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## Urban Catholic Elementary Schools: What are the Governance Models?

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*The closure of nearly half of Catholic elementary schools in the United States since the 1960s has led to the development of many innovative initiatives to stabilize, strengthen, and sustain urban Catholic elementary education. Improving school governance models has been a common agenda of these efforts. This study examined the governance models in use by urban Catholic elementary schools across the United States. Seven major governance models for urban Catholic elementary schools were identified and studied using structured interviews and document analysis. An eighth model, faith-inspired charter schools, is presented as one alternative to a Catholic school.*

*The variety of governance models demonstrates innovation in response to the plight of urban Catholic elementary schools across the country. Common trends across the models are discussed. In short, traditional governance approaches are giving way to more strategic, data-supported models that have the potential to increase efficiency, improve cost effectiveness, and enhance quality. The evidence suggests that the parish school model is the least sustainable of the examined models and is increasingly giving way to newer multischool governance approaches. The future of urban Catholic elementary schools requires that school and diocesan leaders continue to explore governance models that best address the needs of their Catholic schools, assess the effectiveness of their chosen model, and share evidence of improved sustainability with other stakeholders in Catholic education.*

**I**n 1884, the American Catholic Bishops obligated all pastors to establish a parish school (Fanning, 1907). Catholic schools reached their peak enrollment in 1965, when 5.6 million students attended nearly 13,500 Catholic schools hosted by more than half of the Catholic parishes across the country (McDonald & Schultz, 2013). The numbers look quite different in 2013, with 2 million students attending 6,685 Catholic schools (McDonald & Schultz, 2013). These numbers represent a 63% enrollment decline and a 50% school closure rate since 1965. Catholic school leaders and other stakeholders have explored a variety of school governance approaches, seeking a more sustainable future for Catholic elementary schools. This study examines the various

governance models that have emerged in response to the precipitous decline in Catholic schools.

A close consideration of school and enrollment data shows that elementary schools have experienced the steepest loss. (See Figures 1 and 2)

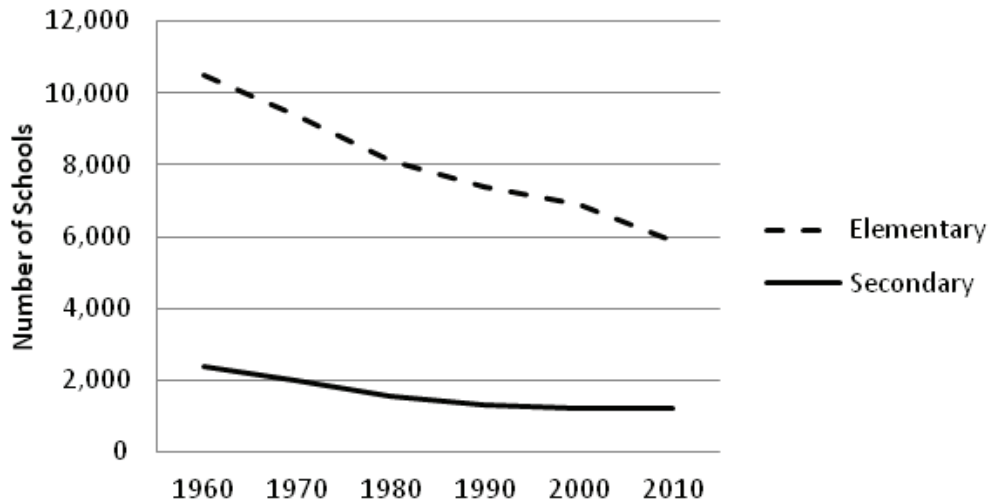


Figure 1. Number of Catholic elementary and secondary Schools from 1960 to 2010. Adapted from McDonald and Schultz (2013).

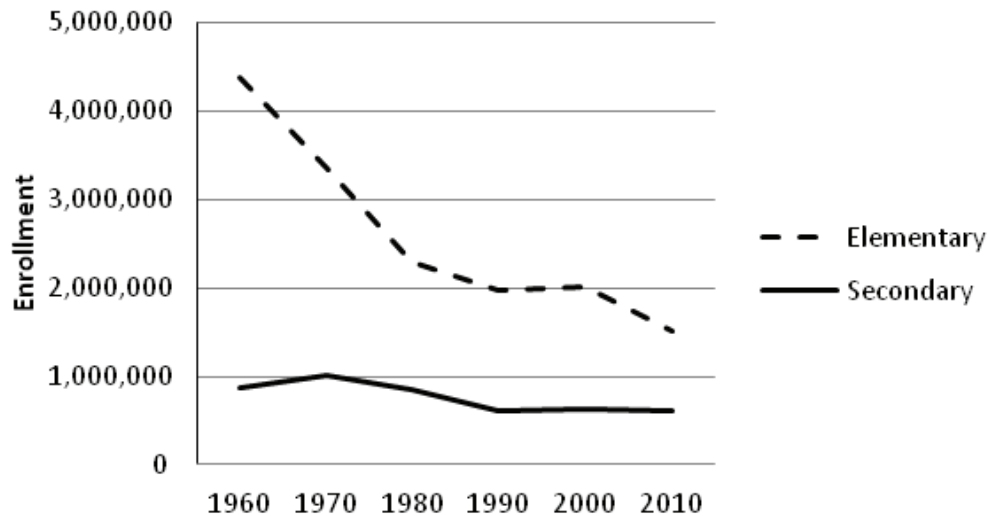


Figure 2. Enrollment in Catholic elementary and secondary Schools from 1960 to 2010. Adapted from McDonald and Schultz (2013).

