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## Boston College to rescue ailing Catholic school

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Aiming to establish a model to help save endangered Catholic elementary and middle schools, Boston College has unveiled what it says is the first-ever partnership between a Catholic university and a parochial school in the United States.

Under terms of the agreement announced March 21, Boston College will join the Boston archdiocese on the board of trustees at St. Columbkille School in the Allston-Brighton neighborhood of Boston. Faculty from Boston College's Lynch School of Education will help develop curriculum and shape teaching techniques used at the school.

"Without this agreement, St. Columbkille School could not stay open in the coming years," said Fr. Richard J. Shmaruk, pastor of St. Columbkille Parish.

Boston College's president, Jesuit Fr. William P. Leahy, noted that across the country, 277 Catholic elementary schools closed in the past two years. Faculty at Boston College expressed hope that universities and parochial schools elsewhere could follow the Boston College model.

"St. Columbkille will serve as a model for how Catholic universities and Catholic schools can partner to develop best practices for Catholic education," said Mary Walsh, director of Boston College's Center for Child, Family and Community Partnerships. "The evidence-based best practices that emerge from this collaboration will have clear potential to strengthen Catholic education across the country."

About 2.4 million students currently receive elementary and secondary school education from the nation's 7,589 Catholic schools, according to the National Catholic Educational Association. Enrollment numbers have declined over the past four decades from an all-time high of 4.5 million in the mid-1960s. One major reason is demographic shifts, according to the association.

"There are many school buildings in urban areas without a nearby Catholic population to support them," the association says in an analysis on its Web site. "And there are thousands of potential students in suburban areas where schools have yet to be built."

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