

# Henrietta

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and more sections at each grade level. On the other hand, parents considered the change risky. Some were anxious that students would cease to identify with their own parishes, that siblings would be separated in different school buildings and that the schools would become too large and impersonal.

In December, 1978, based on the results of their studies and surveys, members of both school boards approved a recommendation to consolidate the two schools, which would then be supported by all three parishes, by the start of the 1978/79 school year.

The consolidation plan was phased in over three years. In 1978/79, both schools maintained grades two through six. Guardian Angels School housed kindergarten and first grade, while seventh- and eighth-graders moved to Good Shepherd. Second-graders moved to Guardian Angels and sixth-graders to Guardian Angels in 1979/80. The plan's final step in 1980/81 brought the two schools to their current format: pre-kindergarten through grade three at Guardian Angels, and grades four through eight at Good Shepherd.

"The reason we were able to do that was that neither school was in absolute crisis at the time," said Gerald Jaromin, a former member of Guardian Angels' school board. "We consolidated from strength, not from weakness."

In addition to the length of time devoted to study and implementation, Jaromin considered communication with parents a key factor in the plan's success. "We allowed them to voice their concerns and we took them into consideration," he explained. "If you let people express their feelings, even if you don't have a great answer, it helps."

The planning committee went even further by inviting individuals opposed to the idea of consolidation to serve on the various committees that were studying it.

Most aspects of the original consolidation plan are still functioning as they were designed. Both school buildings still have their own principals, each of whom controls her own budget. Parents pay tuition to their home parishes. The school boards were merged, but the Home/School Associations remain separate, except for two joint meetings each year.

"I really can't see anything I would have changed if I had been here then," said Catherine Kress, current principal at the Guardian Angels building.

None of the problems parents anticipated have troubled Sheila Dingman, who joined Guardian Angels parish at the height of discussion over consolidation. "When we first consolidated, everybody was worried about it," she recalled.

Her three children have since attended school in both primary and secondary buildings, and she couldn't be happier with the arrangement. "Sometimes, parents worry too much about how their children are going to react," Dingman said.

Consolidation hasn't pleased every parent as much as it has Dingman. The number of students from St. Joseph's attending the Rush/Henrietta Catholic School System has diminished from a high of nearly 80 children to seven last year, according to Father Richard C. O'Connell.

Father O'Connell attributes the drop in numbers at least in part to the fact that primary-grade students must make a lengthier bus trip to Guardian Angels than they made to Good Shepherd. "The consolidation has not been helpful to us," he observed. "That's when we started to see this happen."

Skip Warren, St. Joseph's representative to the Rush/Henrietta school board, agreed that consolidation was in some ways a setback for parents of young children from St. Joseph's. On the other hand, Warren considers the consolidation to have been a substantial benefit in implementing the Regents' Action Plan at the junior-high level.

As far as Good Shepherd's principal Helen Lynch is concerned, the planners couldn't have prepared much better for the new Regents' Action Plan, had they known it was coming. "It has been much easier to implement the plan, primarily because we have the numbers of students to have two sections of everything," she observed.

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