



## **2020-2021 School Year Structural Announcement**

### ***Frequently Asked Questions***

#### **Rationale**

##### **Why are we doing this?**

It is no secret that across the St. Louis area, many Catholic schools are struggling, especially in the upper grades as class sizes have dwindled. Thanks to the foresight our founding parishes had many years ago, we are in a unique position of strength, and this move is about making us even stronger.

This presents an opportunity to serve as better stewards of our parish and family resources, as the enhanced structure will yield meaningful and sustainable savings in coming years while improving the quality of our academic environment for years to come. It also strengthens the faith community of our broader school and parish family as we grow together.

##### **Do we need four campuses?**

The board carefully considered this, and the parishes were committed to keeping the current campuses open. This change will help us better utilize the space we have. Our enrollment is good, and this move will put us in a better position to attract and grow the Academy in the future by offering more educational and after school enrichment options, including greater access to specialized learning resources for all students. There's also a need and demand for a Catholic Early Childhood Center in our area, and we view this as an opportunity for growth.

Ensuring each of our four campuses offers a vibrant learning experience is a top priority for us. Holy Cross Academy draws on the strength of its parishes, and an academic presence on each of these campuses means our parishes – and by extension, our Academy – continue to appeal to young families, which will help them grow and thrive.

##### **How do we know this model will work?**

The committee studied several models for Catholic schools around the country, and the research suggested that most parishes tried to maintain parochial structures as long as they could only to merge or close when their financial situation proved unsustainable. We are innovating, based on a model that has been proven successful in public school districts, and we will be the first to attempt this structure in our area.

##### **What is wrong with our current structure?**

Our current structure requires resources in triplicate that are not needed to serve our current student population. We have to make decisions today between improving our academic programs and being good stewards of parish finances. The new structure will allow the academy to invest without asking parents or pastors to contribute disproportionately more in the out years.

##### **What make us believe this structure is better?**

The new model allows for more collaboration between teachers and students of the same age. We will have balanced class sizes and age appropriate resources for the students who attend each campus. We will need fewer resources

because it will be easier to share between classrooms, and that frees up budget to enhance our resources when we find something that adds significant value to the learning experience.

### **Why are we moving students to different campuses?**

We want to provide affordable, innovative, collaborative Catholic education to our parishioners. Last spring the Structure committee was formed to analyze the current structure and determine the most cost-effective structure for HCA. Consolidating to a single campus would have been the most economical choice, however our pastors were committed to keeping students at all four existing campuses because of the positive impact a school has on a parish in our Archdiocese.

### **How does curriculum and learning improve by having all students of the same age in the same building?**

The new structure will allow each campus to create a building-wide learning environment catered toward the specific learning and curricular needs of the targeted grade levels. Today, the middle school is able to offer a wider range of academic enrichment and support options for our sixth through eighth graders. Breaking each campus into similar grade-level campuses could allow the same opportunity to provide better enrichment and support options for students in all grades in the Academy.

### **What additional resources are we getting with the new structure?**

Immediate gains ensure a gymnasium now for all of our K-8 students, a future President for the Academy, and learning consultants and aides who will now be able to specialize by age. We have a path towards a state-of-the-art Early Childhood program, an advanced learner curriculum, digital learning resources beyond IXL or Google Classroom and special education support so that the academy is more inclusive.

### **Is this really going to help the teachers?**

Yes, the new structure allows the faculty and staff at each campus a better opportunity to work collaboratively to create an enhanced learning experience. Teachers currently meet during off-hours on a monthly basis to collaborate – the new structure allows them to interact daily. When the teachers are working next door to each other, there is a greater likelihood that the curriculum will be taught the same way (often with the same assignments and lesson plans).

## **Details and Logistics**

### **What will the hours be? How will drop off or pick up work?**

We understand the logistics of this move will be challenging, as it creates potential to have children on more than the two campuses our families previously experienced. We have been and continue to explore options to help alleviate some of the challenges around this, including offering staggered start and end times and are looking at other flexible options, including what time doors should open and transitional time between the end of the academic day and pickup for those transporting students from multiple campuses. Another exciting option that we see some real possibilities for is the leveraging of a bus to help with transportation. And this is not some joke either, as we explored the concept of a bus, we realized that a bus could be used for additional educational purposes and to help us be more interconnected in special ways between campuses to build our community.

