

Parents bemoan proposed southwest closings

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Parents expressed frustration and anger Saturday, Oct. 24 over the Southwest Quadrant Governance Board's proposal to close two Catholic schools in the quadrant.

The two schools the board has proposed closing are Holy Ghost, 220 Coldwater Road, Gates, and Most Precious Blood, 219 Stenson St., Rochester.

"I don't understand how we can teach children to succeed when we've done nothing but fail," Karen Cervini said during the meeting at Holy Family School, 899 Jay St. Cervini has three children enrolled in Catholic schools throughout the quadrant.

The board announced the proposed closings on Wednesday, Oct. 21. Another meeting for parents is scheduled for St. Pius the Tenth Church, 3032 Chili Ave., on Thursday, Oct. 29, at 7 p.m.

The closings would affect 97 students at Holy Ghost, and 104 students at Most Precious Blood.

The plan to merge students at the two schools with students from the other four "represents a direction to utilize our largest buildings to our fullest extent and to save on the continued operation of our under-utilized buildings," a board statement said.

In addition to the proposed closings, the board wants to house K-6 programs at Holy Family, St. Pius the Tenth, St. Helen's, Gates, and St. Theodore's, Spencerport.

All Saints — the quadrant's junior high — would remain at St. Theodore's, its current location.

St. Monica's in Rochester would remain open and continue to receive diocesan funding because it serves a "special mission," the board's plan stated.

During the Oct. 24 meeting at Holy Family, board members heard comments from parents but in general did not answer any questions. According to board members, they will respond in writing to parents' concerns expressed at both meetings through a general information letter.

In general, most parents bemoaned the proposed closings, while a number called for more efforts to increase Catholic schools' enrollment rather than solving financial problems through more consolidation.

"I think we need a five-year plan, or an eight-year plan," stated Michael Mazzullo, whose daughter attends Holy Ghost School. Mazzullo complained that Catholic schools only show up in the media when they're closing.

"(Parents) hesitate to send their children because all that's projected to them is a precipice," he concluded.

Former board member Diane Heberger — who has two children at Holy Ghost and another at All Saints — claimed that most of the quadrant principals were opposed to the plan, but that one principal representative voted for it nonetheless.

Holy Family School Principal Sister Lorraine Burns, SSND, who supports the plan as a principal representative to the board, told the *Catholic Courier* on Monday, Oct. 26, that Heberger's assessment was not entirely accurate.

Most of the quadrant's principals did oppose an earlier draft of the quadrant's proposal, she said. However, the quadrant's principals — for the most part — did not see the final modified plan submitted prior to its release.

Sister Burns also noted that it would be inaccurate to say the board "voted"



Bebette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Mark Charlton and his son, Luke, a student at Holy Ghost School, reflect during comments at the Southwest Quadrant Governance Board meeting on Oct. 24 at Holy Family School in Rochester. The board has proposed closing both Holy Ghost and Most Precious Blood schools.

on the plan. Rather, the board members were asked for their opinions and reached a consensus that the plan should be released publicly.

"There's nothing written in stone," she concluded, noting that the board will take parental reaction into account before submitting the proposal.

The plan's tentativeness is what Sister Mary Louise Brien, SSND, Holy Ghost principal, is currently contemplating.

"I'm not going to say that it's a closed issue until (the board members) put together the comments and hear all the input," she told the *Courier* Oct. 26.

In addition to opposition to the proposed closings, some parents also complained about St. Monica's exemption from the consolidation process.

Others wondered whether their children would find room at All Saints, a concern prompted by the fact that the school has an enrollment cap of 200 students, according to Mary E. Caffrey, principal. Currently, All Saints' seventh grade has 105 students. Meanwhile, 142 students are enrolled in sixth grades throughout the quadrant, she added.

Given the fact that classroom space is not being fully utilized in the quadrant, some parents want to know why the board did not propose that All Saints take over St. Theodore's building entirely, and then move its students to other quadrant schools, she concluded.

Indeed, many parents were angry at the board for proposing "a plan that does not include all its students," as one parent said at the meeting.

Along with parental input, the board's proposal will be sent to the diocese's Christian Formation and Education Council by Nov. 13. The council will review the proposed plan and submit its recommendation to Bishop Matthew H. Clark by Dec. 23.

D'Amato stumps for school-voucher plan

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — U.S. Senator Alfonse M. D'Amato spoke to Catholic school parents here last Saturday in support of President Bush's school-choice proposal.

Stumping on a campaign trail that included Buffalo and Syracuse that same day, the Republican senator from New York made his remarks before nearly 150 people who attended the ninth annual convention of the New York State Federation of Catholic School Parents. The convention took place on Saturday, Oct. 24, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 125 Main St.

If U.S. veterans could go to the college of their choice on the federally funded G.I. bill, then parents of school-aged children should be able to receive taxpayer-funded vouchers to help pay for whatever type of school they choose, D'Amato said.

Noting that he sent his own son to a Catholic high school because "he needed guidance," D'Amato said, "Today, many parents may not have the economic wherewithal to give their children that opportunity."

D'Amato is among a number of local, state and national politicians calling for support of President Bush's school-choice proposal, which calls for the federal government to provide \$1,000 annual scholarships to low- and middle-income children from public



Bebette G. Augustin/Photo editor
U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato speaks to Catholic school parents Oct. 24 in support of President George Bush's school-choice proposal. He made his remarks before nearly 150 people who attended the New York State Federation of Catholic School Parents at Rochester's Hyatt Regency.

and non-public schools.

A similar school-choice bill that originated in the Senate was voted down 57-36 in January of this year. D'Amato, who also voted in favor of that bill, noted that school-choice initiatives have still not commanded enough bipartisan support to pass at the national level.

Speaking to the press following his speech, the U.S. senator noted that it was "unfortunate" that Republicans generally support school-choice propo-

sals more often than Democrats. Ironically, D'Amato pointed out that many Democrats represent large urban areas, where low-income inner-city parents disgruntled with public schools often support school-choice initiatives.

The Democratic Party's platform opposes President Bush's school-choice initiatives at the high school and elementary levels. D'Amato's opponent in this year's senatorial election, New York State Attorney General

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