

Accountability for Student Success in Catholic schools

The parents of 171,000 students are currently making the choice to provide their children with a Catholic education at one of Pennsylvania's 530 Catholic schools.

Accountability to parents is a primary concern of every Catholic school. Every year, parents will decide whether or not to pay tuition to continue their child's enrollment in that school. If parents are not satisfied that their child's school is doing a good job, they will remove their child. Catholic schools have been competing to enroll students for well over 100 years.

All Catholic schools work to retain parents' trust and to earn the trust of potential new parents; yet each school is unique in the kind of accreditation it seeks, the tests its students take and the manner in which it promotes the results.

For example, all 77 high schools and hundreds of elementary schools are accredited with the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Middle States is a rigorous process. As described on its website, Middle States accreditation is the affirmation that a school provides a quality of education that the community has a right to expect and the education world endorses. Accreditation is a means of showing confidence in a school's performance. <http://www.css-msa.org/directory/accredit.html>

Most Catholic schools also administer standardized tests such as Stanford Achievement Tests, ITBS Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Terra Nova Tests of Achievement, PSAT, SAT and ACT. Some schools post the results on their website, some in printed promotional materials, some are discussed at open houses and parent informational meetings. Parents receive the test results of their own child, but aggregate results are often available in several different formats from a printed report to an article in the Catholic newspaper.

Most Catholic high schools rightly boast graduation rates at or near 100% for non-transferring students. Of those graduates, over 90% go on to attend either a two or four-year institute of higher learning.

Beyond academic standards, Catholic schools do comply with a long list of state regulations:

- Compulsory attendance
- Minimum days and hours of instruction
- Minimum course requirements
- Graduation requirements
- Health and safety regulations such as fire, cleanliness, building construction, playground safety, lighting, heating, food safety, and emergency response, for example.
- Staff background check requirements

Every non-public school must be accountable to parents and the community around them on many fronts. Competition for enrollment demands nothing less. But parents of Catholic schools students measure success by more than just academic test scores.

Catholic parochial and diocesan schools educate students by establishing high goals and standards, strong motivation, effective discipline and an atmosphere of caring. Catholic schools offer a challenging academic program that fosters excellence and a high quality of student performance. Catholic schools aim to develop each student as a whole person—academically, of course, but also spiritually, physically and emotionally.

There is no test for an improved attitude, respect, good manners or depth of spiritual awareness; no measure for a child's feeling of security; but parents know that these are elements of a good school for their child.

All parents should be able to choose a school that best suits their children. Financial realities often preclude parents from having that choice. School choice legislation that includes a voucher program and the expansion of Educational Improvement Tax Credits (EITC) is a step in the right direction toward expanding those opportunities to more parents.