### **What will the hours be for preschool?**

We recognize that carpooling is generally not an option for children of this age because of car seat laws and we will adjust our ECC to meet the needs of families who have students at other campuses. The new early childhood center will offer extended hours, built into the price, without charging the current ‘aftercare’ fee to allow greater flexibility for our families. Those prices have not been set yet, but they will be reflective of our new structure.

**How much will tuition cost for the 2020-2021 school year?**

Tuition will be approved and announced in January, in advance of our campus open houses.

**How many students will be in each class?**

We anticipate that most K-5 grades will have two homerooms each based on current enrollment. Some classes will be larger and some will be smaller than they are today; no classroom will have more than 25 students without a teacher's aide in alignment with our current policies.

**What about our buddy programs?**

We will look to create a new buddy program that aligns with the new structure and emphasizes parish connections.

**How will I receive communications from the campuses my students attend?**

We are upgrading to a new Student Information System for the upcoming school year that will streamline communication between the Academy and our families. Most school districts use these systems today, along with several local high schools. Teachers and administrators will be able to email families easily using the new system; additional functionality includes online payments, lunch ordering, and standards-based grading, to name a few.

**Staffing****How will this affect the faculty?**

Nothing will change during the current school year. We expect some attrition at the end of the year, which we typically see at every campus each year. Assuming this attrition rate holds, it will keep the loss of positions very low and it is our intention that no teacher or administrator wishing to return next year will have to lose a job as a result of this change. As individuals move on, the administration will hire according to the needs of the Academy rather than a one-for-one headcount replacement.

Once we finish registration and have better information on students enrolled for the coming year, our principals will be in a position to work through teaching assignments based on need and interest.

**Are we concerned about impacts to the learning environment at HCA during the transition?**

Our principals and pastors are committed to managing the classroom experience for our students during this year of transition. If you have concerns, please contact your campus principal, Dr. Densberger, or your pastor for guidance.

**Will we still have classroom aides and learning consultants?**

This structure unlocks the ability to staff with adequate aides and learning consultants dedicated to a specific age group. The Board of Directors believes that in the long term this structure could make it more feasible to hire staff with training to work with students who have special needs.

**Will we be able to bring the library program back?**

We are looking at options to bring back the library program, potentially as a before or after school activity.

**How many administrators will there be? What will their titles be?**

Over the next few years, we will transition to a model that includes one President, one Early Childhood Director, one Principal, and two other campus administrators that report to the Principal. Their exact titles will be decided upon by the new President, once he or she has been hired.

### **Which administrator will be leading my child's campus?**

Per our usual process, we will offer contracts and announce staffing near the end of this school year.

### **Parish and Family Impact**

#### **Are we worried about losing the ties to our parishes?**

We are aware of the additional effort this model will require to retain vibrant parish ties from birth to graduation. This challenge is one the pastors are excited to tackle with the help of our families; they see it as an opportunity to look for new ways to invigorate our parish life.

#### **What about families who don't want to be separated on different campuses?**

While we understand the idea of siblings in one building is very appealing to many families, we've seen great success with our current model, which already separates elementary and middle school siblings. This shift expands on that success and enables us to expand the exceptional middle school learning experience to all grades.

#### **How often will they get to see each other? Will the campuses do more together?**

Since our inception, we have recognized the importance of building relationships among students from all of our campuses, and that won't change. We will continue to celebrate Masses together on a regular basis and hold our annual All Academy Retreat in addition to other HCA events that bring our community together.

### **Finances**

#### **Is the school stable?**

Yes. This adjustment to the structure of the Academy puts us on a stronger path not only for a better academic program for our children, but a financially stronger and sustainable school. We are continually working to use the resources we have to achieve the mission of our school in the best way, and this shift reflects that.

#### **Are we doing this just to save money?**

We are doing this to ensure the long-term financial viability of HCA, while offering innovative academic programming that can be tailored to the individual students we serve. In the recent past we have made sacrifices in order to keep the budget balanced, like the library, and have delayed changes that we believe will add value to the Academy, such as hiring a coordinator for religious education.

#### **Is this why we needed to raise \$200,000 this year?**

The fundraising goal for 2019-2020 was set as a result of the school budget for this year and the desire to maintain the strength of HCA's academic programming. The structure committee work concluded after the goal was established and did not factor in any reallocation of funds from the 2019-2020 budget.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to reach out to any of the five Pastors, Board of Directors, Campus Principals or you may email the address below and we will get back to you with answers.

Board of Director List: <https://www.holycross-stl.org/holy-cross-board.html>  
Email questions to: [admin@hca-stl.org](mailto:admin@hca-stl.org)