

# Plan would change tuition

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier



File photo

Students from St. John of Rochester, Fairport.

The Monroe County Catholic Schools Board is proposing a sliding-scale plan based on income and other factors to determine how much parents will pay for their children's education in the county's Catholic elementary schools.

The proposal would change the current system, in which a single tuition rate is charged throughout the county to all parents with one child in diocesan Catholic schools. A family that is registered with a parish currently receives a discount that is not available to non-parishioner families. Both parishioners and non-parishioner families receive discounts for additional children enrolled in the schools.

Under the new plan, some parents would pay the full cost of educating a child, whereas most parents would receive some sort of discount.

"The majority of our families are middle class; this model will address their needs," said Patricia Hayles, chairwoman of the Monroe County Catholic Schools Board.

Hayles said the schools need a new tuition plan in order to stem declining enrollment among middle-class children, and to increase the schools' ability to provide teacher salary increases and keep pace with rising health-insurance costs.

The county's Catholic school parents are scheduled to receive an information packet on the proposed plan sometime in December, according to Hayles. Next spring, parents will be asked to fill out detailed financial surveys that will provide school officials with data to be used in determining how to set new tuition rates, she said.

"No demographic information exists today on the financial aid requirements of our families," she said, noting that this is why the schools currently are unable to inform parents of potential tuition rates under the proposed plan.

If approved, the plan would be implemented by September 2004, and would increase the cost of tuition by one-third in each of the subsequent three years, until the rate reflected the full cost of educating one child in the system, school officials said.

In October 2001, the school board formed an ad hoc committee to research tuition plans in other dioceses and schools, and to formulate a new plan, Hayles said. Among the schools studied by the committee was Immaculate Conception in Ithaca, which has used a needs-based tuition system for 10 years, she said. Immaculate's parents pay from as little as \$720 to as much as \$3,500 per

child depending on their means, and the school is currently experiencing increased enrollment, she said.

Earlier this month, the ad hoc committee conducted informational meetings with parents and principals to gain their input. The panel is slated to meet with pastors in December, she said. Hayles repeatedly emphasized that parents' input would be taken into account in the development of any new plan. In part, her emphasis on the plan's tentative nature was a response to initial negative feedback from many parents. Some parents reportedly objected to the financial survey they will be asked to complete next year, whereas others were concerned about potentially large tuition increases they might face.

Michael Caito said he may withdraw his three children from St. Joseph's School in Penfield if the tuition system is changed. Caito said he pays about \$5,050 to educate his kids, and guessed that he might have to pay as much as \$8-10,000 for his children under the proposal.

"It's almost irresponsible to expend that kind of money even if you can afford it," he said, noting that even affluent parents have to save for their children's college educations and other expenses. He cautioned that parents in Rochester's affluent suburbs may send their children to public schools if they perceive that they are shouldering too much of the tuition burden.

On the other hand, Sandy DeRoller said she supports the proposed plan. She and her husband, Tom, have one of two daughters at St. John the Evangelist in Rochester. She said she thought they might be eligible for discounted tuition at St. John's under the proposed plan, but

would be willing to keep their daughters in Catholic schools even if they had to pay more. She praised the tuition committee for its work.

"I see what they're doing, and I support it wholeheartedly," she said. Hayles said such factors as a need to increase teachers' pay are driving the proposed changes. For example, she said, a teacher who has worked in Monroe County Catholic schools for 25 years generally makes only a little more than a rookie teacher in the Rochester City School District.

She added that enrollment in Monroe County's Catholic schools has declined from more than 7,000 students in 1995-96 to a little more than 6,000 this school year, for a total decline of 1,394 students. Hayles said that high tuition rates were the chief factor in driving parents out of the system. Tuition is currently \$2,660 for one child whose family belongs to a Catholic parish, and \$3,950 for one non-parishioner child. Without a change in the tuition system, the cost for one child is projected to rise to \$3,910 in five years.

"Every bit of the (enrollment) trend says we will be for the very rich and the very poor, and that is what we want to avoid," Hayles said of the school system. Middle-class parents who might not qualify for financial aid are those most likely to take their children out of the current system, she said.

Hayles noted that the tuition committee was well aware of parents' concerns about the new plan. She added that schools officials are planning to consider many factors when deciding what to charge each individual family.

"(The plan) is not laid in stone, and I know that we need to revise what we're doing," she said.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**PARISH MEETINGS**

**St. John the Evangelist, Rochester**  
 Parish Meeting: Nov. 22, 7:30 p.m. at St. John the Evangelist, 1000 E. Main St., Rochester, NY 14610. Topic: "The Church's Mission in the World."

**St. Ann, Fairport**  
 Parish Meeting: Nov. 22, 7:30 p.m. at St. Ann, 1000 E. Main St., Fairport, NY 14455. Topic: "The Church's Mission in the World."

**St. Christopher, Fairport**  
 Parish Meeting: Nov. 22, 7:30 p.m. at St. Christopher, 1000 E. Main St., Fairport, NY 14455. Topic: "The Church's Mission in the World."

**St. Elizabeth, Rochester**  
 Parish Meeting: Nov. 22, 7:30 p.m. at St. Elizabeth, 1000 E. Main St., Rochester, NY 14610. Topic: "The Church's Mission in the World."

**St. James, Rochester**  
 Parish Meeting: Nov. 22, 7:30 p.m. at St. James, 1000 E. Main St., Rochester, NY 14610. Topic: "The Church's Mission in the World."

**St. Joseph, Rochester**  
 Parish Meeting: Nov. 22, 7:30 p.m. at St. Joseph, 1000 E. Main St., Rochester, NY 14610. Topic: "The Church's Mission in the World."

**St. Lawrence, Rochester**  
 Parish Meeting: Nov. 22, 7:30 p.m. at St. Lawrence, 1000 E. Main St., Rochester, NY 14610. Topic: "The Church's Mission in the World."

**St. Michael, Rochester**  
 Parish Meeting: Nov. 22, 7:30 p.m. at St. Michael, 1000 E. Main St., Rochester, NY 14610. Topic: "The Church's Mission in the World."

**St. Raphael, Rochester**  
 Parish Meeting: Nov. 22, 7:30 p.m. at St. Raphael, 1000 E. Main St., Rochester, NY 14610. Topic: "The Church's Mission in the World."

**St. Vincent, Rochester**  
 Parish Meeting: Nov. 22, 7:30 p.m. at St. Vincent, 1000 E. Main St., Rochester, NY 14610. Topic: "The Church's Mission in the World."