The evidence shows that Catholic elementary education is in serious decline. With approximately 40% of Catholic elementary schools in the United States located in urban areas (McDonald & Schultz, 2013), and considering the growing challenges of sustaining schools in low-income communities, this study focuses primarily on urban Catholic elementary schools.

In response to the school closing crisis, numerous symposia, studies, academic conferences, philanthropic initiatives, and strategic planning consultations have focused on developing more sustainable approaches for urban Catholic schools (Blue Ribbon Committee on Catholic Schools, 2010; Curtin, Haney, & O’Keefe, 2009; FADICA, 2012; Hamilton, 2008; Meitler Consultants, Inc., 2007; Saroki & Levinick, 2009). Efforts to stabilize vulnerable schools or systems of schools have typically involved a cost-benefit analysis of the traditional parish school governance model (DeFiore, Convey, & Schuttl-offel, 2009). A growing concern is that the parish school model, which worked for Catholic schools in the past, may not be sustainable in the future.

As institutions of the Catholic Church, Catholic schools are governed in accordance with both civil law and canon law (Haney, O’Brien, & Sheehan, 2009). The term “governance” refers to the articulation of mission, policy development and enforcement, operational priorities, hiring procedures, evaluation processes, and reporting structures (Brown, 2010). The governance model establishes the framework within which administrators manage the operations of the schools.

While most urban Catholic schools continue to be governed by traditional structures under a local parish, a variety of alternative approaches have emerged. Faced with imminent closures, many school and diocesan leaders have developed an array of changes in governance; however, leaders looking to explore new governance approaches are often challenged by a lack of knowledge about the variety of governance models in use across the country.

This study aims to catalogue some recent innovative efforts to sustain Catholic schools by describing governance models utilized by urban Catholic elementary schools across the United States. This inquiry was part of a larger study that also examined funding strategies (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2012). The study presents approaches that have been implemented (rather than simply proposed), highlighting examples of urban schools where available. After a detailed description of the common governance models, we identify themes that cut across the models. The article concludes with several recommendations for school and diocesan leaders considering a strategic exploration of effective school governance.

## Methodology

The set of governance models presented in this study was identified by: (a) compiling the models described in relevant literature, and (b) contacting key informants experienced with innovative approaches to governance. Informants were asked to identify specific schools and dioceses that have implemented innovative approaches and other stakeholders that have knowledge of these approaches.

### Participants

Participants included diocesan officials, school administrators, pastors, foundation executives, researchers, consultants to Catholic schools, and representatives from related professional organizations (e.g., the NCEA). Participants were recruited from urban areas across the United States, including New York City; Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; Bridgeport, Connecticut; Chicago, Illinois; Indianapolis, Indiana; Memphis, Tennessee; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; St. Louis, Missouri; Seattle, Washington; Los Angeles, California; and Denver, Colorado.

### Procedures

The study involved more than 30 structured phone interviews. The interview protocols varied somewhat according to which sector the participant represented (e.g., foundation, school, diocese). Interview questions addressed the unique aspects of the governance model, the historical premise and context, the process of development and implementation, and any outcomes that have suggested improved sustainability (e.g., increased enrollment, reduced costs). The following is a sampling of the questions included in the interview protocols:

- Can you describe the process by which your school/diocese developed and implemented this governance model?
- Who was involved in the design and implementation of this approach (e.g., the bishop, superintendent, the pastor, local foundations)?
- Were other dioceses or schools that have utilized this model/strategy consulted? What did you learn from doing that?
- How far along is the implementation of the model/strategy?
- What were some of the key challenges to implementation, and how did you address them?

- Have you observed any changes in enrollment, access to resources, or financial outcomes since implementing this governance model?
- What recommendations would you have for others who might consider this approach?

*(Follow-up questions were tailored to fit the context and development of specific models.)*

In addition to conducting interviews, we examined approximately 100 related documents including diocesan strategic plans, academic studies, national reports, organizational annual reviews, newspaper articles, and school/diocesan websites.

### Findings: Models of Governance

The following section presents traditional approaches to school governance (e.g., the parish school) as well as more recent approaches of the last several decades. Specific examples of schools and dioceses are included to represent strategic efforts to improve institutional effectiveness in order to enhance the sustainability of Catholic elementary schools. It is important to note that many of these models have established empowered boards with a defined set of governance responsibilities. A detailed discussion of boards is not within the purview of this study but can be found in Convey and Haney (1997) and Haney et al. (2009).

#### Parish Schools

The most common type of Catholic elementary school in operation across the United States is the parish school. A parish school is sponsored by a single parish. The school is legally—under both civil and canonical laws—a part of the parish and is owned and operated by that parish. The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore instituted the parochial model in 1884, obligating all pastors to establish a school in their respective parishes. Parish elementary schools peaked in number in the 1960s at almost 10,000. At that time, the parish model was utilized by 95% of all Catholic elementary schools in the United States (D. McDonald, personal communication, August 3, 2010). Although the parish school model is still the most utilized among dioceses, it is not nearly as ubiquitous as it was 50 years ago. In 2012–2013, three quarters (70%) of Catholic elementary schools were parish schools (McDonald & Schultz, 2013).

