



Elk County Catholic School System

1.15.2020

St Boniface School, Kersey, to close

Elk County Catholic School System has announced that St. Boniface School in Kersey will close at the end of the 2019/2020 school year.

"This is a sad day for St. Boniface Parish, for the Kersey community and for the Elk County Catholic School System," said ECCSS President Sam MacDonald. "The faculty and staff at St. Boniface are first rate. The children are getting a great Catholic education with strong academics. Unfortunately, enrollment has been trending down and we need to be responsible stewards of the community's resources."

St. Boniface School operates preK through grade five, and has 28 children enrolled in grades K-5. This was projected to fall further next year. As recently as 2011, there were 70 children enrolled in grades K-5. The school was founded in 1885.

"It's partly a sign of the times," said MacDonald. "There are fewer children in the community than there were 10 years ago. At the same time, providing a quality Catholic education gets more expensive every year."

The ECCSS board of directors voted unanimously to recommend closure of the school to the Diocese of Erie. Officials from the diocese, including Bishop Lawrence T. Persico and leadership from the Catholic Schools Office, approved this recommendation on Tuesday, January 14.

"I am grateful for the leadership demonstrated by Sam MacDonald, Tony Gerg and the rest of the directors who have had to deal with some difficult challenges," said Jim Gallagher, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Erie. "Although I am as disappointed as everyone else in the final outcome, I know that they will do everything possible to strengthen the remaining schools in the system."

"Our parish deserves a lot of credit for supporting the school as long as it has," said Tony Gerg, ECCSS Board chairman and a member of St. Boniface Parish. "My kids went to school at St. Boniface and got a great education. The current families are such great supporters of Catholic schools. The amount of time and energy they put into helping the teachers, raising money and staying connected with the administration is unbelievable. At the same time, declining enrollment and rising costs forced us to make some hard decisions."

ECCSS will work closely with St. Boniface families to discuss their options moving forward. The school system offers a preK-8 classical curriculum at St. Leo School in Ridgway, and a preK-8 STREAM program at St. Marys Catholic Elementary and St. Marys Catholic Middle School.

The Very Reverend Ross Miceli, pastor of St. Boniface Parish and Dean of the St. Marys Deanery, said that the church intends to maintain a parish-based pre-school on the St. Boniface campus. He will also speak to families about the parish's Disciples Life faith formation programs. "The parish is committed to forming young people regardless of which school they attend," Miceli said.

"First, we need to talk to the St. Boniface teachers and families to let them know where we stand," MacDonald said. "After that we will talk to them about opportunities at ECCSS schools in Ridgway and St. Marys. We plan to hold special open houses, shadowing opportunities and information sessions at all of our schools and within the parish. Our primary goal is to keep the children fully engaged in their faith, and to help parents make that happen."

"The St. Boniface community has so much to be proud of," MacDonald said. "I have been honored to work with the teachers and families there. Ray Knight has been an incredible principal and a powerful advocate for our students. I have every confidence that he will lead the families and students of St. Boniface through the next several months with integrity. We will ensure these final months are memorable and cherished. This is not the path we hoped for, certainly. But we will get through the difficult discussions as best we can, and then work together to plot the best course forward for our students, our families, our teachers and our local parishes."