

## **KAIRS Today - May 2006**

This is the monthly electronic newsletter of the Kansas Association of Religious and Independent Schools (KAIRS). KAIRS TODAY is sent as a service to KAIRS members across Kansas.

Our goal is to keep you informed about legislative, regulatory and national news, and educational issues. Contact Corey Reese, editor, with questions or concerns – crkairs@yahoo.com.

Editor's Note: KAIRS Today is distributed August through May each year. We pray for safety and refreshment for all our members throughout the summer.

### **MAY ISSUE:**

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Our thanks to Karen Norton for her faithful service to KAIRS. She served as KAIRS president (2003–06) and treasurer (1996–2003). Mrs. Norton was one of two inductees in 2006 to the KAIRS Hall of Fame. As she begins the next season of her life, we pray the Lord's blessing on her and will miss her joyful countenance, her thoughtful insights, and enthusiasm for KAIRS.

### **KAIRS Members Meet with Commissioner of Education**

On Monday, May 8, 2006, Nick Compagnone, Bob Voboril, Shelli Kadel and Karen Norton met with Bob Corkins, the Kansas Commissioner of Education. The purpose of the meeting was to inform him of KAIRS, our purpose, and the public policy agenda that we have. We discussed funding issues, corporate tax credits, the KIDS system, and accreditation issues. We found Mr. Corkins to be an interested listener who has innovative and visionary ideas. It was a very successful meeting, and we look forward to future positive interactions with him.

-Karen Norton, KAIRS President

Public Policy Alert: Several Funding Bills Pending

CAPE (Council for American Private Education) distributed an email alert on May 18. Along with the CAPE email, Bob Voboril included the following information for KAIRS members:

While the third item may not pertain to our schools very much, the first two certainly do. For many years, KAIRS schools have used Title V funds to purchase library books and computer equipment. Title IIa funds help with staff development costs. I do not know how many schools have used FEMA grants, but at least ten of the schools in the Diocese of Wichita have received FEMA grants to build additions that are hardened for safe rooms. These grants have totaled well over \$2 million. I would urge you to use your local networks to contact Rep. Tiahrt and Sen. Brownback on these critical issues for KAIRS schools.

*-Bob Voboril for KAIRS*

CAPE Update -- May 18, 2006

CONTACT CONGRESS ON THREE IMPORTANT ISSUES

CAPE is calling on the private school community to contact Congress on three issues, and CAPE's Legislative Action Center makes it easy to do so.

**ISSUE 1: URGE CONGRESS TO KEEP 2-4-5 ALIVE.** House and Senate appropriators will soon take up the FY 2007 education–spending bill. CAPE's goal is to secure in the bill appropriate funding for three important programs: Title II–D of the No Child Left Behind Act (Enhancing Education Through Technology), Title IV–A (Safe and Drug–Free Schools and Communities), and Title V–A (Innovative Programs).

**ISSUE 2: URGE CONGRESS TO TREAT PRIVATE SCHOOLS THE SAME AS PUBLIC SCHOOLS WHEN IT COMES TO FEDERAL EMERGENCY DISASTER AID.** Legislation has been introduced (H.R. 4517 and S. 2299) that would provide direct federal aid for the repair, restoration, and replacement of private nonprofit educational facilities that are destroyed or damaged by a major disaster. Unlike public schools, private schools devastated by earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, or hurricanes cannot get a direct FEMA grant for permanent work on damaged facilities. They first have to apply for a loan from the Small Business Administration and then can only apply for a FEMA grant for the amount not covered by the loan. The proposed legislation would put private schools on an equal footing with public schools when it comes to FEMA aid.

**ISSUE 3: URGE CONGRESS TO CONTINUE FUNDS FOR DISPLACED STUDENTS AND TO MAINTAIN THE CURRENT MECHANISM FOR DISTRIBUTING THOSE FUNDS.** Congress is considering the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act (H.R.4939). The version passed by the House does not provide additional funds for

students displaced by the Gulf Coast hurricanes. The version passed by the Senate provides additional funds but channels them to displaced students through Title V of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The CAPE community would like Congress to retain the funds in the Senate bill for displaced students and to distribute the funds through the mechanism established in the Hurricane Education Recovery Act (HERA).

To find out more about these issues and to take action, visit:  
<http://www.capenet.org/new.html>

### **KAIRS Member School Profile: St. Joseph, Ost – Catholic School Re-Established after 39 Years**

If a religious school administrator could make a wish list when starting a new school, that list might include supportive parents, a pastor full of common sense and experience, a paid-for building, no tuition costs for students and the opportunity to hire your own teachers and order your textbooks.

For Eva Harmon, principal of St. Joseph’s Catholic School, Ost, that list wasn’t too far from what she experienced two years ago. That was the year she was hired to re-start a Catholic school in Mt. Hope – St. Joseph, Ost – that originally began in 1892. The school functioned in that capacity until 1965, when it became a public school in the Renwick School District. In 2004, that all changed.

#### **Re-Opening as a Catholic Parish School**

“The people of the parish here at St. Joseph petitioned the Diocese and undertook the extensive amount of research needed to determine if they could support a Catholic school again,” Mrs. Harmon said. “After several months of working with Bob Voboril (Superintendent of the Wichita Diocese), he gave them permission

to open -- and we took possession of the school on July 1, 2004.”

Mrs. Harmon, who is in her sixteenth year of teaching, explained that in the original agreement between the church and the public school system, the church had given the school to the district with the stipulation that in the event that the school should close, the building would return to the parish.

