

Questions, Comments and Responses from the Open Forum on the School Expansion Recommendation, February 18, 2007

1. **Based on letter communications from Duane Siepker, there appears to be conflicting information on how many kindergarten students are expected for 2007-2008. What is the actual number of students whose parents have expressed interest in enrolling for kindergarten for 2007-2008? Are members of the school staff recruiting students?**

The different numbers regarding the possible number of students whose parents will enroll them in kindergarten for the 2007-2008 school year arose from the times and the forms of communication. Early, Mr. Siepker sent a survey to parents of kindergarten-eligible students at the request of Susan Vernon and the communication committee. We sent out approximately 70+ surveys and received a 25% return. This accounted for the first number: 21 students expected to enroll. Later, some late replies were received, people phoned in, and we phoned some who we knew would be coming. This accounted for the more accurate number of 40+ students expected to enroll. We do not recruit nor do we run ads in any of the local newspapers. We do send a kindergarten round-up letter to all parishioners with 5 year olds.

2. **Can we financially support the Parish Council's intent to provide Catholic education in Saint Cecilia School for the additional section of kindergarten students enrolled in 2006-2007?**

Yes. Some changes will be required to make this possible, however. The planned changes include reduction in teacher aide staffing level, increase in tuition, and increase in third source revenue such as from the Gala.

3. **What are we doing to provide "Catholic" education?**

We provide an "immersive" learning environment assisted by teachers, aides, Mass, prayer, liturgy experiences within and outside the classroom.

4. **How will the proposed expansion affect support for the Religious Education programs of the parish?**

Support levels for the Religious Education programs are not affected.

5. **How do you plan to address the space needs and costs associated with the proposed expansion?**

Space plans:

- At present, Art activities use the Art room only one day per week. So, in the first year, use the Art Room for an additional classroom section and move Art activities to the Multipurpose Room. Cost for conversion is estimated as \$10,000.
- The Music Room is only used about 50% of the time. So, we'll consider relocating Music activities to other space. Cost for conversion is estimated as \$5,000.
- Plans for how to address space needs in the following three years of the proposed expansion are sketchier. They include possible use of the AY Room, friary garage, Media Center, portable classrooms. Initial rough cost estimates are \$175 per square foot. We realize professional expertise will be needed to develop more detailed plans.

Cost impacts:

- Tuition is expected to increase. We have had increases of 6-6.5% per year for a long time. Future increases will be closer to 7.5% per year.
- Subsidy from the parish will not increase.
- Teacher staffing will increase to cover additional sections but the teacher aide staffing level will decrease because class sizes will be smaller.

6. **What are tuition levels?**

- Education cost for the 2006-2007 school year is \$3566 per student.
- Non-Catholic students (six students this year = 3% of the students) pay tuition equal to the cost, i. e., \$3566 per student.
- Saint Thomas Aquinas parish has been providing a gift of \$7,000 per year in support of our Catholic school. It is not intended to be a tuition stipend nor does the amount depend on the number of students from STA. We use the gift as an STA subsidy, reducing the tuition for STA students. In 2006-2007, STA families pay the balance of the total cost per student reduced by the per student STA support, that is, $\$3,566 - (\$7,000 / \text{the total number of STA students (5)}) = \$2,166$ per STA student.
- Tuition for students whose parents are registered members of Saint Cecilia parish averages \$1,592/student.

- Overall, the average tuition for all students (Saint Cecilia, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Non-Catholic) is \$1,701/Student
- Children whose parents are registered members of Saint Cecilia parish have preference in enrollment.

7. How many students are enrolled now? How much is the parish paying to subsidize the school?

- Current enrollment is 178 students.
- Parish subsidy for the 2006-2007 school year is budgeted at \$316,000.

8. Comment:

- Tuition here is a good deal. It's twice as high in Minneapolis; \$7,000 per student in Mississippi.

9. How many students were turned away in 2006-2007?

We did not log all families who were turned away, just those who agreed to be placed on our waiting list. Of those who were turned down, 16 agreed to be placed on the waiting list.

10. Where does our tuition rank in comparison to other schools in the diocese?

Archdiocese of Dubuque 2005- 2006 Tuition Fee Information as reported in the latest available annual administrative status report can be summarized as follows:

46 Archdiocesan elementary schools reported 1st child tuitions.

They ranged from \$450 to \$1900; median = \$1038.

Saint Cecilia 1st child tuition levels were \$1265, \$1430, and \$1620 depending on family income.

Average tuition for parish members was \$1472, percentile rank = 71.

43 Archdiocesan elementary schools reported Out of Parish tuitions.

They ranged from \$450 to \$4100; median = \$1860.

