

## CONTINUED...

## Junior highs

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be met and the children will be placed in a Catholic school."

The children are looking forward to being with other children they know and being in a group where everything is geared toward children their age, she said.

That is important, noted Sister Patricia Carroll, SSJ, an assistant schools superintendent and middle-school specialist. The social aspects of that age group, 11-14, matter as well as its academic needs, she said.

"There are many studies on the unique challenges that junior high middle teachers have to face," she said. "They are working with students who are developing into a new way of learning. According to the educational theorist Piaget, at this level, young students are moving into a whole new maturation level, comprehending things in a new way," she noted.

These children, unlike kindergartners and first graders, are "changing physically by the day, by the month, and also children are changing emotionally by the day, by the month," Sister Carroll said.

In addition, the junior high curriculum is comprehensive and challenging, she said.

Yet, in encouraging junior highs, the diocese has encountered reluctance from parents, she said. Parents have asked, "Why would I want to change? What I have had, I like," she said.

"Whereas, we are stepping back as a diocese and asking how can we best meet their academic needs and at the same time hold down rising costs?"

"We are trying to say nicely this has been under study," Sister Carroll said. She



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Mike Goy and Ashley Heisel, both 11, look at Houdini, a science class pet gecko, during an open house at Bishop Hogan Junior High Jan. 10. Both students currently attend St. Ambrose School.

added that Catholic school officials have actually been studying the best form of education for junior high ages since the late 1980s. As enrollments continued to decline, changes became more critical, she explained.

Also, she said, for today's teachers "There is unprecedented demand for professional development in their subjects." The junior highs can offer full-time teacher specialists in such fields as science and math, whereas in K-8 schools, teachers ordinarily must teach more than one subject to seventh and eighth grades, and quite often, sixth.

If a teacher teaches science and math to grades six, seven and eight, Sister Carroll said, "That's six preparations for that teacher."

In addition, needed resources for those grades can be concentrated at the junior highs, she said, and a "Meeting All Expectations" (MAX) program is available. MAX supports teachers in meeting various styles of learning, whether for children who are especially talented and gifted, or who have learning disabilities.

Parents whose children already are in Catholic schools must re-enroll them for the junior high programs in February. After that, depending upon availability, classes will be opened to children new to the system. Other options for such parents include public schools and the independent junior-high programs at Our Lady of Mercy High School, McQuaid Jesuit and The Nazareth Schools.

Meanwhile, savings to the diocese may

not be immediate, because some families may leave the system, and teachers must be hired for All Saints, which is expanding this year, noted Gary Smith, assistant schools superintendent for business. Smith did not anticipate any loss of jobs, as teachers may move to positions that open when others leave.

"However, we feel the next year we will have a nice savings because staff will be sized properly," he explained.

Tuition rates are the same at diocesan junior highs as they were for the affected grades in the K-8 schools: \$2,500 for a parish-sponsored student, \$3,600 for a family with two students and \$4,700 for three students.

Meanwhile, Smith's son Kyle, a sixth-grader at Seton, is "very excited" about going to Siena, Smith said. "By the time they're at the sixth-grade level they're anxious to move on. He's ready to go," he said.

So is Kelsey Abelein, a seventh-grader at St. John the Evangelist.

"Most of the kids are excited about it," she said. "And it is going to be a great change because they'll get to meet new people they're going to be going to high school with, and it will be better than having a few people in class."

Preston, her principal, came to her class to explain the change, and Kelsey said, "We knew something was up when she came in." She said the students had a lot of questions, mostly about "the uniforms, the curriculum and stuff. ... They wanted to know how the grading will be done and if we still will have trimesters. They wanted to know how many report cards we are going to get."

A few questions remain, however. "We were going to have a class trip (in eighth grade) and we're not sure yet," she said.

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