Within the parish, the pastor ultimately holds authority over the property and operations. The principal serves at the behest of the pastor as the administrator over the educational functions of the school. The range of authority given to the principal by the pastor varies (e.g., some principals manage the budget whereas others have no budget authority). The diocesan superintendent technically serves only in an advisory role to the pastor, for instance by helping the pastor find a qualified principal. A majority of parish schools utilize school boards that are primarily advisory or consultative in nature. Boards are typically charged with a range of governance tasks, with the exception of those responsibilities delegated specifically to the pastor by Canon Law (Haney et al., 2009). Boards are typically charged with reviewing the operating budget, formulating policy, and making related recommendations to the pastor. The pastor provides final approval of all policies that the principal is responsible for implementing. Some pastors assign policy-making authority and other governance responsibilities to the school board (i.e., a board of limited jurisdiction).

The relationship between the parish school and the parish community can potentially strengthen or inhibit a school. Schools can benefit from a parish that is committed to Catholic education, views the school and Catholic education as central to its mission, and has sufficient funding to support operating deficits. When these three elements are not in place, parish schools are vulnerable. Parish schools that are not central to the parish's mission can feel like tenants, cohabitating but not benefiting from a pastoral and financial relationship. Lack of mission support for Catholic education eventually results in diminished funding from the parish. Parishes in low-income areas, regardless of pastoral mission, often do not have sufficient funding to support a school without ongoing external subsidies.

### **Private Schools**

Private Catholic elementary schools are among the oldest schools in the United States. A private Catholic elementary school is an independent school that is sponsored by a religious congregation or a lay organization that is sanctioned by the bishop. Many of these schools benefit from the expertise of religious congregations that focus their mission on providing high-quality education. Private Catholic schools do not typically have an affiliation with a parish.

Peaking at 362 in 1967 (about 3.5% of all Catholic schools), private Catholic schools have historically been few in comparison to parish-sponsored



schools (D. McDonald, personal communication, August 3, 2010). Today, they number at 355, or 6.5%, of Catholic elementary schools (McDonald & Schultz, 2013). At first glance there does not appear to be a substantial net loss in the number of private schools over 40 years; however, many parish schools have been closed and re-opened as private Catholic schools, thus confounding the total figures.

Private schools are often governed by a board that is empowered with full decision-making authority—in contrast to the consultative board in the parish school. The principal is typically hired by the board to run the daily operations of the school. The diocesan superintendent typically does not have a governance role with respect to the private Catholic school. Pastors from neighboring parishes typically have no involvement in private school governance.

Sponsoring religious congregations usually stay connected to the school by having a presence on the board, supplying religious personnel as teachers or administrators, and/or providing financial support. The Sisters of Mercy are a commonly recognized religious congregation supporting Catholic education. The Sisters of Mercy have sponsored private Catholic schools in the United States continuously since 1844. They currently sponsor over 20 elementary schools and early childhood centers (Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 2010).

Some private schools are owned by an independent lay organization, as recognized in the Code of Canon Law (1998) as an “Association of Christian Faithful” (Canon 298). Lay-run private schools have been founded when a parish ends its relationship to its school, or when a sponsoring religious congregation withdraws ownership. An example of a lay-run private urban elementary school is Francis Xavier Warde School in Chicago, which opened in 1989 at two locations (Holy Name Cathedral Campus and Old St. Patrick’s Campus). The school is a lay-sponsored charitable organization owned and managed by an Association of Christian Faithful. The founders of Francis Xavier Warde School (2010) aimed to provide students with an “excellent education along with a foundation to guide them to become hardworking individuals armed with a strong moral compass.” This private school rents building space from two neighborhood parishes. The pastors of these parishes serve on the board of directors of the school, a rare example of a private school collaborating with local pastors.

### **Inter-Parish Schools**

The inter-parish elementary school—also called a regional school—is sponsored by multiple parishes that are geographically contiguous. The inter-par-



ish model currently represents 12% of Catholic elementary schools, a substantial increase from 1967 when this model represented only 1% of Catholic elementary schools (D. McDonald, personal communication, August 3, 2010). The increase in inter-parish schools reflects an overall trend toward consolidating parish schools.

The inter-parish school typically leases the building of a former parish school. An inter-parish school can be established as an independent “juridic person” or as part of the juridic person of the lead parish. A juridic person is a canonically designated body for a “purpose which is in keeping with the mission of the Church” (Code of Canon Law, 1998, Canon 114.1). As a juridic person sponsored by multiple parishes, the inter-parish school would fall under the canonical jurisdiction of sponsoring pastors. The school can be governed by a board of limited jurisdiction that sets policy, establishes the budget, develops the strategic plans, and hires and evaluates the school administrator (James, 2007). Sponsoring pastors may sit as voting or ex officio members on the board, typically with one pastor having general oversight (sometimes on a rotating basis). The board may consist of lay representatives from each parish.

Inter-parish schools are established to maximize enrollment and financial support by drawing from multiple parishes across a large geographic area. Historically, the inter-parish school model was the first approach to consolidating parish schools when individual parishes recognized that they could no longer support a school. John James, from the St. Louis University, notes that this change “represents a redrawing of school boundaries without redrawing parish boundaries” (James, 2007, p. 297). This collaborative approach allows pastors to pool their parish resources and share costs while fulfilling their obligation to provide their congregations access to a Catholic education.

