News



The provincial house of Mount Alvernia High School in Newton, Massachusetts, is pictured in this 2011 photo. (Wikimedia Commons/John Phelan, CC BY 3.0)

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Three Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Boston are closing at the end of the 2022-2023 school year, leaving families, teachers and alumni dismayed. St. Joseph Prep Boston announced their closure first in February, followed by Mount Alvernia High School in March and Matignon High School in May.

The three institutions gave different reasonings for their closures, but each have experienced declining enrollment in recent years.

St. Joseph, a coeducational school affiliated with the Sisters of St. Joseph, is located in the Brighton neighborhood of Boston. Mount Alvernia High, an all-girls school affiliated with the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, is in Newton, Massachusetts. Matignon, run by an independent board on land owned by the Boston Archdiocese, is in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

St. Joseph and Mount Alvernia are both also located near Boston College, which has previously purchased land from several other schools that have closed.

The Mount Alvernia closing has sparked some unusual controversy online, as a former chairwoman of the school's board took to social media to complain about the process by which the Missionary Franciscan Sisters decided to close the institution.

In a Facebook post to the school community, Kathleen Joyce, who served as a member of the board from 2014-2022 and as its chair from 2019-2022, said the possibility of closing the school "was never once discussed" among the board during her tenure on it.

Joyce claimed that the Missionary Sisters "secretly voted" in April 2022 to divest from their real estate holdings, including the property on which the school sits at 790 Centre Street in Newton.

"Instead of notifying the Mount Alvernia Board and the school community of their unilateral decision, they covertly set out to find a buyer," said Joyce. "Not surprisingly, this market research began and ended with one buyer — another Catholic organization with a significant presence in our community."

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In a March 2023 joint statement explaining the Mount Alvernia closure, the current school board and the sisters' leadership team said the sisters had decided they were "no longer able to continue living" on the property housing the school and that it would therefore be "unsustainable" for them to continue to operate a school there.

"The MAHS Board of Directors worked tirelessly to explore all options, including maintaining the MAHS community in a new location, if at all possible," they said, using an acronym for the school's name. They said the institution would continue "in partnership" with Fontbonne Academy, a Catholic high school in Milton, about 20 miles away.

The current Mount Alvernia school board did not respond to NCR requests for comment for this story. The Missionary Franciscan Sisters likewise declined comment.

Beyond Mount Alvernia, families, teachers, and alumni at all three schools were shocked by the seemingly abrupt closure announcements. At Matignon, the announcement was made less than a month before the end of the school year.

Private schools are required to report enrollment data to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. According to those figures, Mount Alvernia High School had 251 students in 2002, 217 in 2012, and 134 in 2022. Matignon High had 486 students in 2002, 442 in 2012, and 339 in 2022.

The Archdiocese of Boston used to have significantly more high schools than at present. Many of these began to close in the 1990s, such as Mission Church High in Mission Hill in 1992, and Don Bosco Technical High School in East Boston in 1998.

Matignon's property, which is owned by the archdiocese, has been assessed by the city of Cambridge at a value of some $32 million.

Marc-Anthony Hourihan, the president of the Matignon Board of Trustees, explained some of Matignon's problems recently on "NightSide with Dan Rea," a Boston area radio show. Hourihan said parents didn't want to send their children to a school that didn't own its land, was in debt, and was running a deficit.

"Eight percent of our domestic students are on some sort of financial aid," he said. "The more they try to assist the community, the more they have to rely on donations, and that's a pretty small pool."

Hourihan said Matignon lost about 36 international students for the 2022-2023 school year because the students couldn't get visas, and this loss of tuition money was significant. In 2023 they had 95 seniors and only 35 prospective freshmen, he said. He added that because fall enrollments weren't finalized until April, this is why they didn't announce the closure until May.