

# Bishop: Survey supports shift

**Poll of 10,000 parents shows backing for 2 new schools, he says.**

By Melanie Hughes Of the Morning Call

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced Thursday the results of a survey that could lead to a shift in the location of three venerable high schools in Lansdale, Pottstown and Norristown that have been part of their respective landscapes for nearly a century.

Although archdiocesan officials say survey results show community support for new high schools in Hilltown and Upper Providence townships in Montgomery County, they say more analysis is needed before a final decision is made. They didn't say when they might reach that decision.

'We're extremely encouraged by the results of this research,' said Bishop Joseph P. McFadden, auxiliary bishop of Philadelphia, who oversees the Office of Catholic Education. 'Our parents have spoken through this survey, indicating that support exists for these [new] high schools.'

The proposed new schools, both of which would cost an estimated \$45 million, would replace three high schools: Lansdale Catholic in Lansdale, Kennedy-Kenrick in Norristown and St. Pius X in Pottstown.

In a survey of 10,000 parents of Catholic elementary school students in a 10-mile radius of Lansdale Catholic, Kennedy-Kenrick and St. Pius X, 32 percent supported sending their children to a new Catholic secondary school near the proposed Hilltown site, while 67 percent indicated they would most likely send their children to the school proposed for the Upper Providence site.

Parents who indicated that they 'definitely' or 'probably' would send their children to one of the two proposed schools cited faith formation, school location and a new, state-of-the-art educational facility as the three primary motivating factors that would fuel their decision, according to the archdiocese.

Almost half of all parents said they would pay a tuition increase in exchange for those factors.

The archdiocese says it is considering the new schools to cater to a growing suburban population at a time when enrollment at city schools is declining.

A group of Lansdale Catholic alumni which had been campaigning to keep the Lansdale school open and a group lobbying to replace it with a new Hilltown school are holding out hope that their side will prevail.

'I would like to see the Lansdale Catholic facility developed,' said Bridget Algeo, a 1985 alumna. 'I'm not opposed to a new high school, but not at the expense of Lansdale Catholic. I'm disappointed the survey didn't include an option to expand the current facility. I think

that would have been appropriate, and people would have supported it. Since 1998, there has been no aggressive move to modernize [Lansdale Catholic.] It's not fair to the area, parents and students that the facility hasn't been given a lot of time and attention.'

An opposing organization making its voice heard on <http://www.buildourhighschool.com> supports the new school, which would be about eight miles north of Lansdale in Hilltown.

As a member of the strategic planning group at Lansdale Catholic, Joanne McHugh, also a graduate of Lansdale Catholic, said she has wonderful memories and is 'proud of a very good education.'

'But what makes sense now is to move forward.,' McHugh said. 'I think about what I would like for my children - to enhance facilities and programs. The world is very different than it was 20 years ago when I went there. We have to keep pace and take the diocese to the next frontier. It's logical for schools to go to where the people are. I view this very positively.'

The archdiocese has said it would need to attract at least 1,200 students to each new school. Survey results showed both proposed high schools would meet or exceed those criteria, the archdiocese said.

There are approximately 20,000 students in 20 archdiocesan high schools.

Enrollment in both city and suburban Catholic schools has gone down in recent years, according to archdiocesan figures.

In the city, enrollment declined from 11,743 in 1998 to 10,530 last year. In the suburbs, the population has dipped from 11,261 to 10,910 during that time.