

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

More Urban Religious Schools Set to Close or Convert to Charters

Extending the national decline of urban religious schools, two Catholic archdioceses recently unveiled plans to deal with the squeeze of sagging enrollments, rising costs, and under-utilized buildings. The plans include closing schools, consolidating them, and converting some to charters.

Washington, DC

The Archdiocese of Washington announced November 5 that out of 12 schools in the District of Columbia with “serious and growing deficits,” five will continue as Catholic schools in 2008 and seven will apply to become public charter schools. The decision was reached after rounds of consultation with archdiocesan advisory boards as well as with parents, parishioners, and teachers at the schools involved. The 12 schools currently enroll 2,200 children, nearly three-quarters of whom are not Catholic.

“It has been very painful to realize that the archdiocese can no longer maintain all of these schools as Catholic. This new framework will allow the archdiocese to sustain Catholic education in the center city and, where that is no longer possible, to ensure the students have access to a high quality educational alternative,” Washington Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl said. “I am very grateful to all those who participated in this consultation process and for their support of quality education for the children in our city.”

The archdiocese’s Center City Consortium of schools, established in 1997, had been regarded as a national model for maintaining viable schools in poor neighborhoods where tuition and parish contributions could no longer cover spiraling costs. The consortium was centrally administered and relied on archdiocesan

subsidies and outside donors to keep the schools afloat and tuition within an affordable range. Since the consortium began, donor and church investments have exceeded \$60 million, and the results, according to an archdiocesan statement, have been “strong academic achievement and

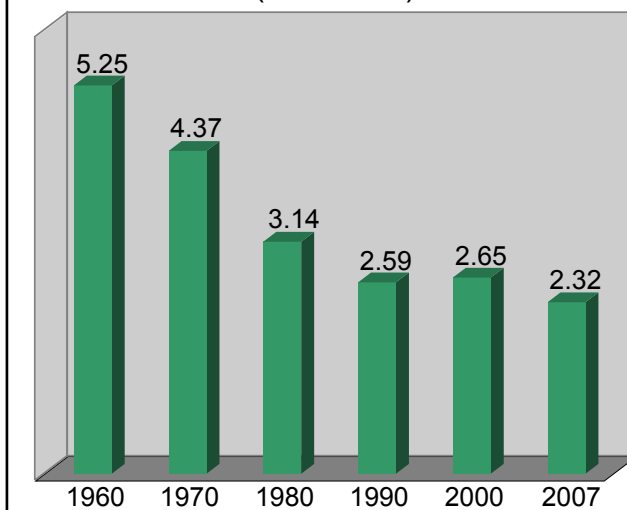
diocese, “will allow faculty and students to be ‘grandfathered’ in and to continue at the same school they already attend.” Thus, in exchange for religious instruction and worship, the same students will be taught by the same teachers in the same buildings, but entirely at taxpayer expense.

Public charter schools in DC are funded through a uniform per-student funding formula, which provides a base amount (\$8,322 for FY 2008) augmented by additional weights for certain grade levels and student attributes. A kindergarten student, for example, carries a 1.16 weight, which translates into \$9,654 in per-pupil funding; a student with limited English proficiency produces a \$3,329 supplemental allocation. And all charter school students generate a per-pupil facilities allotment of \$3,109 to make up for their schools’ lack of access to the District’s capital budget. So, a limited English proficient student in a charter school kindergarten would generate over \$16,000 in government funding.

Ironically, it was charter schools in the District that helped drain enrollment from Catholic schools and that helped force the seven schools to seek charter status. The archdiocesan statement attributed the consortium’s enrollment fall “in part to a loss in the city’s population and the growth of tuition-free public charter schools.” Charter school enrollment in DC has grown from 3,594 in 1998 to 19,662 in 2007 and now accounts for almost 30 percent of the District’s roughly 70,000 public school students.

School closings understandably stir emotions, and a group called Black Catholics United, made up of parents and community leaders who oppose the charter school conversion, called the move “a

Catholic School Enrollment 1960-2007
(in millions)



Source: National Catholic Educational Association

significant facility improvements.” Still, a 19 percent fall in consortium enrollment, current annual deficits in the range of \$7 million, and projections of five-year deficits exceeding \$50 million proved too much of a challenge.

The seven schools that will apply to the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) to become charters will be overseen by a charter organization that the archdiocese plans to select in early December. It is looking for a charter operator that “demonstrates a commitment to continuing the academic philosophy, excellence, and values that have made the Consortium so successful.” Although the new schools will be “value based,” they will not be Catholic.