One example, East Boston Central Catholic School (EBCCS, 2010), was established in 1974 as a multi-parish, collaborative elementary school serving four parishes in Boston: Our Lady of the Assumption, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Most Holy Redeemer, and Sacred Heart. Thirty years later, EBCCS remains the only school sponsored by multiple parishes in the Archdiocese of Boston. At the time of this study, EBCCS is sponsored by two of the original parishes; one was suppressed while another withdrew support. The two remaining sponsoring parishes, Most Holy Redeemer and Sacred Heart, continue to subsidize a combined \$40,000 annually—a mere 3% of the school’s operating budget. Additionally, in an interview for this study, EBCCS principal Maryann Manfredonia, reported that the school is governed by a board

of limited jurisdiction composed of community representatives, parents, and teachers in an effort to ensure that all stakeholders are represented.

### Diocesan Schools

A diocesan school is owned by the bishop and managed by the superintendent of schools. While the school may be housed at a parish, it is part of the juridic person of the diocese under the authority of the bishop (rather than of the parish which is governed by the pastor). The diocese is financially responsible for the school. In most cases, diocesan schools are formed when pastors return authority over the school to the bishop, when a previously closed parish school is re-opened by the diocese, or when the pastor agrees to temporarily “out-source” the governance of the school to the diocese.

The diocesan school model has been utilized for many decades. In 1967, there were 35 diocesan schools across the United States, representing less than 1% of Catholic elementary schools (D. McDonald, personal communication, August 3, 2010). Four decades later, these schools grew to nearly 600, or roughly 10% of Catholic elementary schools. The steep rise in diocesan schools negatively correlates to parish school closings, suggesting that the diocesan model has been utilized as an alternative to closing a parish school.

In diocesan schools, the principal reports to the superintendent, the designated canonical administrator representing the authority of the bishop. Participating in a larger diocesan system potentially facilitates access to improved practices in curriculum, instruction, professional development, strategic planning, and pooled resources such as Title funding. Many diocesan schools utilize boards in an advisory capacity or with policy-making authority. The pastor from the host parish, as well as pastors from surrounding parishes, can serve as spiritual/pastoral leaders but with no canonical authority over the schools.

One example of diocesan schools is the Jubilee Schools in the Diocese of Memphis. In 1998, the Superintendent of Schools in Memphis, Mary McDonald, was charged with the task of reopening Catholic schools that had been closed in downtown Memphis. Over a decade later, the eight reopened Jubilee Schools serve over 1,300 students, according to McDonald. The “Miracle in Memphis” is a rare example of a diocese that has opened schools and experienced increased enrollment (Humphrey, 2008). The Jubilee Schools are governed by the Diocese of Memphis and supported by innovative marketing and capital campaigns to secure financial support from local philanthropists and foundations.

A second example is the Diocese of Bridgeport. In 2003, a study by Meitler Consultants pointed to an issue of “blurred authority” within the Diocese of Bridgeport Catholic Schools. They noted a void in leadership, whereby no one “owned the mission of the schools and their operations” (Catholic Schools of Fairfield County, 2010). In response, Bishop William E. Lori (2009) announced that a new model of diocesan school governance would be pursued under the Bridgeport Roman Catholic Schools Corporation. Superintendent Margaret Dames explained in an interview for this study that the schools were charged with developing their own “empowered” boards, while the Corporation would be responsible for supporting, sustaining, and governing the schools. In 2011, the Diocese of Bridgeport managed 33 elementary schools and five high schools, serving over 11,000 students.

A third example is the Archdiocesan Collaborative Schools (ACS) in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. The Archdiocese’s strategic plan states that all parish schools will eventually transform into the ACS model, in which schools will be owned and operated by the Archdiocese (Blue Ribbon Committee on Catholic Schools, 2010). The implementation of the ACS model will be incremental. Schools will become ACS schools in one of three ways: (a) the school has previously been operated by the Archdiocese; (b) the pastor voluntarily cedes canonical authority over a parish school to the bishop; or (c) as a condition for the appointment of a new pastor. In an interview for this study, Mary Ellen Fise, Program Director for the Archdiocese of Baltimore Blue Ribbon Commission on Catholic Schools, reported that 11 schools (about a quarter of the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese) converted to the new model in July 2011, with a second cohort following in the 2012–2013 school year. Each ACS is tasked with forming a school board with decision-making authority in the areas of strategic planning, finances, facilities, development, and marketing.

Another unique aspect of the ACS model is that the pastors, as canonical representatives, are charged with maintaining the relationship among the school, the host parish, and the surrounding parishes (Blue Ribbon Committee on Catholic Schools, 2010). Canonical representatives work with the school’s president and/or principal to develop opportunities for mutual engagement between the school and each parish. Participating parishes focus on the Catholic identity of the school whereas the Department of Education oversees the administration and academic programming (Lori, 2013).

### Consortium Schools

A consortium is a cluster of Catholic elementary schools within a diocese that are linked through shared administration, policies, finances, resources, and practices. Consortium schools are incorporated as one school with multiple campuses. No definitive figures are available on the number of consortium Catholic schools across the country, though this study was able to identify a dozen such models in urban areas. The consortium model seems to be most utilized in low-income urban areas where individual parishes are not able to support a school.

