



# DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

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OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

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**CONTACT:** Sean P. Dolan  
(p) 516-678-5800, ext. 625  
(c) 516-510-0473  
E-mail: [sdolan@drvc.org](mailto:sdolan@drvc.org)

## **DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE ANNOUNCES SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION AND CLOSING**

*Plan Is Part of Broader Effort To Strengthen Catholic Education on Long Island*

**ROCKVILLE CENTRE - March 12, 2018** - As part of a long-term effort to revitalize and strengthen Catholic education on Long Island, the Diocese of Rockville Centre ([www.drvc.org](http://www.drvc.org)) today announced that it will consolidate two elementary schools and close a diocesan high school that are no longer viable. Enrollment at the three schools, all on the eastern end of the island, has fallen 37 percent since 2011. The high school alone was subsidized \$16.3 million from 2007 through last school year and is expected to require an additional \$2.3 million in support this school year. The enrollment decline partially reflects a 6.2 percent drop in the school-age population in Suffolk County between 2011 and 2016 - a loss of 19,000 children (according to data from the 2016 US Census Bureau American Community Survey).

The diocese will combine Our Lady of Mercy Regional School in Cutchogue and St. Isidore School in Riverhead into a new Nursery through Grade 8 school on the St. Isidore site. The new school will be named St. John Paul II Regional School. The diocese also will close Bishop McGann-Mercy Diocesan High School in Riverhead and will offer students the opportunity to enroll at St. John the Baptist Diocesan High School in West Islip. The diocese will provide transportation, guidance counseling and tuition grants to students who continue with us at one of our diocesan schools.

These three schools will close at the end of the current school year in June, and St. John Paul II Regional School will open in September, 2018.

The graying of Long Island's population has caused significant challenges for all schools - public, Catholic and private - reducing the available number of school-age children. The effects of this decline have been even more pronounced on Long Island's east end where the population is already more sparse.

"We recognize the pain and disruption that this decision causes for our beloved school families," said Most Reverend John O. Barres, Bishop, Diocese of

Rockville Centre. “It is a decision that is heartbreaking to our students, their parents and families, our dedicated faculty, administrators and staff, and of course our parishes that are impacted. We will be supporting our students and families, and our employees, throughout this transition with spiritual and pastoral care, as well as the practical and timely information that is needed through consistent and ongoing communication.”

“Our goal is that these measures will strengthen Catholic schools on Long Island. The sad truth is that it has become increasingly unfeasible to maintain these schools financially. As is often the case in these situations, the only real course of action is to combine our resources in new and creative ways so that we can provide a more robust and compelling educational experience across the entire system, in keeping with our mission to serve the people of Long Island.”

Bishop McGann-Mercy, with a total enrollment of 365 in Grade 7 to 12 and 312 students in Grades 9 to 12, expects to graduate 91 students in June and has registered only 55 students for the incoming freshman class of September 2018. From 2007 through the 2016-2017 school year, diocesan entities have provided subsidies of \$16.3 million to the school and are expected to provide an additional \$2.3 million of support in the current school year.

St. Isidore School, with 104 enrolled students in Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> Grade, is expected to require a subsidy from the parish and diocese of approximately \$475,000 for this school year.

At Our Lady of Mercy Regional, enrollment has declined to 53 students in Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> Grade with just three students in the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade. The school is anticipated to require a subsidy from the supporting parishes and diocese of approximately \$600,000 for the current school year.

“Strengthening enrollment at St. John Paul II Regional School in Riverhead and at our remaining diocesan high schools will create a more vibrant and effective Catholic educational environment,” said Dr. Kathleen Walsh, superintendent of schools, Diocese of Rockville Centre. “We are deeply committed to providing the best Catholic educational experience possible across all 55 elementary and secondary schools in the diocese.”

The diocese has developed staffing and logistical plans and will be sharing details at informational meetings and open houses. In addition, the diocese has set up a hotline (516.280.4124) and website ([www.eastendcatholicschools.org](http://www.eastendcatholicschools.org)) where parents, students, faculty and staff can go for additional information.

Plans for St. John Paul II Regional School in Riverhead include an enhanced Early Childhood Education Center, a strengthened elementary education program and middle-school academy featuring a STREAM (Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, Art and Math) curriculum. STREAM schools integrate Catholic identity into all aspects of the curriculum and have a strong focus on problem solving, group collaboration and independent research.

“While we sincerely regret having to take these actions, we remain dedicated to the mission of Catholic education,” said Bishop Barres. “We recognize the critical role that Catholic education plays in the formation of the next generation of Catholic laypeople and clergy. We will do everything we can to strengthen the long-term viability of our Catholic educational system on Long Island, in keeping with our vision of a revitalized Church in service to our people and our communities.”