



1.16.2020

**VCRS announces details of plan for the future**

The board of directors of the Venango Regional Catholic School announced today the results of a critical planning process regarding the future configuration of its organization and locations.

In a letter shared with faculty, staff and school families, the board said that after extensive information gathering and analysis, consideration of stakeholder input, consultation with the Catholic Schools Office and prayerful reflection, they have adopted the following organizational configuration and location status, effective July 1, 2020:

- St. Patrick Elementary School in Franklin will be merged with St. Stephen Elementary School in Oil City.
- Seventh and eighth grades at St. Stephen Elementary School will be moved to the Venango Catholic High School campus in Oil City and be further developed as the Venango Catholic Middle School.

The board cited demographic and economic challenges as having created a serious financial condition requiring immediate decisions regarding when and how the region's students will be taught.

"We certainly know how difficult these kinds of changes are for all involved," the board said in its letter. "Each campus provides a unique, safe, loving environment for its students, which made this decision even more heartbreaking. However, the ultimate rationale behind this unavoidable decision was to ensure financial solvency

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and to preserve the opportunity for all students in the Venango region to experience Catholic education grades PK through 12.”

“I am grateful for the leadership demonstrated by Laura Blake, Greg Merkel and the rest of the directors who have had to deal with some difficult realities,” said Jim Gallagher, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Erie. “Although significant change is always a challenge, I know that they will do everything possible to strengthen the schools in the system.”

The board acknowledged the community’s concern for what the reconfiguration will mean for staff.

“(We) assure you we will do everything we can to address their needs,” members wrote. “It is true a number of positions at each campus will be lost. We will do our best to assist any staff members who are displaced.”

Board members also indicated they were aware of the impact the decision will have on students, families, and staff and extended support and prayers to everyone involved during the transition. In addition, they pledged to do everything they can to ensure that the final months of class on the St. Patrick campus are treasured by all involved and do justice to the great history of the school.

The announcement concluded with a pledge from the administration and members of the VCRS Board of Directors to remain committed to keeping the flame of Catholic education alive in the form of one regional school for generations to come.