A consortium is owned and managed by the diocese or sponsored by multiple parishes (Goldschmidt, O’Keefe, & Walsh, 2004). In the consortium model, principals typically report to an executive director. In a diocesan consortium, the executive director reports to the superintendent and/or a board of limited jurisdiction. In an inter-parish consortium, the executive director reports to the policy-making board that represents the sponsoring parishes. The presence of an executive director frees consortium principals from many administrative tasks, allowing them to focus on educational leadership. Pastors serve as spiritual and pastoral leaders in the diocesan consortium, but reserve some canonical authority in an inter-parish consortium. In some consortia, pastors participate on the board of directors (Goldschmidt et al., 2004).

Coordinating several schools as a consortium is designed to be more efficient than an individual school model. Consortium schools have increased economies of scale. A collective administration allows for a centralized management of finances: budget development, payroll (i.e., salary and benefits), tuition collection, and bill payment. Consortium schools share resources such as professional development, materials (e.g., desks, textbooks), and specialized teachers (e.g., art, gym, special education). Consortium schools leverage increased purchasing power and a shared capacity for marketing, strategic planning, and fundraising. Collective coordination of academic programs allows for the implementation of higher-quality curricula and assessment tools. The collaborative relationship among consortium schools increases opportunities for peer-to-peer consultation (between principals or teachers across grade levels).

One example of a consortium was developed in response to growing concern about the viability of parish schools in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. Archbishop Buechlein formed a consortium of six inner-city schools called the Mother Theodore Catholic Academies (Archdiocese of Indianapo-

lis Catholic Schools Office, 2010). Through consolidating and coordinating areas such as finance, maintenance, marketing, and Catholic identity, the consortium provided a more viable model of Catholic education in urban Indianapolis. With an executive director and a board of directors to handle nonacademic administrative tasks, principals can focus on the academic programs at their schools. Executive Director Connie Zittnan explained, “The change in governance has brought about great efficiencies, good stewardship of resources, and the empowerment of educators to do what they do best” (Mother Theodore Catholic Academies [MCTA], 2010). In 2010, MTCA converted two of the six campuses to public charter schools.

Another example is Pope John Paul II (PJPII) Catholic Academy in the Archdiocese of Boston. Recognizing the trends of declining enrollment and financial hardship, the Archdiocese sought to redesign Catholic education in Boston’s inner city. In September 2008, PJPII Catholic Academy (2010) opened its doors to over 1,500 students on five campuses in the Dorchester and Mattapan communities. Under this consortium, a central office and regional director are responsible for the financial management and structural improvements of the campuses, thereby enabling principals to focus on serving as educational leaders in their schools. Russ Wilson, Director of PJPII Catholic Academy, reported that the consortium’s central office offers professional development courses to its faculty throughout the year. In 2010, PLPII closed one of its campuses for financial reasons.

### **Private Network Schools**

A private network of Catholic elementary schools is a national association of private, independent schools aligned by a common set of practices and standards of mission effectiveness. Networks essentially cross diocesan lines. While the network does not own its member school, a central office staff and governing board ensures fidelity to certain elements of operational vitality and mission effectiveness. Similar to individual private schools, network schools are largely independent of diocesan governance, with the exception of basic assurances of Catholic identity. Individual schools within the network are governed by a policy-making board of directors that hires a president and/or a principal.

A network model of schools brings the added benefit of access to a specific set of practices, a faith-based identity, accountability metrics, and a nationally recognized brand name that assists in development fundraising.

Network accountability implies some assurance of quality and transparency related to practices. Regular communication, annual network meetings, and sharing of outcome data facilitate continual improvement processes and evaluation for these schools.

This study identified one national network with an explicit focus on urban Catholic education. The NativityMiguel Network (2010a, 2010b) was officially formed in 2006, uniting the best educational practices from the former separate networks of the Nativity Schools and the San Miguel Schools. These two networks had been delivering quality middle school education in low-income urban areas for several decades. The combined network serves 5,000 students in 64 schools across 27 states. The Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation provided substantial funding to help replicate and support many of these schools. NativityMiguel schools implement a specific model of schooling rooted in Mission Effectiveness Standards. Unfortunately, the central office of the network was closed in June 2010, thereby returning the schools to private, individual school status.

An example of a regional network, ACCESS Academies (Academies Creating Challenging Education for St. Louis Students), was founded in 2005. ACCESS Academies are certified members of the NativityMiguel Network and therefore utilize their practice standards. ACCESS Academies (2010) serve over 300 students in four middle schools that are “embedded” within existing Catholic parish schools. ACCESS Academies assist in managing the middle school grades of their partnership parish elementary schools. In an interview for this study, Terry Mehan, the Director of Development at ACCESS Academies, explained that a small central staff oversees quality control, mission effectiveness, and funding for this small network of schools.

ACCESS institutes an intensive curriculum and extensive afterschool programming to ensure that students will thrive in competitive college preparatory high schools in St. Louis (Brinker, 2008). As students complete high school, ACCESS Academies provide a Graduate Support Coordinator to support students through the college application process. This “school within a school” approach has created a unique collaboration among a network of schools, local parish schools, and the Archdiocese of St. Louis Catholic School Office. The ACCESS Academies (2007) and host schools mutually benefit from coordinated marketing and other efforts to stabilize enrollment and improve fundraising capacity.



