



January 24, 2006

QUESTION AND ANSWER SHEET

Alliance of Mission District Catholic Schools

What is the Alliance of Mission District Catholic Schools?

The Alliance is a consortium of 6 Catholic elementary schools of the Mission cluster schools of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. (Each Catholic school is part of a cluster of schools in its direct, geographic area. Since St. Finn Barr School is near the Mission District of San Francisco, it belongs to the Mission cluster of schools. All 6 Alliance schools are in the Mission cluster- St. Finn Barr, School of the Epiphany, St. James, St. Elizabeth and St. Anthony-Immaculate Conception). Each school that joined the Alliance has experienced a decline in their enrollment, financial difficulties and a change in public perception as to what Catholic schools are really all about. By forming an Alliance of schools, pastors, principals, teachers and parents come together to move forward through this difficult time to work together to solve the present difficulties; by working together at solving a common challenge, we can share many resources to support and continue the mission of Catholic education in San Francisco. Under the old model, parish schools were entities unto themselves, depending primarily on the parish for its enrollment, finances, governance and spiritual support. Because our schools no longer draw students solely from the parish, and are no longer 100% Catholic, they can no longer look to the parish for full financial support. The old model has begun to break down and a fresh way of looking at governance and financial support needs to be undertaken. The Alliance was formed to directly address those specific needs so that schools could remain open rather than face closure, one by one, and thereby exclude the parish families and its neighborhood from the benefit of the Catholic school mission.

Why did St. Finn Barr School join the Alliance?

Since 1999, St. Finn Barr School has seen a precipitous decline in student enrollment. In less than 4 years, the school has seen a loss of 75 students and their families. Such a sharp decline in enrollment affects the ability to provide a basic academic program for our children. Our programs depend heavily on tuition and fundraising. As enrollment declines, revenue to pay salaries, medical benefits, school insurance, Archdiocesan fees, and the costs it takes to run a school from month to month, also declines. The shortfall between what it costs to run the school and what we collect in tuition and fees must be made up in fundraising. Fundraising by fewer and fewer families becomes an onerous burden, as the gap between what we charge for tuition and what it costs to teach your children, widens. For example, the school charged \$4,400.00 last year, for a fully participating, one child family. It actually costs \$5,800.00 to pay the expenses to teach your child. The school must fundraise \$2,400.00 for each child to cover the tuition shortfall. I cannot charge the full amount to our school community – it's simply too expensive. I also have limited resources on hand to give a tuition break to everyone who asks (actually, since no one pays the actual cost, everyone receives a tuition break).

There are then, two alternatives: (1) reduce spending by cutting programs, thus reducing our effectiveness as an educational leader in the Sunnyside neighborhood; or (2), find other ways to fund our program.

Archbishop Levada invited the current six schools to be a part of an alternative, the Alliance. Fr. Corral enthusiastically agreed to join the Alliance as did I. It is expected that eventually all schools in the Mission Cluster will be invited to join the Alliance. In a recent conversation, Fr. Corral and I expressed the same commitment to Bishop Wester.

The vise we find squeezing us needs to be alleviated. The Alliance model proposes that the Executive Director go outside normal revenue streams the schools normally rely on, namely, families and parishioners, and find alternative funding for our programs. These funds could close that gap between charged and actual tuition fees, pay for capital improvements and support curriculum upgrades. This form of revenue sharing would also take the burden off the parish to support the school's short fall.

What about the funds St. Finn Barr School raises here? Do we pay the Alliance a fee, or tax?

All funds raised at St. Finn Barr School, stay in St. Finn Barr School for whatever they are being raised for. There are no fees, tax or other hidden expenses for being in the Alliance. I can't stress this enough: **The revenue of all fundraising efforts by the St. Finn Barr School community stay here at St. Finn Barr School. It is not shared with other Alliance schools, nor are funds dumped into a common bucket for all Alliance schools to share.** Parent fundraising efforts are used solely for the purpose of supporting programs at St. Finn Barr School.

St. Finn Barr School has cash reserves. We have always been independent from the Archdiocese in asking for operating funds. Will that change?

Our cash reserves will stay in St. Finn Barr School. Our investment pool funds and our building maintenance funds are still in our name. These funds are not *used* by any other school in the Alliance and are *not shared* with any of the other schools in the Alliance. We use these funds only when necessary, such as, a catastrophic building failure or necessary capital improvement. This is not, however, a bottomless fund and they will not last beyond a few years if we continue to use them at the rate we currently anticipate.

