

Diocese of Fall River announces the merger of two New Bedford Catholic Schools

The Diocese of Fall River announced yesterday that due to compounding financial challenges from the COVID pandemic, Holy Family Holy Name School and St. James St. John School will merge into a new school at the end of this school year, building on the strengths of the two New Bedford elementary schools.

The consolidated school, yet to be named, will serve an estimated 300 students and will reside on the St. James St. John campus on Orchard Street in New Bedford. A middle school serving the combined schools will be established in the Kennedy Youth Center, located behind the St. James St. John building, and is slated to receive major renovations and upgrades.

"We recognize remarkable strengths in our schools that we need to build on and find ways to sustain," said Bishop de Cunha in a video to the school communities. "These decisions were not made lightly, and I regret the losses they bring," the Bishop said. "Both schools have long been anchors for developing Catholic identity in young people of New Bedford."

Holy Family Holy Name's 100-year-old building on Summer Street requires costly repairs and upgrades, a financial investment that the Central School Board decided would more wisely be spent on updating facilities at St. James St. John School and the Kennedy Youth Center.

Superintendent Daniel S. Roy said, "While we sincerely regret having to change the structure of any of our Catholic schools, the ultimate goal is to strengthen all remaining schools to ensure Catholic education is available for many years to

come.”

The Diocese of Fall River has fared better than Catholic schools nationwide with enrollment plummeting 6.4 percent across the country in the 2021-22 school year, according to The National Catholic Education Association. In contrast, nine of 19 Diocese of Fall River Catholic schools have seen an increase in enrollment over the 2019-20 school year, and an additional four schools exceeded last year’s enrollment.

Roy said that St. James St. John Principal Cristina Viveiros-Serra will serve as principal for the new elementary school, while Holy Family Holy Name Principal Deacon Peter Schutzler will be Dean of the middle school. A public naming process will start in February with recommendations to the Bishop for naming the new school.

“While this decision was difficult, we believe that wise stewardship of our resources will allow our students to receive the best possible Catholic education in a new school that will allow our students to thrive, and our community to grow,” said Roy.

For over a century, Catholic schools have educated thousands of children in the Diocese of Fall River. Today, there are about 5400 students in Pre-K through 12th grade in 19 Catholic schools from Attleboro to Cape Cod. Catholic education continues to be recognized for its rigorous academic education while providing the moral and spiritual formation according to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

To view the message conveyed by Bishop da Cunha, please go to www.catholicschoolsalliance.org/school-merger/. For more information about the Catholic Schools Alliance, please go to www.catholicschoolsalliance.org.