### **P-12 School Systems**

A P-12 Catholic school system is a unified cluster of schools (several elementary schools and one high school) covering a specified geographic area. A Catholic school system aligns participating schools into one corporate system providing a seamless P-12 education for a defined region. Kenith Britt (2011, 2013), President of Catholic Central Schools in Springfield Ohio, identified approximately 80 such systems across the country. This model was first utilized in rural areas, but has been increasingly implemented in urban centers. P-12 Catholic school systems typically utilize either an inter-parish or diocesan governance model. One private P-12 system was identified for this study. P-12 Catholic school systems are typically overseen by an executive director who reports to the superintendent or to a policy-making board. The executive director supervises the principals and manages centralized operations and finances.

Similar to a consortium model, P-12 Catholic school systems benefit from economies of scale (i.e., centralized operations and shared resources and personnel). In addition, Catholic school systems can coordinate curricula, assessments, and professional development not only across grades and schools but also across levels. Close coordination among participating elementary, middle, and high schools provides increased access to resources and expertise that would not be available to institutions under a single-school model. The regional system reduces competition and pools resources for the benefit of all schools.

One example of a school system is the Messmer Catholic Schools in Milwaukee. In 1998, Messmer High School, a private Catholic high school, assumed responsibility for Blessed Trinity Elementary School, which was facing financial difficulties. A year later, Messmer Catholic Schools was formed to include Messmer High School and Messmer Preparatory Catholic School (formerly Blessed Trinity), both governed by a president/CEO and a board of directors. At the request of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Messmer Catholic Schools (2010) assumed management responsibility of St. Rose and St. Leo Catholic Urban Academies, expanding the Messmer schools system to nearly 1,700 students across three campuses. In an interview for this study, Brother Bob Smith, President of Messmer Catholic Schools reported that the unified P-12 system benefits from curriculum alignment, shared costs, unified purchasing, centralized finances, and an integrated technological system.



The Diocese of Scranton has adopted the P-12 model as its primary approach to governance. As a result of a strategic planning process in collaboration with Meitler Consultants (2007), the Diocese of Scranton committed to a consolidation of its elementary and high schools. Under the new model, four regional systems were formed in 2007 to align early childhood centers, elementary schools and one high school within each region (Diocese of Scranton Catholic Schools Office, 2010). The P-12 regional system provides a built-in enrollment mechanism; early childhood centers supply students to the elementary schools, and in turn to the regional high school. Each P-12 system is led by a system director who reports to the superintendent of schools.

Similarly, the Diocese of Paterson has developed three P-12 Catholic school systems, each serving one of the three counties in the diocese. For instance, in 2007, the Catholic Academy of Sussex County, Inc. was formed to join three elementary schools, one early childhood center, and the regional high school under one “virtual academy” administration (Diocese of Paterson, 2010). A Board of Trustees oversees operations and reports to the Superintendent of Schools. The board includes three pastors from local parishes who are appointed for three-year terms. An executive director is charged with managing the daily operations of the participating schools and is accountable to the board and the superintendent (The Catholic Academy of Sussex County, 2007). The academy arrangement allows participating elementary schools to align their curriculum with the regional high school, thus facilitating transitions across school levels (Diocese of Paterson, 2010).

### University Partnership Schools

A university partnership school is co-owned by a parish, a diocese, and a local Catholic university. The partnership school is an independent juridic person that accounts for the unique canonical arrangement among the owners. The university partnership model leverages the resources inherent to multiple sectors of the church. The parish brings the pastoral benefits of a sacramental community. The diocese brings the expertise of the diocesan Catholic Schools Office, particularly in the area of religious education. Lastly, the university lends knowledge of academic best practices, management expertise, and development opportunities. This unique collaboration formalizes the commitment of each partner to contribute to the improvement and long-term sustainability of the school.

In 2006, St. Columbkille Parish, the Archdiocese of Boston, and Boston College combined their resources to create the first university partnership school in the country (St. Columbkille Partnership School, 2010). St. Columbkille Partnership School was founded by a Board of Members consisting of the then–Pastor of St. Columbkille Richard Shmaruk, Archbishop Sean O’Malley, O.F.M., Cap., and President of Boston College William Leahy, S.J. The Board of Members appointed a Board of Trustees that includes equal representation for each founding member as well as for the surrounding community (Dunn, 2006). The Board of Trustees hires the Head of School to direct and manage the daily operations of the school.

This collaborative model establishes a “laboratory school.” Best practices in educational leadership, student development, curriculum and instruction, finance and enrollment management, facilities management, and religious formation can be developed, tested, and disseminated (Dunn, 2006). Some examples of institutional collaboration include placements for student teachers, undergraduate volunteer tutors, free tuition for teachers to earn graduate degrees at Boston College, a summer program for students held on the Boston College campus, and a thorough curriculum and facilities review by the university. In addition, the university has provided substantial financial resources to the partnership school. St. Columbkille Partnership School represents the only school co-owned by a parish, diocese, and university.