One of the exciting promises of the Alliance is that the funds raised outside our communities will pay for all capital improvements on the schools in the Alliance. As funds are raised and need is identified, those funds will pay for the capital improvement: Likewise, money raised by the Alliance will be used to offset tuition by providing each school with tuition reduction funds: It is hoped that within a few years, tuition and fees will actually go down!

We are worried that we will suffer academically because of our association with schools that we perceive don't perform as well as St. Finn Barr has traditionally. What will the Alliance do to safeguard those academic values we hold so importantly?

The Alliance holds standards of excellence for all of its schools. St. Finn Barr Catholic School will continue to be educationally excellent in aspects of curriculum. St. Finn Barr is a unique spiritual and academic environment. Our expectations of excellence which enable our students to compete in the larger community will not be compromised because of our involvement with the Alliance. It will be strengthened. Your children are receiving the best education in the Sunnyside neighborhood. That will not change. Our teachers are fully credentialed, many with years and years of teaching experience. They will not be kept from doing any less than their traditional best by our membership with the Alliance. New teachers will be screened and interviewed very carefully so that the mission and philosophy of St. Finn Barr School continues to be embraced. Your children deserve the best and they will continue to be provided with the best. Our

8th grade students will continue to enroll in the Catholic and private high schools of their choice and our track record for allowing them to be competitive for those seats will not diminish. Schools have never been ‘lumped together’ for any reason. Joining the Alliance doesn’t change that. We will continue to work with you the parent, as the first educators of your children. If you make the sacrifice to send your children to St. Finn Barr School, then we make that promise to provide the quality education you have come to expect.

What is the role of the Executive Director of the Alliance in the operation of the Alliance Schools?

The Executive Director works with the pastor, the principal and the parents of each Alliance school to see that educational programs, financial projects and budget issues, tuition collection and fundraising efforts fully support the school and its programs.

Sister Maureen Hilliard is the Executive Director of the Alliance of Mission District Catholic Schools. She was hired by Ms. Maureen Huntington, Superintendent of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Sister was hired to pull together the Alliance and work with the pastor, principal, teachers, parents and parishioners of each Alliance school to work with her to address the issues mentioned earlier. Sister will be responsible for putting together an Alliance Board of Directors comprised of influential members of the San Francisco community who support Catholic education in San Francisco. This board will be responsible for sponsoring and supporting the mission of the Alliance and work with each Alliance school. The Board will work with the marketing and development arm of the Alliance to get the word out that Catholic education is for everyone who wants it. They will also be visible in our communities, listening to you, its constituency, and promoting and supporting those ideas and projects that will enhance and grow our educational communities. The Executive Director’s office is located in St. Finn Barr School because the Alliance is “out here” in the community – not up in the chancery offices. St. Finn Barr School was the only school in the Alliance that could easily make space available for the office.

What is the role of the pastor in the Alliance?

The job description of all the pastors in the Alliance communities states that the pastor’s role is that of spiritual leader of the school and parish. Father will be responsible for the spiritual well being of the school and parish and make sure that we continue to be particularly faithful to the Catholic Mission of the school. Our Catholic heritage and tradition will be Father’s primary duty and he will see to it that all sacraments, masses, and liturgical events are under his careful watch. The Executive Director, in collaboration with the Alliance principals makes decisions

for the Alliance schools with the final approval or authorization of the Superintendent of Catholic Schools where appropriate. This includes selection and employment of new principals, evaluation of principals, employment of school personnel, tuition policy and procedure, and budget approval.

Father Corral, as well as the other Alliance pastors, supports this change. Don't forget the original premise for the Alliance: we needed a new governance model. Because of increased costs of running the school and decline in enrollment to support those costs, a new approach had to be considered for the school. It is unfair to burden the pastor with day-to-day minutia that comes with running a school. Father Corral's primary duty as religious and spiritual head of the community is uncompromising in its demands on his time and effort. The new model will allow him to spend more quality time with the school children, offer classes on the sacraments and spirituality for our older students and continue to lead as an example in holy, Catholic guidance for our impressionable youth and their families. Nothing is more important for our community than that: it is the center from which we turn.