Mr. Voboril elaborated on the situation in 2004, “The public school district had been wanting to close the school for some time and had set conditions for keeping open. The school parents met those conditions, but the district decided to close it anyway. St. Joseph’s parish only had 125 families, and so funding a Catholic school was going to be a great burden.”

He continued, “The district turned the buildings over on July 1, leaving nothing but the bare walls. The parents had 48 days to furnish, repair and prepare the facility for the first day of school. They promised me they could get it ready, and they did. In addition, I have to note that when we were evaluating the feasibility of this project, Keith Jopp, Principal at St. Paul Lutheran in Cheney, was one of our greatest encouragers. His positive spirit was a great boost when some of our days seemed gloomy.”

The first year at St. Joseph, Ost the enrollment was 82 children in grades Kindergarten through eighth grade. This past school year, that number grew to 91, and pre-enrollment for next year is currently at 102 students. According to Mrs. Harmon, these numbers are beginning to exceed the estimated attendance the school last enjoyed in the public system.

“I was lucky enough to be hired as the principal of this new Catholic school in March of 2004,” she said. “I was given the great opportunity to order textbooks, hire teachers, and get the building ready – with the tremendous help of the parish and the absolute dedication and stewardship of the parents. The people here wanted it so badly and were willing to do whatever it took.”

St. Joseph, Ost features a unique curriculum for combination grades. Kindergarten is alone, but the remaining classes include four classrooms, consisting of first and second, third and fourth, fifth and sixth, and seventh and eighth grades.

“We have a very challenging curriculum. We like to think it is harmful to underestimate the ability of a child,” Mrs. Harmon said. “We want them to reach their potential and don’t want to let anyone fall in the cracks. So, our teachers spend a tremendous amount of after-school time in tutoring, individualized education and accommodations to help these kids be successful.”

The curriculum includes religious education, following the Dioceses guide, and a variety of extra-curricular activities including music and band. St. Joseph, Ost also is technologically current with wireless Internet and a computer lab. It belongs to the Valley Nine league and participates in a wide range of sports. The school received accreditation from the state of Kansas in October 2005.

Students from St. Joseph, Ost go on to attend Trinity High School in Hutchison, Bishop Carroll Catholic High School in Wichita, and Garden Plain and Andale High Schools. Mrs. Harmon said that the report back from the high school counselors indicated that their students were well prepared for those schools.

### Stewardship Way of Life

As with the other schools in the Wichita Diocese, St. Joseph, Ost follows the Stewardship Way of Life where parishioners give back what God has given them with their time, talent and treasure.

“This community is certainly a model of that, as we have only six paid employees and the rest of our staff are volunteers,” Mrs. Harmon explained. “The families pay a registration fee at the beginning of the year and the rest is between themselves and God the Father. Thankfully, so far, we’re doing great. The people are fulfilling their commitment as promised.”

The six employees include the teachers and Mrs. Harmon. The volunteer parent staff includes maintenance, custodial service, lunch servers, librarians and a secretary.

### Unique Leadership and Opportunities

St. Joseph, Ost is blessed with the leadership of Father Ivan Eck, who recently celebrated his 55th anniversary as a priest and is himself a graduate of St. Joseph Catholic School. Mrs. Harmon indicated that Father Eck's extensive experience with schools in the Diocese was a key element to the re-establishment of St. Joseph as a Catholic school.

She described him as one of those rare individuals who is remarkable in his common sense, understanding of tradition and vision. "He has a tremendous amount of wisdom. He doesn't let the influence of the culture change his mind about what is right."

Mr. Voboril added, "Father Eck has given his life to Catholic education. He taught seventh graders as a classroom teacher as a young priest. He uses his so-called day off to take the high schoolers water-skiing. I doubt there are many priests anywhere who could have pulled off what he did, and do it as successfully."

"Enrollment is now higher than at any time in the last ten years that the public school was open. As a result, the school has outgrown the 1922-era facility, and Father Eck is planning a new addition," Mr. Voboril said. "What a marvelous last chapter in Father Eck's priesthood, and what a great story."

Mrs. Harmon's motto is "upward and onward" and St. Joseph, Ost continues to grow. Growth itself, however, is not the overriding priority for the school. "We're in the midst of strategic planning and our main concern is to maintain high quality texts and to continue to provide state-of-the-art curriculum.

"Our strengths are our parent support, the Catholic tradition and commitment, and a fantastic priest who leads and guides our way,"

she said. "At St. Joseph Catholic School, we are committed to teaching, sanctifying and governing the People of God. This, as well as God's continued blessings and graces is what is unique about our school and allows us go forward."

### A Final Note from KAIRS Out-going President

It is with mixed feelings that I approach my final few weeks as Head of School at The Independent School and President of KAIRS. Although I know I will enjoy some free time and some time to recharge my batteries, I am going to greatly miss the many friends I have made and the relationships in which I have been privileged to share. I say thank you to the members of KAIRS for making my term as president such an enjoyable one. KAIRS is a terrific group, and I know the future of Independent and Religious Schools in Kansas is in good hands. Best wishes to all in the future, and I hope our paths cross again!

*-Karen Norton*

### KAIRS 2005-06 OFFICERS

President: Karen Norton, The Independent School, Wichita

Vice President: Nick Compagnone, Salina Catholic Diocese

Secretary: Bill Dieckhoff, Holy Cross Lutheran School, Wichita

Treasurer: David Swank, Trinity Academy, Wichita

Annual Meeting Co-Secretaries: Shelli Kadel, Wichita Friends School

& Nick Compagnone, Salina Catholic Diocese