

# Proposal envisions grade reconfiguration

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the fifth in a series of articles examining Catholic Community Schools: A System Framework Plan for Monroe County, the proposed plan for reorganization of Monroe County's Catholic Schools. This week's installment focuses on grade reorganization.

**By Rob Cullivan**  
Staff writer

**ROCHESTER** — The wave of the future for Monroe County's Catholic schools could be centralized elementary schools housing grades kindergarten to six, junior highs housing grades seven and eight, and former school buildings housing pre-k and after-school care programs.

But at least two of the four quadrant planning boards in Monroe County may ask that the grade reconfiguration proposal — stated in section 5.0 of the *Catholic Community Schools* plan — be revised before a final draft of the plan is approved.

The Commission on Reorganization of Catholic Schools, headed by William Pickett, developed this section with input from the diocesan Catholic schools office and the Center for Governmental Research, an independent consulting firm.

Section 5.0 acknowledges that special circumstances may prevent some schools from adopting the recommended configurations, but it nonetheless states: "(w)here it is possible the schools of the Diocese shall be organized in such a way that the students will experience the necessity of a building move only twice between Kindergarten and Grade 12."

Following consolidation of the Catholic school system, the plan envisions that most students would first attend a K-6 elementary school. Section 5.3 states that the K-6 configuration is a sound makeup for an elementary school for three reasons: space needs, the format of the new state curriculum materials and the teacher certification standards of New York State.

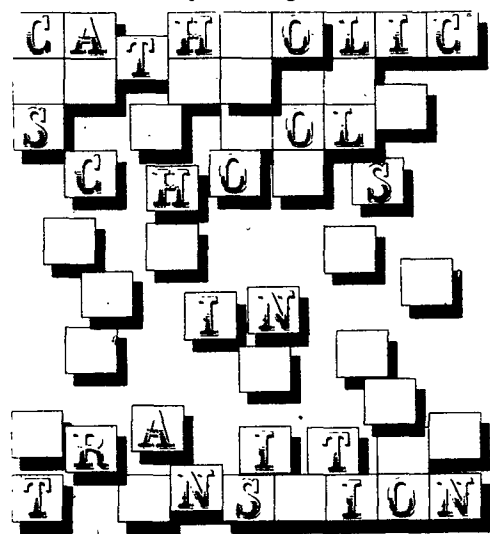
Most of the Catholic school buildings in Monroe County have limited space, according to Evelyn J. Kirst, assistant superintendent for curriculum for the diocesan Division of Education. Ideally, each elementary school would house two sections of each grade, a library and a music or art room, Kirst said, noting that such an ideal could be realized best by a K-6 configuration and would be unobtainable under the current system, in which most schools house K-8 programs.

K-6 schools would also reflect the pattern of the curriculum materials provided by New York state, Kirst said, explaining that the state follows a K-6 and 7-12 sequence.

In a similar manner, teachers are certified to teach either grades K-6, nursery-to-six, or 7-12, according to Sister Joseph Gilmery Russell, assistant superintendent for personnel. Kirst said that K-8 schools have to cater to both levels of teacher certification when formulating school policy. For example, she said, when faculty members at a K-8 school conduct meetings, they have to divide their time between the needs of their K-6 teachers and their 7-8 teachers.

Kirst also remarked that the Catholic schools mandate a 70 average as a passing grade in grades K-6, dropping that required average to 65 when students enter junior high. Hence, a K-6 configuration will allow elementary schools to become more administratively efficient by focusing their energies on one grading system rather than two.

A centralized junior high could focus the



energies of its staff on developing the strengths of its adolescent students, according to the plan. Section 5.4 states the commission's belief that, "Junior High students (defined as grades 7 and 8) need academic, social and spiritual guidance programs to help them in their transition from childhood to adolescence."

Kirst remarked that, because of their par-

ticular social and psychological needs, junior high students need guidance counselors. Quadrant junior highs, drawing a large number of students from the various elementary schools, will be able to afford to hire such counselors, who are not always available at schools housing K-8 programs.

Despite the reasoning behind the planned grade reconfiguration, some of the quadrant planning boards don't agree that it is a sound proposal for their regions.

Patricia Glogowski, chairwoman of the Northwest Quadrant Planning Board, said that school parents in her quadrant are opposed to a standardized grade configuration because they fear it would upset educational programs in the quadrant's schools.