The conversion, according to the arch-

continued on page 2



CAPE member organizations:

- Agudath Israel of America
- American Montessori Society
- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Christian Teachers and Schools
- Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
- Christian Schools International
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Friends Council on Education
- Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- National Association of Episcopal Schools
- National Association of Independent Schools
- National Catholic Educational Association
- National Christian School Association
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools
- 31 Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
Executive Director: Joe McTighe

Outlook is published monthly (September to June) by CAPE. An annual subscription is \$25. ISSN 0271-1451

13017 Wisteria Drive #457
Germantown, MD 20874
(tel) 301-916-8460
(fax) 301-916-8485
(email) cape@capenet.org

www.capenet.org



continued from page 1

major blow to education in the District.” The group decried the loss of “high achieving schools that provide an outstanding education to predominantly African American students.”

Boston

The Archdiocese of Boston announced November 30 a plan to consolidate Catholic schools in the Dorchester and Mattapan neighborhoods of Boston. Seven parish schools will merge into a single regional school with five preK-8 sites, leaving two existing schools to close and another to change its location. The new regional school will be called Pope John Paul II Catholic Academy.

The plan—designed to strengthen academics, improve facilities, and establish a firm financial footing long term—was developed by a committee of pastors and principals with input from the school communities. The archdiocese expects to raise over \$50 million to implement the initiative, which includes construction of a brand new facility, the first new Catholic school in Boston in nearly 50 years.

Sr. Kathleen Fitz Simons, CND, interim superintendent of schools, said, “This plan allows us to enhance curriculum, improve technology at all campus locations, provide increased programs for families beyond the regular school day, work towards increasing teacher salaries, and reinforce our commitment to families who want to preserve Catholic education in the community.”

Jack Connors, chair of the 2010 strategic planning committee, said, “Catholic schools in Dorchester/Mattapan have educated scores of leaders who today are contributing to the Commonwealth across many walks of life.” He said the archdiocese is committed to insuring that existing families “have more opportunity to achieve greater heights.”

Over the past 30 years, Catholic elementary school enrollment in Dorchester and Mattapan has plummeted from nearly 5,000 students to

continued from page 3

strongly that choice supporters must continue to seek both charter school and private choice laws, but redouble their efforts on the private choice programs.”

Ladner’s suggestion may be particularly appropriate in urban areas with large concentrations of the poor. One reason for the disproportionate draw of private school students into charter schools is that the decision to switch from a tuition-based school to a cost-free school carries a financial reward, namely, eliminating the cost of tuition. That reward is especially enticing to low-income parents who are making extraordinary financial sacrifices to send their

about 1,600. The past year alone saw a 6 percent enrollment drop.

“The schools have experienced a steady and dramatic decline in enrollment,” archdiocesan spokesman Terrence C. Donilon told the Boston Globe last month before the plan was finalized. “Many of their buildings require upgrades to keep pace academically, and there is agreement that to do nothing is not an option.”

The merger plan is phase 2 of the “2010 Initiative,” which the archdiocese describes as “an effort to improve, strengthen and revitalize... Catholic schools.” Under the first phase, three schools in Brockton were merged and reopened this year as Trinity Catholic Academy, housed in two renovated buildings. The Boston Globe reported November 30 that \$12 million in private donations were invested in the project. And as the Globe put it: “Success has already shown in enrollments that rose after years of decline. The three schools had a combined enrollment of 466 at the end of last year. Trinity Catholic opened with 482 pupils, and some predict the school, with a maximum enrollment of 515, will have a waiting list next year.”

National Context

According to the National Catholic Educational Association, a member of CAPE, the steepest declines in Catholic school enrollment in recent years have been in the nation’s 12 largest urban dioceses. Between 2000 and 2007, 350 elementary schools in those dioceses have closed and enrollment has dropped by 166,233 students, or 17.7 percent. In all dioceses, whether urban or not, 780 Catholic elementary and secondary schools have closed since 2000 (9.6 percent), and enrollment has declined by 332,387 students (12.5 percent).

But the numbers reflect only a piece of the picture. Such schools have been a stabilizing force in many neighborhoods, have produced productive citizens, and have offered a future full of hope to countless children.

children to a religious school. The conversion to charters of seven Catholic schools in the District of Columbia is ample testimony to that. If the religious liberty and educational freedom of parents of modest means is to be protected, some way will have to be devised to help them exercise that freedom without financial penalty.