### **Faith-Inspired Charter Schools**

Charter schools are independent, public schools run by a nonprofit organization that has obtained a charter to implement a school. Charter schools are not and cannot be considered Catholic schools in any sense. “Faith-inspired charter schools” replicate some implicit characteristics of faith-based education, such as a highly structured environment, high expectations for behavior and a values-based character education program. While these schools may be hosted at a parish or represent a cultural group (e.g., Jewish, Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Catholic), they are not permitted to explicitly express or endorse specific religion during the school day (Bailey & Cooper, 2008; Horning, 2013; Weinberg, 2007). These schools, however, may offer optional religious education classes outside of school hours. With stable public funding, mission-oriented charter schools provide a values-based education for low-income communities that have few other alternatives. The lack of religious education, however, represents a fundamental departure from Catholic education.

While faith-inspired charter schools represent a departure from traditional Catholic schools, this model is relevant for the following reasons: (a) Catholic schools in many countries are publicly funded; (b) There is a growing trend to develop charter schools that utilize selected characteristics of faith-based schools; and (c) Many dioceses have recently explored the option to convert parish schools into charter schools.

A few examples were identified in which dioceses or Catholic educational leaders took an active role in developing a charter school based upon Catholic values. Faith-inspired charter schools are typically run by an executive director who reports to a governing board of directors. These schools have no direct governance relationship to a parish, a Catholic school, or the diocese school office.

One example of a faith-inspired charter school is a Lasallian Christian Brothers-sponsored charter school in Chicago. In 2004, Arne Duncan, then CEO of Chicago Public Schools, invited Brother Ed Siderewicz, FSC to replicate the San Miguel model as a charter school. This represented essentially an exploration of the potential of a collaborative partnership between Chicago Public Schools and the private San Miguel network. After substantial internal debate about mission and identity (among San Miguel Network administrators, the Lasallian Christian Brothers community, and other contributors), the Lasallian Board of Directors approved the proposal. In 2009, Siderewicz co-founded the Catalyst Schools, two public charter K-8 schools serving a rigorous academic program to children from low-income areas of Chicago (The Catalyst Schools, 2010). A values-based education is integrated throughout the school day, and religious education is taught after school, from 2:30-4:30 in the San Miguel extended-day program. Initial concerns about identity have faded. In an interview for this study, Siderewicz stated, "These are Lasallian schools. Our charism is the heart beat of these schools. Transparency, honesty, integrity –are core values, are Gospel values."

A second example can be found in Indianapolis. In 2009, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis was invited by the city mayor's office to apply to open charter schools. Officials from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and Mother Theodore Catholic Academy (MTCA) engaged pastors, parents and principals in an extensive study of the invitation, as explained by Connie Zittnan, MTCA Director, in an interview for this study. Upon conclusion of the study, the Archdiocese submitted a formal proposal to open two charter schools under a new nonprofit organization called ADI Charter Schools, Inc. Approval was received, thus allowing two former MTCA schools to open as charter schools for the 2010-2011 school year (Archdiocese of Indianapolis, 2010). ADI re-

ceives approximately \$7,500 per student from the city. ADI, in turn, contracts MTCA to manage the daily operations of the charter schools. In compliance with state charter law, archdiocese employees cannot hold a majority of the ADI board. According to lease agreements, ADI has exclusive use of the school buildings from 6:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., at which point the buildings return to parish oversight. This arrangement represents the first Catholic diocese in the United States to manage public charter schools.

### **Discussion**

The governance models reviewed in this study demonstrate the range of innovation in urban Catholic education. While this study did not evaluate the effectiveness of each model, many interviewees suggested that new governance approaches have contributed to reduced costs, increased revenue, and improved sustainability for their urban Catholic elementary schools. Nevertheless, it appears that more effective governance models in and of themselves are necessary but not sufficient for financial stability. The following section presents several common themes illustrated by the models identified in this study.

#### **Strategic Planning and Data-Informed Practices**

Strategic planning and data-informed practices characterized many of the governance models in this study. Individual schools, clusters of schools, dioceses, and foundations are increasingly using data to track their efforts, inform their decisions, and measure outcomes. This theme reflects a broader trend in education of adopting practices that the business community has utilized for decades. Funders increasingly require schools to provide evidence for constructive use of their investments. In response, schools are learning to demonstrate more strategic use of resources and to track their viability over time. Dioceses are utilizing more adaptive models of planning that allow them to recognize shifts in their operating environments and to adjust accordingly and in a timely manner.

#### **Collaborating and Networking across Schools**

The data reveal that many Catholic elementary schools are overcoming their isolation and moving beyond a competitive stance toward one another. Dozens of examples across the country demonstrate how collaboration and sharing practices can be mutually beneficial to under-resourced elementary

schools. In many places, collaboration with high schools is yielding increased access for elementary schools to a range of resources such as professional development opportunities, specialized personnel, and knowledge of best practices.

### **Strengthening the Capacity of the Catholic Schools Office**

Many bishops are moving to clarify the authority of the diocesan schools' offices. This study cited several examples of dioceses (e.g., Bridgeport, Baltimore) in which the bishop has appointed the superintendent as canonical administrator over schools with the authority to hire, supervise, and train principals—an authority formerly held by pastors. More robust central offices seem to be assisting all of the schools across their respective dioceses with enhanced enrollment management and development strategies, systemic curriculum improvements, coordinated professional development, implementation of effective business practices, and procurement of government funds. In addition, when principals report directly to the superintendent, affiliated pastors are often involved as the sacramental, liturgical, and/or religious education leaders for the schools.

