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Hazard Yet Forward: Catholic schools in Boston, 1965-2010

John White
Catholic Education Summit, 2013
Sisters of Charity, Halifax

- 1893 Academy of the Assumption
SCH additions in Wellesley, 1960s

- 1965 Elizabeth Seton High School - archdiocesan central high school
- 1967 Mt. St. Vincent Formation Center
1965-67 Sister Marie Augusta Neal, SNDdN, a sociologist at Boston's Emmanuel College conducts “Sister Survey” to capture attitudes of religious sisters in the US.

The survey actually ends up setting the agenda for radical change in religious orders.

Sisters who favored hierarchy, a disciplined life in community, and a career in education were said to “have a proneness for fascism that is an easy acceptance of arbitrary strong command.”

Sisters were encouraged to self actualize, often choosing to work with urban poor; but without doing so in an organized, collective fashion their efforts were fragmented and less effective at helping the poor than was their work in schools had been.

Sr. Neal and her supporters came to dominate the LCWR by 1972.
• 1972-73 Sisters of St Joseph and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur announce that they are pulling out of over 30 parochial schools.

• Marie Augusta Neal leading those who question whether Catholic schools should exist in Boston as they are segregated.

• Ecumenism and conceptions of social justice color attitudes toward Catholic schools just as forced busing begins.

• 1970s see a 25% drop in parochial schools within the city of Boston.
Humberto Cardinal Medeiros’ transfer policy

- the acceptance would improve the racial balance in the school to which the child was applying;
- the application was due to a change in family address;
- the family already had other children in the school;
- the number of students accepted conformed to the average number of acceptances of previous years; and
- the acceptance was consistent with the principles of social justice as enunciated in the official teachings of the church. (Source: AABo)
Mission Change

Prior to 1970, the mission of Catholic schools was to educate Catholic children in the faith and to protect them from threats to that faith from outside elements.

The Vatican II call for the Church to face the world leads to a re-examination of the mission of Catholic schools.

Involvement with civil rights leads many to equate civil rights activities with ecumenism.
http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/tocn-mla000858-clergy-plead-for-racial-peace-in-boston
Charlestown 1975
Rosary Protests

- We have pleaded our case on every level of the government and the courts...now we are pleading before a higher court.”

  *Louise Day Hicks*
LWCR and Boston’s Strategic Plan, 1972-78

- Cardinal Medeiros establishes a Planning Conference on Staffing to deal with the crisis of vocations and staffing in schools. The LCWR is put in charge.

- The Planning Conference concentrates on changing the curriculum to reflect their interpretation of social justice and upon changing the power structure within the archdiocesan Department of Education.

- Nothing is done to address the crisis in staffing or to help to form the lay teachers coming to fill parochial schools.

- The Planning Conference also helps to set Medeiros’ anti-transfer policy during busing.

- Throughout the 70s and beyond, catechesis is jettisoned in place of education for social justice.

- The process of secularizing Catholic schools is well underway by 1980, when “white flight” is leaving those parochial schools in the inner city to blacks, many of whom are not Catholic.
• By the 1980s, enrollments leveled out.
• By the early 90s a demographic crisis again hit the high schools, and many closed, especially those in the city.
• As costs continued to rise and as schools were essentially lay in staffing, the crisis of the 90s was primarily fiscal.
Enter Organized Private Philanthropy

- In 1991, the Inner City Scholarship Fund is founded, modeled after a similar program in NYC.
- By 2010 it had given out 60,000 scholarships for Catholic schools, and raised on average $8-10 million annually.
- The ICSF was Peter Lynch’s entry into Catholic school philanthropy.
In 2002, Boston was rocked by the start of what became a national crisis in the Church as cover-ups and mismanagement of clerical sex abuse was exposed.

Cardinal Law lied to his supporters and lay advisors, including Jack Connors.

At the same time, a rash of parochial school closures took place.
In 2004 the archdiocese announced that Presentation school in Brighton was closing in June. Parents protested. The archdiocese agrees to keep the school open 1 more year.

Meanwhile, parents offer to purchase the school for $2.5 mil and submit a 150 page report and proposal to the archdiocese that is met with a 5 sentence response. Protests begin again.

Children are locked out of school during the last week of classes.

Parents get a parade permit from the city and hold “graduation” on the street in Oak Sq.
The rise of the venture philanthropist

- By 2003, the Archdiocese of Boston had a $46 mil deficit.
- Had already paid $150 mil in settlements.
- A Gallup survey showed that 1 in 4 Catholics were withholding regular donations to the Church.
- Sean cardinal O’Malley approaches Jack Connors of Hill, Holliday.
Connor’s terms

- Connors seeks consolidation. Leads to the establishment of "academies" for urban areas.
- Consolidation of several parish schools into one administrative unit with several campuses.
- Had first been tried as early as 1974 in East Boston as a multi-parish school (4 parishes). By 2010, 2 parishes support, subsidizing a combined $40k per annum, or 3% of operating budget.
- Parishes can not do this alone or in tandem.
Catholic Schools Foundation

- Connors establishes the CSF in 2008.
- Establishes regional academies in Dorchester, Brockton, Lawrence, Quincy, and S. Boston.
- Also funded by the Yawkey Foundation, Cassin Educational Initiatives, Roche Family Foundation.
Pope John Paul II Academy, Dorchester

- Opened in Dorchester with 5 campuses and 1500 students in 2008.
- Three Dorchester parochial schools closed, another opted not to participate.
- By 2012 the 5 academies in the archdiocese were serving 3,055 students in 5 cities.
... and if you choose not to participate?

- St Brendan’s, Dorchester chose to remain a parish school.
- Archdiocesan funding slashed by 75%.
- By 2010 the school had cut itself to grades K-5
St Brendan’s Dorchester

Races in Dorchester in Boston, MA

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

- White 84.46%
- Black 8.29%
- Asian 3.63%
- Hispanic 3.63%
- Other 2 races
- Some other race alone
- Asian alone
- Black alone

St Brendan School
Dorchester, MA (year 2007-2008)
St Mary of the Assumption, Lawrence

- 2009 the pastor and parish chose not to participate in the consolidation of all Lawrence schools into an academy.
- To join the academy would cost the parish $80k that it didn’t have.
- Archdiocesan funding cut, school closes in 2010.
- At the same time, the archdiocese was subsidizing the other schools that constituted the academy.
- Charter school wishes to purchase building; archdiocesan policy prevents it.
Venture Philanthropy

“The mentality of Wall St. favors consolidation and downsizing— the sense of the larger mission can get lost.” Diane Ravitch, NYT, Feb. 6, 2011.