The Impact of Charter Schools on Catholic Schools: A Comparison of Programs in Arizona and Michigan is available at <<http://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/AboutUs/ArticleView.aspx?id=1880>>. *Beyond Achievement: Enrollment Consequences of Charter Schools in Michigan* is available at <http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/OP128.pdf>.

Do Charter Schools Affect Private School Enrollment?

Charter schools in the District of Columbia attracted students from families struggling to pay tuition in Catholic schools, thereby helping to cause seven of those schools to give up their religious identity and convert to charter status (see story on page 1). But do charter schools pose a similar threat to religious schools in other jurisdictions? Recent research sheds some light on this question.

Michigan

In 2006, the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education at Columbia University published a study by Eugenia Toma of the University of Kentucky, Ron Zimmer of the RAND Corporation, and John Jones of the Kentucky Legislative Research Commission that examined the impact of charter schools on enrollment patterns over a five-year period in a single state. Entitled *Beyond Achievement: Enrollment Consequences of Charter Schools in Michigan*, the paper found that 17 percent of the students who enrolled in the state's charter schools had previously attended private schools. With private schools accounting for slightly more than 8 percent of the state's students, the consequences of charter schools for private schools were especially heavy. Looking at it from the perspective of enrollment numbers rather than percentages, the authors found "that private schools will lose one student for every three students gained in the charter schools." The bottom line: "[N]ot only are charter schools having a statistically significant effect on private schools but an effect that is economically meaningful."

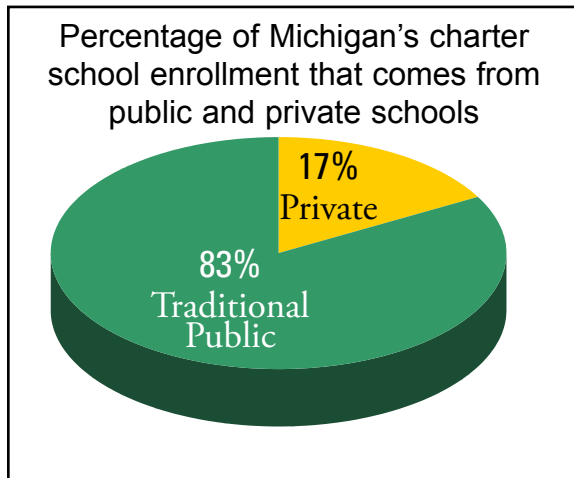
Consequences for Public Schools

Besides finding that "charter schools are competitors to private schools," the study also concluded that the transfer of private school students to charter schools has "long-run consequences for the financing of public schools." If charter schools attract students from private schools, "the public burden of educating students may increase as these schools will bring in students who previously exerted little demand on public resources." Simply put, students who were once educated at private expense are now

being educated at government (i.e., taxpayer) expense.

Arizona

Writing in the September 2007 issue of the *Journal of Catholic Education Inquiry and Practice*, Matthew Ladner of the Goldwater Institute, looks at the effects of charter schools on Catholic school enrollment in both Michigan and Arizona. Reviewing the Michigan study described above, Ladner writes that preliminary evidence



suggests "that charter schools are actually threatening to Catholic schools," noting that the Michigan study found that "private schools were taking a bigger hit from charter school competition than public schools on a student for student basis." He bolsters the point by citing a quote from Ronald Nuzzi, director of

the Alliance for Catholic Education Leadership Program at the University of Notre Dame, who claims that charter schools "are one of the biggest threats to Catholic schools in the inner city, hands down. How do you compete with an alternative that doesn't cost anything?"

But Ladner goes on to claim that "Arizona's experience provides a counter-example to Michigan in that the Catholic school system has done well despite the proliferation of charter schools." He notes that Arizona's programs of individual and corporate tax credits for contributions to scholarship tuition organizations has helped Catholic schools resist the national downward enrollment spiral despite the state's "vigorous charter school law." Catholic school enrollment has gone up in Arizona even through "charter school enrollment is 12.5% higher in Arizona than in Michigan." Ladner explains that it is possible "to have a vigorous charter school law... along with a thriving Catholic school system."

Because an additional influencing factor in the school enrollment climb in Arizona could be the state's population growth, Ladner suggests that states with slower population growth should do even more to promote private school choice than Arizona has done. He concludes, "The experience of these two states—both enjoying the large benefits of charter schools, but with starkly different trends in Catholic schooling—suggests

continued on page 2

Spending Bill Kills Title V

No program under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) reaches more religious and independent schools than Title V, Grants for Innovative Programs. Yet when Congress last month approved its FY 2008 spending plan for education at a record \$60.7 billion, it was somehow unable to find any funds at all to keep Title V alive, a program that this year costs \$99 million, about two-tenths of one percent of the new spending package.

