

Charter Schools: A Case Study of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis Charter School Project

Presenter: Archdiocese of Indianapolis

CONFERENCE FOR CATHOLIC FACILITY MANAGEMENT (CCFM)



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Learning Objectives

At the end of this program, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the historic milestone of a private religious entity applying for a charter school license to maintain a sustainable school in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood.
2. Understand the rationale behind the decision to convert an existing Catholic school to a public charter school status and how this change has affected the parishes that formerly operated the schools.
3. Understand the process required to renovate the existing schools for full compliance with the ADA and building codes.
4. Understand how the conversion to a charter school has allowed the school to increase the sustainability of the schools and create a more “green” and healthy learning environment for the students.



About MTCA

- The Mother Theodore Catholic Academies (MTCA) formed in 2005 to support six center city schools originally supported by parishes
- Designed to create cost efficiencies, MTCA is able to share personnel and resources
- Overall, there are 986 students of which:
 - 54 percent are Catholic
 - 46 percent Non-Catholic
 - 85 percent on free and reduced lunch
 - 50 percent male and 50 percent female



About MTCA

- As part of the high school system, the graduation rate is 97 percent
- During the last four years, all MTCA schools have achieved either Commendable or Exemplary PL221 status
- One-third of the families within MTCA have an annual income of \$14,000
- The schools are governed by a private board
- The schools serve as valuable resources for the children and Indianapolis community



Red = school
 Blue = parish
 Green = school/parish



The Current Situation

- Due to the economic downturn, schools within MTCA are struggling financially
- Something must be done to ensure the Archdiocese continues to have a presence in the center city



Potential Solutions

1. Increase tuition
2. Consolidate MTCA schools
3. Individual church parishes run schools
4. Close schools within MTCA
5. Transform to charter schools with MTCA as CMO
6. Transform to charter schools with outside company as CMO



Option 1: Increase Tuition

- Very difficult for families
- One hundred percent of students receive tuition assistance



Option 2: Consolidate MTCA Schools

- MTCA schools are already too full
- Geographically difficult



Option 3: Individual Church Parishes Run Schools

- MTCA acquired a \$4 million debt when taking over the six schools
- MTCA took over building maintenance and utility payments for both schools



Option 4: Close Schools within MTCA

- Two or more schools would have to close
- Removal of key resources for children and community anchors



Option 5: Transform to Charter Schools with MTCA as CMO

- All schools would remain open
- MTCA would serve as the CMO

Option 6: Transform to Charter School with Outside Company as CMO



- All schools would remain open
- All ties with MTCA would be cut
- An outside company without knowledge of the communities would serve as the CMO



Best Solution Criteria

- Serve the best interest of the children
- Keep the schools open
- Continue educating students in a safe, supportive environment



The Best Solution

- Transform into mayor-sponsored charter schools with MTCA as the CMO
- Innovative approach – a first in the nation
- Requires support and involvement from key stakeholders



The Best Solution

- The current unfunded deficit is \$2.7 million, but by transforming to charters the deficit will be only \$1 million
- A new public board, ADI Charter Schools, Inc., would oversee the schools including community leaders such as Stephen Goldsmith, Marc Guess, Holiday Hart McKiernan, Rev. Msgr. Joseph Francis Schaedel, Jeffrey Stumpf, Carmen Hansen Rivera and Tory Callahan



About the Process

- Originally, the mayor's office approached the Archdiocese about this innovative approach
- Internally, the Archdiocese and MTCA began to research the notion of transforming into mayor-sponsored charter schools
- The Archdiocese and MTCA first met internally and then turned to attorneys, the schools, the public sector and many other key stakeholders



Pros

- The Archdiocese is not walking away from any of the center city schools
- The buildings would continue to be utilized and the Archdiocese would have control
- The schools would be better equipped to serve students with special needs



Cons

- All religious education, imagery and ties would not be allowed during the regular school day
- The school would only offer a secular program
- By receiving public funds, the schools cannot choose which students are admitted



Decision Process

- MTCA evaluated the six center city schools and selected the two schools with the greatest need for capital improvements
- During summer 2010, the two schools were outfitted with new windows, plumbing and made ADA compliant
- Next summer 2011, the schools would undergo HVAC and electrical renovation to make them more energy efficient



About St. Anthony (Now Padua Academy)

- Enrollment of 127 students
 - 90 percent Hispanic
 - 1 percent African-American
 - 5 percent Caucasian
 - 91 percent Catholic
 - 98 percent on free or reduced lunch



About St. Andrew & St. Rita (Now Andrew Academy)

- Enrollment of 156 students
 - 96 percent African-American
 - 3 percent Hispanic
 - 7 percent Catholic
 - 77 percent on free or reduced lunch



The Best Solution

- 190 instructional days
- Based on Indiana's framework
- Provide additional educational resources
- Ability to incorporate a “whole student” philosophy



Consultation Process

- We hosted several parent and community open houses
- We met one-on-one with community leaders and presented to public and private organizations
- There continue to be meetings and open houses to provide clear and consistent communication



How the Schools Operate

- **A Catholic preschool is available**
- **Full-day kindergarten is available**
- **The remaining grades are public with a clear separation**
- **A wrap around faith program is offered to students after school**



How the Schools Operate

- Each grade is capped at 24 students
- Grades 7 and 8 will be added during next two years
- Transportation is provided to students who live more than a mile away from the school
- All staff members, including teachers, had to reapply for a position



Application Process

- Current students do not legally have priority for acceptance
- All students have to apply during a two-week open enrollment period
- After the two-week period, students are accepted on a first come, first serve basis
- If more than 24 students apply for a grade, there is a lottery
- With the lottery, families are given priority to ensure families can stay together



Keeping Parents Involved

- Parents were asked to participate in the transformation process
- Two focus group sessions were held to determine school naming options and parental involvement
- The after-school faith program is run by the parishes and parents



Future of Remaining Schools

- The city is not willing to entertain other Catholic Schools at this time
- We are not willing to entertain other Catholic Schools at this time
- Approval to do expand would only be granted through Archbishop Daniel - he is not prepared to entertain this request



Ongoing Challenge

- There is no room for failure
- Success will be measured by:
 - A vibrant and positive force in the community that is able to prepare children for high school
 - A strong wrap-around faith program sought out by families



Sustainability Improvements

- During 2010- 11, the two schools are undergoing extensive design studies to determine the most cost effective manner to increase energy efficiency in the HVAC and electrical systems - Existing systems are 50 -60 years old.
- Designs are being studied to make the two schools more sustainable and energy efficient by the incorporation of new windows and storm water systems that are sustainable and do not contribute to the pollution of the City storm system.



Sustainability Improvements

- With the growth of the schools through the Charter program, new and improved spaces are required to advance the learning environment for the students such as: library, art and music classrooms, gymnasium, and improved administrative spaces.
- Site improvements are also being planned for playgrounds, athletic fields, green spaces, and other site amenities.

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