

Archdiocese defends school survey

By **MARK D. MAROTTA**
Staff Writer

The archdiocese of Philadelphia has responded to questions some Lansdale Catholic High School alumni have raised about the results of a survey of opinions about a new school in Hilltown.

In August, the archdiocese issued the survey to 10,000 families living within 10 miles of proposed school sites in Hilltown and Royersford and with children between third and sixth grades in Catholic elementary schools or in parish religious education programs.

A Nov. 15 press release from the archdiocese said 2,855 parents returned the survey.

According to the release, 50 percent of the respondents within 10 miles of Hilltown who have children in parish elementary schools would choose to have them attend the new facility. Among parents of children in parish elementary schools or religious education programs, 32 percent of those within 10 miles of Hilltown favored having them attend a new secondary school.

Larry O'Malley, Web master for the Friends and Alumni of LC Inc., questioned by e-mail why the archdiocese released information about the results in terms of percentages, rather than actual numbers.

Bridget Algeo, a 1985 Lansdale Catholic graduate who has opposed the proposed move to Hilltown, wrote by e-mail, "I think most parents and invested parties are interested in the actual survey results, the

specific percents to the specific questions."

Instead, she said, the archdiocese presented "an interpretation of select numbers and umbrella phrases like 'voiced their intent.' I believe if there was genuinely overwhelming and undeniable support for the new site, we would have seen the results."

Donna Farrell, the archdiocese's director of communications, responded by e-mail that the "survey is confidential and proprietary, and therefore, the full survey will not be released to the general public. Likewise, we will not release the results of individual questions to the general public."

She added, "The archdiocese has openly provided numbers of responses in its press release."

Farrell said the archdiocese's market research firm statistically projected that more than 2,000 families would definitely or probably send their children to a school in Hilltown.

"This indicates that we would meet the minimum projection of 1,200 students needed to continue our study into building the school," she added.

But O'Malley wrote that, in the industry he worked in, a product that 32 or 50 percent of people polled were interested in "wouldn't see the light of day."

He wrote, "I think an unbiased group would see that results for what they are, and admit that the numbers just

don't support a new school in Hilltown."

O'Malley said a survey conducted by the archdiocese in 2000 showed that 42 percent preferred a new location.

In the current survey, which did not offer respondents a chance to support keeping the school, significantly fewer than 50 percent of respondents favored the Hilltown location, O'Malley wrote.

"To me, this shows a decline in the support for Hilltown," he added.

In her e-mail, Farrell said, "It is not prudent or valid to compare these two surveys. First they were conducted six years apart. Secondly, there were conducted with completely different methodologies and with completely different survey samples."

Farrell said the archdiocese will not consider the results gathered through a questionnaire by the alumni group because the survey was not independent or prepared by "a professional, third-party market research entity."

She added that other alumni contacting the archdiocese "have been very excited about the possibility of a new high school. We consider this initial portion of the feasibility study to be a very positive indicator. The archdiocese is ready to move forward with this exploration."

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