

Enrollment, scholarship fund growing at St. Kevin School

by John Howell

Apr 20, 2010 | 401 views | 1 | 19 | | |



A GROWING SCHOOL: Father David Green, James Lawrence, Principal Roger Parent and Frank Nolan visit students on their lunch break. It was a dress-down day, which explains the absence of uniforms.

Not all that long ago St. Kevin School was on the verge of closing. Enrollment had dropped. The parish was heavily underwriting school costs and there was a plan to transition St. Kevin into a middle school operated by Bishop Hendricken High School.

That didn't happen. And now, thanks in large measure to the generosity of a parishioner who has chosen to remain anonymous, the ranks of students have swollen and more people have stepped forward to endow a fund to make the school affordable.

The school is also offering new activities such as drama and chorus and department nights. Department nights enable middle school students to remain after school to work with a teacher for remedial purposes or to reinforce concepts learned in the classroom.

Last week James Lawrence, president of the school board, Father David Green, Principal Roger Parent and development director Frank Nolan gathered to announce the tuition scholarship fund now stands at \$200,000 and that in the last year enrollment grew by 29 students, or 21 percent, for a total enrollment of 170.

It doesn't stop there.

Starting this September, St. Kevin will expand its foreign language program and launch a middle school enrichment program.

"This is only the first step to making St. Kevin fully self-sustaining," said Lawrence.

The concept is one of numbers. With greater numbers, tuitions will enable the school to retain, as well as add, teachers while not relying on parish subsidies.

But how can that happen in these difficult times when parents have enough trouble making ends meet, no less afford a parish tuition of \$4,025?

Last summer with enrollment at an ebb low, a parishioner came forward with \$100,000 to start the scholarship fund that pays up to half of the tuition for a needy family. Then, thanks to Nolan's contacts, Academy Award winning actress Renee Zellweger became involved. She offered a challenge grant of \$50,000. That challenge has now been met, meaning the Making Excellence Affordable Fund, which it has been named, has an additional \$100,000. The aim, said Lawrence, is an endowed fund where the interest earned will be used to pay for scholarships and the principal won't be touched.

Zellweger is expected to visit the school to tour the facility and meet with the staff and students, Nolan said.

Looking ahead, Lawrence said language classes will be available for grades K-8 and students in grades 6-8 will have classes four times a week in place of the current two.

Spanish and French are to be taught on a rotating basis in the lower grades, with students making a selection for continued studies in one language when they reach the higher grades.

The emphasis on languages is designed to give students a jump when they get to high school. As they are expected to be ahead of some of their peers when they get to high school, they will be permitted to enroll in more advanced language courses, or since they will have met requirements, to select other courses.

The school's enrichment program, directed at giving students an educational and entertaining experience through interactive activities, is being extended to math, science, social studies and language arts. According to a release issued by the school, students in the program will be placed in groups and participate in a five- to six-week rotation cycle in each of the academic disciplines.

"Let's use this milestone," Lawrence said of the scholarship fund, "to propel St. Kevin even further toward its goals."

As for the purpose of the fund, he said, "We can now assist folks who are interested in St. Kevin to afford it as well."

Is there a point where numbers offer a diminishing return?

Parent, who has worked in the public school system, knows how teacher contracts can restrict the size of classrooms. While such restrictions don't apply to parochial schools, Parent feels about 25 students should be the maximum class size. He further noted that the school building has sufficient space for expansion should, for example, it be deemed advisable to have multiple classes at a certain grade.

Lawrence, whose children attend the school, said there is an excitement about St. Kevin. He

said his children like going to school.

“They’re excited about doing homework. I don’t understand it,” he said.

With the growth in enrollment, Lawrence said the school will be able “to erase” the need for the parish to fund the school.

“Self-sustainability is our goal,” he said, “and while moving toward that goal, we’re able to help a lot of kids get educated.”