Title V serves children in public and private schools by providing materials, equipment, and services to meet student needs as determined by local administrators. The program has been a staple of federal education assistance since the initial enactment of ESEA in 1965. In June 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the program in the landmark decision *Mitchell v. Helms*.

Within the private school community, Title V enjoys a long history of support because it provides for the equitable participation of private school students based on their share of a district's enrollment. A recent survey by the U.S. Department of Education on the participation of students in federal programs confirmed the program's popularity, finding that it affects 50 percent of private school students in ESEA-participating schools.

But the program is not dead yet. Within days of its passage, President Bush vetoed the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill that Congress approved (though not because of Title V, which the president's budget had also zeroed out). The veto and a failed effort by Congress to override it now leave lawmakers with two options: develop a compromise spending package that the president will sign, or enact one or more continuing resolutions, which would keep existing programs intact at current funding levels, thus staving off Title V's demise.

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ **Fast Fact About Private Schools:** A recent survey by the *Wall Street Journal* found that certain private schools “continue to hold sway” when it comes to “getting students into top universities.”

The survey ranked 40 high schools—38 in the U.S. and two overseas—in terms of their success rate in having students attend eight highly selective colleges. According to the Journal, “The 10 schools that performed best in our survey are all private schools.” In fact, all but six of the 38 U.S. schools were private.

The survey looked at admissions patterns in Harvard, Princeton, MIT, Williams, Pomona, Swarthmore, the University of Chicago, and Johns Hopkins. All the targeted colleges “received a record number of applications last year.” Harvard, for example, “admitted an all-time low of 9 percent of applicants after receiving a record 23,000 applications.”

The results of the survey were reported in an article entitled “How to Get Into Harvard,” published in the November 30 issue of the *Wall Street Journal*.

★ School leadership teams interested in exploring ways to expand AP and other challenging courses through online offerings are invited to register for a live webcast on Wednesday, December 12, 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. (EST) to discuss *Connecting Students to Advanced Courses Online*, the latest publication from the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education

According to the department: “The webcast will feature a panel of national education leaders and experts in online learning, including Assistant Deputy Secretary of Education Morgan Brown; Thomas Matts, director of AP course audit at The College Board; Liz Pape, CEO of Virtual High School; and two high school administrators who partner with online course providers that are featured in the publication. Among the issues that the panel will explore are what services to expect from online providers; how to match students to appropriate online coursework; and how to ensure academic quality of online content and instruction.” To register for the webcast, visit <http://www.visualwebcaster.com/US_Dept_Edu/42740/reg.html>.

As for the publication itself, *Connecting Students to Advanced Courses Online* will be available for download in PDF format prior to the webcast. Copies will also be available after December 12 online at www.edpubs.org; toll-free at 1-877-4-ED-PUBS; or by mail at EDPubs, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398. When ordering online, enter the publication’s name in the EDPubs “Keyword/Title” search box. For phone and mail orders, use publication order number ED003948P.

★ The U.S. Department of Education has launched a new “Doing What Works” (DWW) Web site to help educators “identify and make use of effective teaching practices” that are “supported by rigorous research.”

Much of the site’s content is based on the What Works Clearinghouse at the Institute for Education Sciences. The clearinghouse “evaluates research on practices and interventions to let the education community know what is likely to work.”

Right now the DWW site is featuring materials on teaching literacy in English to K-5 English learners. Multi-media presentations and resources help teachers “review the research base, understand the essentials, find recommended practices, and access planning templates.”

Upcoming reports will cover topics such as preschool language and literacy, encouraging girls in math and science, cognition and learning, high school reform, adolescent literacy, and school restructuring. The new site’s Web address is <<http://dww.ed.gov/>>.

★ Qualifying high school mock-trial teams are invited to compete in the third American Mock Trial Invitational (AMTI) May 18-20, 2008, at the new state-of-the-art Mecklenburg County Courthouse in Charlotte, NC.

AMTI was established by the New Jersey State Bar Foundation and the North Carolina Academy of Trial Lawyers in order to permit high school mock trial state champions with weekend religious obligations to compete in a national forum on weekdays. For more information, contact Liz Avery-Jones at 919-835-2808, e-mail liz@ncatl.org, or Sheila Boroat 732-937-7519, e-mail sboro@njsbf.org.