Are Catholic Schools Academically Accountable?

Now that Senate Bill 1 has passed the Senate and been sent to the House Education Committee, Pennsylvanians are hearing false arguments from those opposed to giving parents the ability to choose the best school for their child. One of these tired "red herrings" is that Catholic schools are not academically accountable. In fact, Catholic schools diligently monitor teacher and student achievement in a variety of ways, and have been doing so consistently for decades. If the question is academic accountability, Catholic schools already make the grade.

Catholic schools across the state of Pennsylvania already use academically rigorous nationally normed standardized tests. These test results provide measurements to help schools evaluate the progress of students, the effectiveness of teachers and the efficacy of curriculum. Further, Catholic schools test students nearly every year beginning in grade 3; this is not required in state law for non-public or public schools, but Catholic schools have found that testing in every year provides the most complete picture of educational progress. Taking tests doesn't solve anything – it's the action that follows from these tests that creates positive progress and increased success for the students. Catholic school teachers write action plans based on their students' test results. Not only do Catholic schools test their students, they also act upon the results, which is the most crucial part of the accountability process.

There is also accountability in Catholic school curriculum. All of our high schools and most of our elementary schools are accredited with the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. While not required, nearly all teachers in Pennsylvania's Catholic schools are public school certified. At times, Catholic schools look for professionals with a specific expertise and advanced degrees, rather than certification. Catholic schools require their highly qualified teachers to complete continuing education, take part in lesson plan evaluations, and participate in the professional development that is included as a regular part of the academic calendar.

If opponents still aren't convinced about the accountability in Catholic schools, there are additional safeguards built into Senate Bill 1. The legislation requires all non-public schools to administer at least one of eight nationally normed standardized tests (our schools already use these tests). The school is also required to share the voucher student results with parents (our schools already do this for all students, not only those who receive tuition assistance).

And we can't argue about the results. Catholic school students typically score well above national averages on their SATs and complete hundreds of hours of community service. Catholic high schools prepare graduates to successfully matriculate through some of our nation's top universities, with many of our Catholic high schools sending nearly 100% of their graduates onto post-secondary studies, gleaning millions of dollars in academic scholarships to do so.

The ultimate measure of accountability in Catholic education is that parents *choose*, year after year, to send their children to our schools. If families aren't happy with our schools, they can simply transfer their children from them and send them to the tuition-free public schools. Competition demands accountability. It is clear Catholic schools are already highly accountable for student achievement.

Send a message to your representative in support of school choice at www.pacatholic.org.