Most parents would prefer to maintain the K-8 configuration, she said, noting that some schools pair older and younger students as part of the learning process.

For example, seventh- and eighth-graders provide spiritual, social and academic help to students in the lower grades at St. Lawrence School in the Northwest Quadrant, according to Sister Diane Dennie, school principal. Each eighth-grader is paired with a first-grader with whom he or she attends school liturgies all year.

Older students also volunteer to play with younger students during lunch hours, and tutor them in various subjects, Sister Dennie said. Currently, she remarked, grades four and seven are teaming up to study the American Revolution together.

The Northwest Quadrant Planning Board also needs to study whether or not it should establish more than one junior high to serve all its students, Glogowski said. She remarked that the planning board wants students to travel no more than 15 miles to attend a junior high, and she commented that the northwest may need one junior high for its suburban students and one for its urban students.

But even if the northwest creates two junior highs, the planning board could still be philosophically opposed to centralized junior highs, Glogowski said.

"People are uneasy about pulling kids apart from their own building," she said, referring to K-8 schools. A junior high would, "throw," students together at an age when they need to practice their faith in an environment with which they're familiar, rather than in a new building, she said.

Sister Dennie echoed Glogowski's sentiments, noting that grouping junior high students in a separate building would create a uniformity in which the students would lose their sense of a wider community.

Although the Southeast Quadrant Planning Board has not discussed grade configuration at length, school parents in the quadrant don't want to adopt the proposed configuration either, according to Sister Janice Morgan, chairwoman of a quadrant committee studying Catholic schools.

Sister Morgan said that people are opposed to grade reconfiguration because it

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## St. Anne's principal offers plan to save school

**By Rob Cullivan**  
Staff writer

**ROCHESTER** — Parish and school officials at St. Anne's are making a last-ditch effort to save their school from its scheduled closing in June of this year.

Robert J. Edelman, school principal, sent a proposal to keep the school open through June, 1990, to Sister Roberta Tierney, diocesan director of education, on Friday, April 7. Edelman declined to reveal the proposal's details, but hopes to receive a diocesan response by the end of this week.

Sister Tierney was unavailable for comment, but Father George Norton, diocesan spokesman, said the diocese would respond to the proposal by week's end.

Edelman's proposal follows the rejection of two previous attempts to persuade diocesan officials to reconsider their decision to close the school. Father John Mulligan, moderator of the Pastoral Center, and Bishop Matthew H. Clark have both rejected an earlier proposal to keep the school open. The proposal was drafted by Joan Powell, president of St. Anne's parish

council, and Carol Bernard, parish council member.

The proposal included a pledge by parishioners to raise a total of \$15,000 to help cut a parish budget deficit of \$27,000 for fiscal year 1988-89. Powell noted that she had conducted a survey of school families, 70 of whom had said they would send their children to St. Anne's for 1988-89 if the school remained open.

Powell's proposal also discounted the diocesan contention that the presence of asbestos in the school was a problem. According to Powell, diocesan asbestos coordinator Arthur Bragg conducted tests in February that showed asbestos in the school presented no immediate danger. Powell said that Bragg also assured her that St. Anne's qualified for a federal grant to help pay for removal of the asbestos. School officials have applied for the government grant.

Father Mulligan has acknowledged that asbestos in the school presents no immediate threat. However, when he wrote to notify Powell that he was rejecting her proposal, he commented that St. Anne's

had yet to receive the federal grant for asbestos removal, according to Powell.

The statements contained in Powell and Bernard's proposal alluded to the reasons diocesan officials gave for their Feb. 25 decision to close St. Anne's school. The diocese thus supported the wishes of Monsignor William Roche, St. Anne's pastor, against the wishes of the parish council, which had voted 6-3 with 3 abstentions Feb. 13 to keep the school open through June, 1990.

In previous statements, Monsignor Roche cited his belief that keeping the school open would result in declining enrollment and parish indebtedness. But parish council members have contended that they only want to keep the school open another year so that it can be considered in any overall consolidation plan adopted by the Southeast Quadrant — one of four quadrants that make up the Monroe County Catholic School System.

The Southeast Quadrant Planning Board, one of four groups planning the future of Monroe County Catholic schools, has yet to release its own consolidation plan.

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