

The Blue Ribbon Commission:

Charting the future course of catholic education

December 2011

In January 2011, the Blue Ribbon Commission appointed by Cardinal Justin Rigali began a comprehensive study of the elementary, special education and secondary schools of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia as well as the Parish Religious Education Programs (PREP) in the parishes across the Archdiocese. The Commission identified the critical trends facing the future of Catholic schools: declining Church attendance and contributions, shifting demographics, diminishing enrollment and rising tuitions as well as underutilized school buildings. Parishes that support a school have also seen their finances strained as they work to offset operating deficits of their schools. In the last ten years, parish subsidies to schools have increased from an average of \$255,450 per school to an average of \$319,162 per school—an increase of 24.9%.

As a result of this study, the Blue Ribbon Commission developed a comprehensive strategic plan focused on the ability to provide quality, affordable and sustainable Catholic education for present and future generations across the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Simply leaving each school on its own to achieve this goal has become much more difficult over the years, as indicated by the announcements of school closings each year.

At a meeting for priests, school administrators and directors of religious education on January 6, 2012, the Blue Ribbon Commission will provide the specifics of its plan. As Archbishop Chaput indicated in his Pastoral Letter on December 8th the Blue Ribbon Commission will likely recommend that some, and perhaps many, schools must close or combine. It will also offer a framework for strengthening our schools going forward.

This renewed vision provides great hope for the future of Catholic schools and their service to children and families in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The time is here for all of us to step forward with the support, good will and ongoing involvement enabling our long held tradition of Catholic Schools to be here for our children and for the children of future generations.

On Friday, January 6, 2012 at 4:00 p.m. there will also be a news conference with Archbishop Chaput unveiling the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations. You will be able to view the news conference live on the Archdiocesan website at www.archphila.org. At the conclusion of the news conference a new website, www.faithinthefuture.com, will go live. This site will offer tools which will guide us all through the coming days, weeks and months ahead.

During this time of transition in Catholic education let us ask the intercession of Saints John Neumann and Katharine Drexel. May they comfort and inspire us to provide the best quality Catholic education possible for today's children and tomorrow's generations.