Saint Cecilia Out of Parish tuition was \$2830, percentile rank = 90.

44 Archdiocesan elementary schools reported Other Denomination tuitions.

They ranged from \$500 to \$4650.

Saint Cecilia Other Denomination tuition was \$3450, percentile rank = 79.

11. Comment:

Don't let the school rob the parish or other Religious Education programs.

Response:

The Board of Education is well aware of other needs and is striving to maintain balance.

12. Space – How will other important parish uses be addressed? Where will the money come from to provide additional needed space?

- Accommodating other important space needs will require more flexibility and creativity.
- Requirements for additional money for space will be minimal in the first two years of the expansion but more will be needed in the later years.

13. Can the present Education Center handle the proposed expansion (hallways, rest rooms, room sizes, lockers, etc.)?

We believe it can, based on City of Ames code requirements and the fact that the present facility was built to accommodate considerably more students than we have today.

14. Comment:

Music teaching can be made ambulatory (with music cart and teaching in the classroom) but you will have to provide storage for sheet music and musical instruments.

15. Will parents accept divided classrooms?

- 121 parents responded to a survey conducted by the SEE committee. The 73 parents who had students currently enrolled at St. Cecilia ranked ample classroom space as a 5.8 in importance (with 1 being most important and 10 being least important) against other criteria. The parents who had children attending other schools and parents of younger children rated ample classroom space as a 4.0. The survey showed that space is important to parents. However, it also showed that parents ranked teacher quality, class size, and adaptability to

higher/lower academic levels as more important than class size. Three parents were explicitly opposed to dividing the classrooms with the existing partitions.

- Members of the SEE committee visited a classroom that had been divided into two sections. The part the committee visited contained the teacher's desk, associated file cabinet and book shelf, and 22 student desks and chairs. According to Ames City Code, twenty two is the maximum capacity for a classroom of that area. The points of discussion included the following:
 - Although the chairs were on top of the desks, the committee members felt the room would surely be crowded with 22 students. The working maximum would likely be more like 17 or 18.
 - There was some concern about the feasibility of conducting small group activities in such an environment.
 - There was some concern about how the space limitation might affect the ability to conduct preferred teaching practices, e. g., teacher circulation and close teacher-student interaction.
 - Teacher Lori Van Fleet and others offered suggestions on how these concerns might be addressed by a teacher in the classroom.
- Based on the observations noted above, the SEE committee concluded that most parents would not accept divided classrooms as a long term solution but that they may accept them temporarily if the room assignments are fair.

16. Do you have a process for making the tough decisions that involve money and enrollment numbers – when to add or discontinue a section?

Yes. As indicated in our report, we propose to base the decision on expanding a grade to two sections on the financial impact of the additional students and other considerations rather than on only a specific required number of students. We plan to address the question as follows:

With Kindergarten round-up in February/March of the preceding school year, the School Administration and Board of Education will gather information as to the expected **number of students** and estimate the **level of tuition** to be generated from the expected total school enrollment for the upcoming year. This information will be gathered in advance of the final school budgeting process and the financial feasibility of two kindergarten sections can be analyzed along with the **percent tuition** increases and **teacher aide** reductions if any. These four main factors along with **third source income** and other **non-recurring events** will be utilized each year to determine whether we will offer one kindergarten section or two.

The same approach will also be utilized each year for determining whether, based on enrollment, we need to reduce any two-section grade to one section.

17. Continuity of teaching personnel has been a plus at Saint Cecilia School. How will the proposed expansion impact that?

- It appears that the projected enrollment will support expansion with continuity in teaching personnel.
- If the expansion proposal is not implemented, we will have to dismiss one teacher when the present kindergarten class graduates.
- If is implemented and eventually all classes except 5th grade are expanded to two sections, we would have a pool of 11 teachers versus the current 6 teachers. Certainly, with a larger pool of teachers, there will be a greater chance that someone will leave/retire, thus the actual potential to dismiss someone is decreased. If we did need to down-size a class, we would not expect a major impact on overall teacher continuity.

18. The note taker apologizes for missing a question/comment at this point. His attempts to recover the information were not successful.

19. Question & comments:

What brick and mortar will be needed to support the proposed expansion?

Remember, too, that the City of Ames has a requirement that at least 40% of our site area must be "green space".

We need a long range site plan that addresses both school and new church visions.

Begin working with the Ames City Council now – to get the rules changed.

Look into the vacant school building in the neighborhood.

20. Comments:

- Parents are the primary educators of their children.
- Finish phase 2 (the new church) first.

