so that all schools benefit. As collaborations develop in the areas mentioned above, pastors, local schools and principals will be able to focus their attention and efforts on producing the highest quality Catholic education for the students.
- 8. How will the Catholic identity of the schools be preserved and strengthened?** The main priority in Catholic education is Catholic identity and the involvement of the clergy in the day-to-day spiritual activities of not only the parish, but also the school community. This model would remove the operational activities from the clergy and prioritize the clergy’s involvement in the spiritual needs of the school community and parish. It would also remove some operational responsibilities from the principal so he or she can spend more time as the educational and formational leader of the school. Schools will still maintain the charisms and characteristics that are unique to the patron of their parish or school but would have an enhanced relationship with the other schools in the region through collaboration in areas at a level they may not be able to achieve alone. Schools would keep their school colors and the activities that have been developed over the years that support the culture of the parish and school.

- 9. Will the new Des Moines Regional model save money?** By creating a regional system, certain functions will benefit from cost efficiencies (e.g., business functions, purchasing, shared programming) but other functions where schools are not adequately resourced now will be added on behalf of all schools (e.g., enrollment management, marketing and advancement). The goal is to create a regional model that moves schools from subsistence to thriving. The plan will make possible growth in revenue to sustain quality programming and to attract and retain the best teachers and staff.
- 10. Are there plans for a junior high?** During the process, along with many topics of discussion, there was conversation about the pros and cons of having a junior high or middle school experience for students. A decision was made to maintain all schools as K-8 schools and focus new resources on financial assistance to help enhance the viability of each school and grow enrollment. No students will be required to change schools or be bused to other schools to increase enrollment in schools with empty seats. The conversation about the pros and cons of a junior high or other experience as well as where new schools could be built in growth areas will remain in long range planning discussions as the regional system develops.
- 11. Are specific schools going to have special programs like STEM or Dual Language where parents are encouraged or need to attend that school for the special program?** The goal of the plan is to have excellent programs like STEM and other curriculum enhancing initiatives present in all schools. Some schools currently have programs that are well established. They will continue to be supported, encouraged to grow, and to be a resource for other schools to learn from to grow their own STEM programs. The Dual Language program is unique with specific requirements and is not designed to be replicated in multiple locations, so it will most likely remain in one location.
- 12. What about additional help or programs for students with unique learning needs?** Programs to provide resources and support for students with special learning needs varies across schools. The intent of the plan is to build upon existing programs and find ways through collaboration to provide a greater level of support for these students across the schools.
- 13. How will this be paid for?** The plan has many facets, and some will take more funding. One of the most important areas to address early on is increasing tuition assistance. The Catholic Tuition Organization, funded by tax credits, will need to continue to grow as a part of this effort. A diocesan wide campaign to support tuition assistance at all schools will be necessary early in the process, and goals for that campaign will be determined as work continues. Ongoing and enhanced fundraising efforts at each school as well as continued parish support at a level that is manageable for each parish going forward will be essential.
- 14. Talk of a need for tuition increase can be concerning. Will the cost of a Catholic education be beyond my ability to pay for it?** Any raise in tuition must be tied to an increase in tuition assistance as described above. Tuition increases would be phased in over multiple years and supported by more financial assistance so that families who need assistance would be able to afford the increases in tuition. Additional revenue from tuition, supported by enhanced tuition assistance, is a key element in the plan. Our goal is to provide excellence in the faith-integrated teaching/learning process provided by staff committed to the mission. Being able to provide competitive compensation is the key to attracting and maintaining a high-quality staff

- 15. The plan contains so much. How will all this be accomplished?** This is a multi-year plan. Just like any good plan, not everything will be accomplished at the same time or all at once. Decisions must be made regarding key priorities that will be addressed early on. The work of the Implementation Committee, Focus Groups and meetings with constituents will help determine what those priorities are and how to develop a plan to move forward. Some schools will move toward our goals at a faster rate than others, but a plan will be made so each school can move at a pace that is tailored for them.
- 16. Our school seems to be doing fine. Do we need a region?** A school may feel they are immune from the issues facing the parish school model and not need to be in the region. Realistically, the issues as an independent parish school remain the same for the parish and school. Acting independently presents issues for the pastor to have time to be the spiritual leader and not be so involved in fund raising, HR issues, fundraising etc. The principal does not receive the level of support for tasks such as enrollment management, marketing, state reports, business functions, etc. that a regional staff would take off their plate, so they can be a formation and educational leader. Maintaining competitive teacher compensation and providing additional tuition assistance would be more difficult.
- 17. Will forming a region downgrade existing curriculum or programs?** The goal of regionalization is to raise the level of excellence of all schools. That requires more resources and strong support for current as well as new academic and formation efforts, not simply the redistribution of current resources which would result in mediocre programs across the board. We want all schools to have excellent academics, work together to know what that looks like, and practice at getting better at it every day. We want to learn from and replicate good programs, discover new teaching/learning processes, and get them in every classroom in all schools. The goal of forming a region is to provide additional support and resources to all schools. We cannot drive equity at the expense of quality and achieve excellence. We need to find efficiencies such as less duplication of business practices and bulk purchasing across. We need to find or create new resources that do not exist now to support all schools. We can seek some level of equity but not without finding savings and efficiencies, providing new resources to groups that never had them before, discovering the best teaching/learning practices, and sharing them with everyone to drive excellence so that the “tide raises all boats”.