### **Centralizing Operations**

Many dioceses have determined that individual school management of finances and related operations is inefficient. The multischool models demonstrate that centralizing payroll, tuition management, budgeting, purchasing, development, professional development planning, and other administrative duties across a number of schools or an entire diocese yields a number of benefits. School administrators reported feeling freer to focus on educational issues such as observing teachers in the classroom, aligning curricula, and so forth. Many schools are sharing full-time specialists (e.g., gym teacher, art teacher, etc.) rather than each school hiring part-time personnel (e.g., physical educator, business manager, art teacher, etc.).

### **Leveraging Economies of Scale**

One salient example of the cost-saving potential of a multischool governance model is the leveraging of economies of scale. Schools and dioceses are benefiting from tremendous savings by collectively purchasing supplies and textbooks, negotiating lower utilities contracts, and securing reduced

rates for services such as building repairs, janitorial cleaning services, and snow removal.

### **Deepening Relationships with the Philanthropic Community**

Private Catholic family foundations and individual donors have supported individual Catholic schools and diocesan initiatives for many decades. In addition to providing financial support, foundations and donors are offering their expertise in a variety of ways. Many philanthropists are becoming more engaged as schools develop new governance structures, business practices, and programming.

### **Partnering with Catholic Higher Education**

Catholic colleges and universities have for decades committed resources and expertise to assist Catholic schools (e.g., tuition remission for graduate courses). The last decade has seen a number of Catholic colleges and universities increasing their outreach to Catholic schools by offering more programs for Catholic school professionals, founding Catholic education centers, providing onsite professional development, and forming strategic partnerships targeting the specific needs of Catholic schools.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study highlights new models, cites examples, and suggests common themes across the models. In short, traditional governance approaches are giving way to more strategic, data-supported models that have the potential to increase efficiency, improve cost effectiveness, and enhance quality. The parish school model is giving way to newer multischool governance approaches for reasons of both governance and finance. These systemic approaches can lead to a unified educational vision and a commitment to common standards of excellence (e.g., Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). System-wide educational leaders can implement more effective professional development and state-of-the-art curricula and instructional strategies. A multischool approach can also assist in obtaining the necessary resources from a variety of sources and can take advantage of economies of scale. However, despite its many advantages, a multischool approach is likely not a sufficient solution to the ongoing challenge of sustaining urban Catholic elementary schools.



The Catholic educational community must continue to “think outside the box.” This study examined various innovative practices, including networking across schools, collaborating within and among dioceses, and systematizing operations. Other models will continue to emerge. Even the controversial charter school—with Catholic education occurring in an afterschool program—deserves serious consideration.

While development and implementation of these governance models occurred out of critical necessity, a reactive stance is not ideal moving forward. More in-depth study of the capacity of the various governance approaches to contribute to financial sustainability and high quality education is necessary. Further study would also help to distinguish among the issues of ownership, management, and administration. Continued replication of these models without a systematic examination of their effectiveness is risky. These impact studies will be costly and will require substantial expertise. Philanthropists and universities might combine their strengths to engage this needed task.

While the needs in urban areas are the most immediate and have led to the largest number of innovative governance models, there are substantial but unique challenges in working-class, suburban, and rural areas. Many Catholic schools on the outer ring of urban centers are experiencing financial struggles and some are beginning to collaborate with each other on new approaches to governance. The Catholic education community needs to be intentional in identifying governing models that are best suited to different settings. Future studies could explore the specific contextual factors (e.g., demographic, regional) that contribute to the effectiveness of these different approaches.

It is self-evident that sustainable models of governance and quality schools require effective leaders. This study did not identify any use of continual performance evaluations of educational leaders (i.e., principals, school boards [both local and diocesan], regional supervisors, and superintendents). These and other critical assessments can lead to quality improvements in school administration. The typical parish school has not been well positioned to use performance evaluations of a principal, precisely because pastors are not professionally trained educators. An appropriate evaluation process for principals would more likely occur in the context of a systemic, strategic evaluation of leaders at all educational levels in the diocese. A successful strategy plan should include state-of-the-art performance evaluation as one of its core strategies for improving quality practice at all levels.

Wider communities, both Catholic and non-Catholic, recognize that Catholic schools are an important civic asset; however, donors will remain



hesitant to give without proven governance models and evidence of sustainability and educational outcomes. The engagement of the philanthropic community can assist schools and dioceses in their strategic process to identify and implement effective governance and business models. Philanthropic support is also critical to helping schools invest in quality improvement of all aspects of schooling (i.e., curriculum, assessment, leadership, etc.). It should be acknowledged that in some dioceses, implementing a more systemic approach necessarily resulted in some school closings. Stakeholders in Catholic education will not be able to completely stabilize and sustain all existing Catholic urban elementary schools. Dioceses thus are challenged to identify both the optimal number of schools and cost-effective models that can be supported in a fiscally sustainable manner while also ensuring educational quality.

In short, the future of urban Catholic elementary education requires the identification, implementation, assessment, and marketing of models that demonstrate effective governance and sustainability. A courageous, coordinated effort to support urban Catholic elementary education utilizing well-tested and innovative governance models will not save all schools, but could ensure that this vital ministry will be preserved in some form in every urban center across the country.

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