

St. Matthew Catholic School

URGENT School News Regarding the Upcoming 2010-2011 School Year

This past fall, a school task force was commissioned by the Pastoral Council to evaluate St. Matthew School and explore ways to run our school more efficiently while maintaining the high academic standards and quality faith-based education we have offered for years. This looked to be a tall order in this troubled economy, but with faith and hope, the research began. The task force consists of members of the Education Commission (Sherri Rapp and Scott Griffin), Finance Commission (Jeff Denning and Melinda Garman), Pastoral Council (Tom Sommerfield), as well as the parish manager, Donett May and our school principal, Vickie Wannemuehler. Seven people were involved, five of whom have students currently attending St. Matthew School. The recommendation of this task force has been approved by both the Education Commission and the Pastoral Council. It is now being recommended for consideration by our school teaching staff, our school families, and our St. Matthew parishioners.

This task force has been very conscious of all parties involved as it has considered each prospective school change. Each option has been looked at from the perspective of the students, teachers, school families, and parishioners. A variety of options and ideas have been discussed and researched ranging from closing the school, closing the child care ministry, closing both the school and child care ministry, combining grades with low class size, merging with another Catholic school, and even adding back 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.

The option the task force is recommending for pilot at St. Matthew School is one that has been researched and shows much promise. It is a program that has seen success in other communities across the country and has received accolades in the field of education. This progressive and innovative program is called the Multi-Age Classroom. The task force is recommending that this organizational structure be implemented over the next few years to benefit both our students and teachers. The students would be in a "traditional" classroom for math and language arts and in a Multi-Age Classroom for science and social studies. Because of the way children grow and develop, students in kindergarten and 1st grade are grouped together, 2nd and 3rd graders are grouped together, and 4th and 5th graders are grouped together. The Multi-Age Classroom works especially well with the Differentiated Instruction that is also being implemented next year. Our experience and discussions with this learning structure and method during the pilot year of 2010-11 will help us determine the timeline for further study and implementation.

Children benefit both academically and socially from the multi-age learning environment. Academically, it provides greater flexibility for working with students at different skill levels, regardless of their "grade level", and it helps each child develop to his/her greatest potential. Socially, a multi-age environment provides all children with the opportunity to be leaders when they are the older students in the class, thus building self-esteem. Meanwhile, the younger students learn mature and responsible behavior from the older students; they also benefit from having peer mentors to help them adjust to a new

classroom. Limiting the classroom size is also important. Ideally there would not be more than 22 children in a multi-age class.

In order to have sufficient time to implement this pilot plan, the task force is recommending that school registration be held in early March. This will allow time to determine staff assignments, develop plans for teacher training, design curriculum, and create schedules for the 2010-11 school year. Introduction of this pilot plan will reduce the Parish school subsidy immediately as well as provide the potential for future cost flexibility, which given the current enrollment and economic environmental are significant factors to be considered.

We certainly have a lot of work ahead of us. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and prayers during this time of research and transition. You may find the following websites helpful for learning more about the Multi-Age Classroom: www.choosingmultiage.com and www.multiage-education.com.

We would like to hear your thoughts regarding this exciting recommendation as well as answer any questions that you may have. Please plan to attend one of the following meetings: St. Matthew School parent meeting on January 20th at 7:00pm, parish informational meeting on January 24th at 10:00am, or a meeting on January 26th at 6:30pm open to both school parents and parishioners. All meetings will be held in the school cafeteria/gymnasium.

Lord, without your help we are helpless, so as parishioners, parents, teachers, and community members, be our guide as to how we can best educate our children. Lord, you love children, help the adults who come in contact with our students to see them the way you see them. We pray that you bless our community with your love and guidance. Amen.

Isaiah 54:13 "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children."

Ken Steckler, Pastor

Pastoral Council

Dan Hayden

Michelle Hudson

Mary Kuper

Mel Levin

Eric May

Tom Sommerfield

Vickie Wannemuehler, Principal