

Pittsburgh-East Regional Catholic Elementary Schools

Top 10 Frequently Asked Questions JULY 2019

*Catholic schools are one of the best ways that the Church brings young people into **a relationship with Jesus**, while preparing them for life. **Spiritual formation** encourages virtue. **Academic excellence** leads to success in higher education. **Gospel values** promote respect, compassion and service. As our communities change, the way Catholic schools operate is changing to keep this education ministry strong to serve future generations.*

1. How have Catholic elementary schools historically operated? American bishops first endorsed the education model of each parish having its own school in 1884. As schools were built, many were staffed by **religious sisters** who received a small stipend, allowing for low or free tuition. With steady growth in the U.S. population this approach worked well until the mid-1960s, when enrollment peaked at 6.5 million students in more than 13,500 Catholic schools. Today, with **lower birth rates** resulting in smaller families, **higher education costs** and fewer Catholics practicing the faith, about two million students are being educated in about 6,500 Catholic schools nationwide. In the Diocese of Pittsburgh, **K-8 enrollment declined 38 percent** over the last decade to 9,414 students, while the number of elementary schools decreased 36 percent, from 75 schools to 48.

2. How does school regionalization work? Regionalization is a new structure that calls for **all parishes** in a geographic area to share in the **governance** and **support** of Catholic elementary schools, which are an education ministry of all parishes in a region. Schools continue to be led by **principals** while a **regional administrator** and business manager oversee operations and finances, reporting to a **regional board** made up of clergy and lay representatives of parishes in the region. Similar efforts have helped rejuvenate Catholic schools in other dioceses and archdioceses, including New York City, Boston, St. Louis and Milwaukee.

3. Is regionalization just another name for merging and closing schools? No. The primary goal of regionalization is to ensure families have access to Catholic schools that are **academically excellent**, **spiritually vibrant** and **financially sustainable**. Every parish grouping has a responsibility for and a voice in Catholic education as we create a system of **mission-centered schools** that are affordable, collaborative and accessible within a region, ensuring their viability for generations to come.

4. What Catholic elementary schools are in the Pittsburgh-East region? There are **11 schools** in the region:

- St. Bede School, Point Breeze
- Divine Mercy Academy, Monroeville
- East Catholic School, Braddock/Swissvale/Forest Hills
- St. John the Baptist Catholic School, Plum
- St. Joseph Catholic School, Verona
- St. Maria Goretti Catholic School, Bloomfield/Garfield/Friendship
- Mary of Nazareth Catholic School, White Oak
- Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament Elementary School, Natrona Heights
- St. Raphael Elementary School, Morningside
- Sacred Heart Elementary School, Shadyside
- St. Therese of Lisieux School, Munhall

5. What will change with the Pittsburgh-East region incorporated? Parish schools in the region had been run by pastors. They made decisions for fiscal year 2019-20 regarding staffing, tuition rates, fundraising goals and other issues. On **July 1, 2019**, the schools in the region became part of **Pittsburgh-East Regional Catholic Schools, Inc.**, a new 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation with a two-tiered structure comprised of a Member Board that includes **Bishop David Zubik**, and a Board of Directors responsible for the operation of schools. **Mr. Joseph Rosi** has been appointed regional administrator.

6. What role does the regional board play in the operations and decision-making in our schools? Principals will work in close collaboration with the regional administrator. A region may establish **policies and practices** that all schools in the region will be responsible for implementing. The regional board is charged with making decisions about how the schools will be structured within the region and overseeing all aspects of the schools' operations in partnership with the regional administrator and regional business manager.

7. Who is serving on the new board in the Pittsburgh-East region? The board consists of members representing each parish grouping in the region:

- **Rev. Lawrence D. Adams**, team member, St. Bartholomew, St. Bernadette, St. Gerard Majella, North American Martyrs, St. Susanna
- **Rev. Frank D. Almada**, administrator, St. Colman, St. John Fisher, St. Jude the Apostle, Good Shepherd, Madonna del Castello, St. Maurice, Word of God
- **Janet R. Ciramella, Ph.D.**, parishioner, St. Raphael, Sacred Heart/Shadyside
- **Rev. John B. Lendvai**, administrator, St. Alphonsus/Springdale, Holy Family, Holy Martyrs, Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady of Victory, St. Joseph/Natrona
- **James V. Maher, Jr., Ph.D.**, parishioner, St. Bede, St. Charles Lwanga, St. James/Wilkinsburg
- **Mrs. Mary-Peg Miller**, board secretary and parishioner, St. Maximilian Kolbe, Resurrection/W. Mifflin, St. Rita, St. Therese of Lisieux
- **Rev. Terrence P. O'Connor**, administrator, St. Angela Merici, Corpus Christi, St. Patrick/McKeesport, St. Robert Bellarmine
- **Rev. Kevin G. Poecking**, administrator, St. Irenaeus, St. Januarius, St. John the Baptist/Plum, St. Joseph/Verona, Our Lady of Joy
- **Ms. Lisa J. Sciallo, Esq.**, parishioner, St. Maria Goretti, Our Lady of the Angels
- **Mr. Lawrence E. Scott**, parishioner, Transfiguration, St. Victor
- **Mr. Thomas Smith**, board vice chair and parishioner, St. Agnes, Christ the Light of the World, Holy Trinity, St. Joseph/Duquesne
- **Very Rev. Kris D. Stubna**, board chair and administrator, St. Paul Cathedral, St. Regis, St. Rosalia, St. Stephen
- **Rev. Thomas A. Wagner**, administrator, St. Mark, St. Michael, Queen of the Rosary
- **Vacant seat**, St. Benedict the Moor, Epiphany, St. Mary of Mercy

8. The North Hills region was established in 2017. What are some of the successes to date? When school income in the North Hills was dropping rapidly and affecting parish finances, pastors asked Bishop Zubik for assistance. **School budgets were balanced** in the first year largely through school mergers as well as group purchasing. With fewer mergers to date in the Pittsburgh-East region, the initial focus will be on savings through group purchasing. Also in the North Hills region, teachers and principals are collaborating in **curriculum development** and strengthening their **Catholic identity**.

9. How will Catholic elementary schools in the Pittsburgh-East region be supported financially? The current funding model of **tuition, parish subsidy** and **fundraising** continues to be in effect with the parish schools becoming regional schools. It is imperative that **every parish in the region** helps support and promote Catholic schools in the region through involvement in marketing, communications, enrollment building, fundraising, and other ways that will continue to emerge within the region.

10. As a supporter of Catholic education, what can I do personally to help strengthen our schools? Continue to promote the value of Catholic schools in your daily conversations. Share the fact that we set and meet **high standards** for student achievement. Dedicated teachers **integrate faith** into every subject and help develop each young person's unique, God-given gifts, and encourage them to **give back** to their communities.

*For more information, contact regional administrator **Mr. Joseph Rosi** at rosij@perces.org*