21. Comments:

- Do both the school expansion and phase 2 (new church) in parallel.
- You need to address the needs of young people and families. They bring vitality.

Response:

The School Expansion Exploration Committee has worked to provide a proposal that will work in the context of all parish goals.

22. Comments:

- We're not asking the parish for more money.
- We are the church.

23. Comment:

The gift of Catholic education is valuable, something worth making available to those who want it for their children.

24. Comment:

Keep the quality level high.

25. Comments:

- Miracles happen here.
- God is not excluded here.

26. Comment:

This assembly is split over the expansion proposal but shouldn't be.
We are one body in Christ.

27. Comment:

We need to ask, What would Jesus do? The answer is given in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew 19:13-14:
"Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them.
Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

28. Comment:

Consider using the facility as designed. Don't compromise Art, Music, AY rooms.

Response:

We believe some compromises are necessary to accommodate the needs of present and additional families.

29. Comment:

The proposal addresses the space needs for the next two years; we need to begin addressing out-year needs immediately. That should be coordinated with phase 2 (new church) planning and will likely require professional assistance.

Response:

Until the Parish Council can provide the SEE Committee with some details and timeline information for Phase 2 of the church expansion there will be some questions on space. The SEE report suggests that design professionals be integrated into the process to suggest possible solutions.

30. Was it space or noise considerations that made divided classroom proposal unattractive?

It was space considerations. Testing experience indicated noise would not be a problem.

31. If the Parish Council approves the proposed expansion, does that commit the parish to a capital campaign to address out-year space requirements?

No. The Parish Council may stop the expansion. Financial and other checks and balances are applicable each year.

32. Is parish revenue keeping pace with the increasing number of parish members?

No. In general, the primary reason people don't give is that they aren't asked. In this parish, we need to do a better job of asking for money.

33. Have you considered portable classrooms?

Yes, but we have not researched the cost of portable classrooms other than receiving anecdotal information from the experiences of others.

34. Comments:

- We need to continue to support the teachers.
- I'm glad you're not planning to increase the subsidy provided to operate the school.

35. Comment:

If we want to continue quality education, we must provide adequate pay for teachers.

36. Comments:

- I think you should go ahead with both the school expansion proposal and the new church proposal.
- Don't be surprised if you have real trouble raising money for the new church.

37. If the Music Room is used for classroom space, where will the choir, song leaders, and instrumentalists practice? Where will the Spiritual Growth and Liturgy Committee meet?

Music practices could still be held where they are currently. Furniture can be rearranged to accommodate different uses during the evenings or weekends just as is done currently in the Social Hall. Parish committees can meet in any available space in the Education Center, including the Conference Room adjacent to the Media Center.

38. Comment:

We don't want to lose the present Burke Chapel before the proposed new chapel becomes available.

Response:

It has never been contemplated that the Burke Chapel be used for anything other than its current use until another Chapel exists.

39. How will the tuition increases be split between parish subsidy and the school families?

All tuition increases are to be covered 100% by the families paying tuition.

40. Comment:

"The only area that we feel St. Cecilia falls short is the special needs of some of the students. This environment will allow the average and above average students to excel however, St. Cecilia does not offer an on site Resource Teacher for the challenged students. If you increase the number of students, you will increase the number of students that need additional help. We feel meeting the needs of all the students cannot completely fall upon the classroom teacher. Please consider this issues you look to expand and meet the needs of all the students."

Response:

We avail ourselves of Heartland Area Education Agency 11 (AEA11) special education support staff in the areas of speech and language, attention deficit disorders, occupational therapy, physical therapy, school psychology, school social work, etc., to identify areas of difficulty and develop strategies to resolve issues regarding students with special needs. All attempts are made to resolve the problem of concern in the general education environment. Suggested interventions are intended to identify the child's needs and the resources and strategies to meet those needs. Our teachers work with the AEA specialists on providing recommended interventions and the teachers implement those interventions during the school day or after school in some situations on a one-on-one basis or small group. Intervention results help determine if the concerns can be met in the general education setting or if special education resources are required. On at least three occasions in the past four years, we have had a child transported to the Ames Community School District for part of the day for special services which are only provided on their premises.

Why we no longer have Title I: Title I funds are to provide additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving children master challenging curricula and meet state standards in core academic subjects; however, only schools in which poor children (based on eligibility for free and reduced lunch) make up at least 40 percent of enrollment are eligible for Title I funds. We have few, if any, families who qualify for free and reduced lunches and therefore are not eligible for Title I funds.

Total attendance	70 to 75
Parish Council members	10
Board of Education members	6 or 7
Teachers, aides, school staff	9