News



A locked fence is seen at a Catholic school. The Archdiocese of Newark, N.J., announced Aug. 4, 2020, it was permanently closing eight schools due to the economic hit caused by the coronavirus pandemic. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

by Catholic News Service

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Citing the toll COVID-19 is taking on school enrollments and finances, the Archdiocese of Newark's Office of Schools announced Aug. 4 that five elementary schools will not reopen this fall and three elementary schools will consolidate with nearby school communities.

"I recognize that this news is profoundly painful for our students and their families, teachers and principals, school communities, and those who support Catholic education, as well as for our archdiocesan community," said Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin of Newark.

"I extend my prayers and support to all those affected. Our schools represent communities that offer vital faith formation for children," he said in a statement. "The difficult decision to further consolidate our Catholic schools follows considerable discussion and examination of their viability under the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic."

"Education remains a crucial element in the life and mission of this archdiocese," he added.

The archdiocese in a news release said the Office of Schools and the Finance Office "have been monitoring and evaluating projected enrollment, increasing financial fragility and the level of support these schools would require since they were already experiencing formidable challenges prior to the pandemic."

The offices agreed "the current status of some schools is unsustainable" because since the pandemic began, funding resources for the Catholic schools in the archdiocese and "paid registrations for the 2020-2021 academic year were both "critically reduced."

Tobin accepted the offices' recommendations to close five schools: Transfiguration Academy, Bergenfield; St. Joseph Academy, Bogota; the Academy of St. Mary, Rutherford; and St. Francis Xavier and Ironbound Catholic Academy, both in Newark.

The following school communities will consolidate: Mother Seton and St. Augustine School, both in Union City, will be consolidated with St. Joseph of the Palisades in West New York; St. Joseph the Carpenter in Roselle will welcome students from Our Lady of Guadalupe in Elizabeth to its campus.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, school principals, teachers and the families of students were told about the closures and mergers in online meetings and email correspondence. They "will receive continuing support during this transition," the archdiocese said.

Families whose children's schools were affected have been encouraged to enroll in nearby Catholic schools. The archdiocese is helping faculty and other school staff members identify other employment.

"The pandemic makes ongoing vigilance necessary and the Schools Office will continue to assess needs and implement best practices for our Catholic schools and partner with pastors and principals to monitor and evaluate enrollment and finances," the archdiocese said.

In his statement, Tobin said: “We pray for all those impacted by these trying circumstances and pledge ongoing support for those who need it. Together, we will find a sustainable model for Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Newark."

The announcement on schools from the Newark Archdiocese follows by about a month similar news from the Archdiocese of New York that 20 schools will not reopen in the fall because of the financial fallout caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic. Archdiocesan education officials also announced that three schools will merge.

In the neighboring Diocese of Brooklyn, New York, school leaders said six schools will close there as of Aug. 31. They also attributed the closings to the pandemic.

More than 100 Catholic elementary and secondary schools nationwide are expected to close by the fall, largely because of financial challenges resulting from the

pandemic and the resulting economic recession.

"Nearly every diocese probably is facing a closure. While we don't have it in stone, we think the closures as we speak are 100 to 150 schools," Mary Pat Donoghue, executive director of the Secretariat of Catholic Education at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told Catholic News Service June 12.

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