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# CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: DEVELOPING HEARTS AND MINDS OF FAITH

*"Catholic schools afford the fullest and best opportunity to provide an atmosphere in which the Gospel message is proclaimed, community in Christ is experienced, service to our sisters and brothers is the norm, and thanksgiving and worship of our God is cultivated."*

—U.S. Bishops, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*

Catholic schools throughout the country and the State of Michigan are invaluable institutions dedicated to spreading the teachings and mission of the Church. Through Catholic schools, students learn values and are taught virtues that remain with them for the rest of their lives. In 2012–2013, 6,685 Catholic schools across the country educated 2,001,740 children; 19.6% of whom were racial minorities and 15.9% were non-Catholic.<sup>1</sup> Roughly 54,832 students were educated in Michigan Catholic schools. Today, the Church is successfully continuing her historical tradition of cultivating faithful and service-oriented men and women in the classroom.

Catholic schools contribute to and educate for the common good in a variety of ways. Community service, parental involvement, high percentage of graduates and college enrollees, and inclusion of non-Catholic and racial minorities are hallmarks of Catholic schools. Facilitated within a disciplined, structured and safe environment, the education provided at Catholic schools is rich in history and tradition. The first parish supported school was established in Philadelphia in 1782, and in the early 1800s a school for poor children in Maryland was created by Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, who became a champion of Catholic schools in her lifetime.

In the mid-19th century, the involvement of the Catholic Church in education soared as increasing numbers of Catholic immigrants settled in America. The public

schools at the time, which were built on Protestant values, did not foster a friendly environment for Catholics. Despite attempts to reform Protestant schools, anti-Catholic bias continued. As a result, the Church created her own system of schools to provide a Gospel-based education that was available, accessible, and affordable. Today, Catholic schools serve students of all backgrounds. Their mission is to provide "a sense of welcome, dignity, community, and connection with [the students'] spiritual roots."<sup>2</sup>

Importantly, Catholic education places a primary focus on the role parents play in the instruction of their children. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2229) teaches that parents "have the right to *choose a school for [their children]* which corresponds to their own convictions." Parents must also choose schools, according to the *Catechism*, that "will best help them in their task as Christian educators," so that they may pass the Gospel message on to their children. While many types of schools are available for parents in Michigan, Catholic schools are beneficial as they provide a lasting foundation for students, teaching knowledge as well as developing the whole person. By incorporating faith into the daily experience of the child, Catholic schools demonstrate the importance of connecting actions with the larger world and the teachings of the Catholic Church. This **focus** publication highlights the benefits and achievements of Catholic schools in Michigan and the continued importance of advocacy and support for their future. ■

# THE BENEFITS OF A CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Pope Paul VI in 1965 wrote in his declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, that the proper function of Catholic schools “is to create a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, to help youth grow, and to order human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith.” Over the years, Catholic education has remained a proven way of fostering a positive learning environment for students as it carries out these three tasks. By incorporating prayer and faith into the daily routine of the school and curriculum, students are provided a strong, lasting moral framework. They are not just taught how to apply academics to everyday life, but also to consider the moral implications of their decisions. Integrity, hard work, and service are valued and instilled in each student. Through lessons in the classroom, games on the athletic field, performances and concerts on stage, and services held in the chapel, faith formation is always an integral part of the Catholic school experience.

The value of this positive moral environment is shown in the results of Catholic school students. According to the superintendents of Catholic schools in Michigan, graduation rates are at least in the 90th percentile at every school. A study of Catholic secondary schools by the National Catholic Education Association in 2010 supplements these findings, reporting that across the country, these schools boasted a graduation rate of 99.1%. This rate is higher than the 97.9% rate reported by other religious schools, a 95.7% rate of non-sectarian schools and a 73.2% rate of public schools. The study also found that students graduating from Catholic high schools are more likely than students from other religious and non-sectarian schools to attend four year colleges, 84.7% compared to 63.7% and 56.2%, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

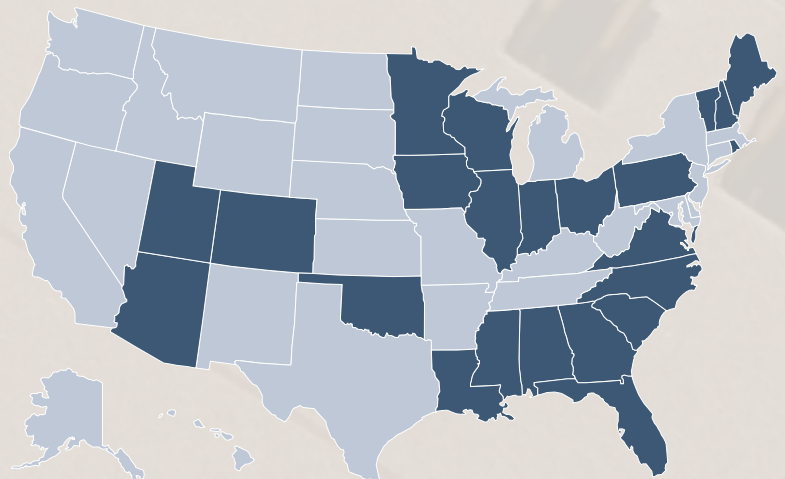
Michigan Catholic schools have also been recognized at the national level for their high academic performance. For example, the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, which rewards high performing public and non-public schools, has recognized five Catholic schools in the last ten years. In fact, since 2003, all of Michigan's National Blue Ribbon Schools have been Catholic schools, including Guardian Angels School of Clawson in 2003, Shrine Catholic Grade School of Royal Oak in 2005, St. Paul on the Lake Catholic School of Grosse Pointe in 2006, Holy Name Catholic Schools of Birmingham in 2008, and St. Hugo of the Hills School of Bloomfield Hills in 2009. ■

# CONSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES: MICHIGAN'S BLAINE AMENDMENT

In 1970, language was added to the Michigan Constitution that prohibits state aid to non-public schools. The policy went into effect after then Governor William G. Milliken signed a bill the previous year that authorized state payments to non-public schools for non-religious instruction. The Michigan Supreme Court upheld the law but it was later successfully challenged by opponents at the ballot box. Michigan's “Blaine Amendment” is known throughout the country as the most prohibitive of similar state constitutions, as it specifically forbids:

- Tuition tax credits or deductions,
- Voucher programs, or
- Scholarship programs for low income families.

As a result, revenue for Catholic and other non-public schools is derived from tuition, parish subsidies, and school donations. The map below indicates those states where school choice programs prohibited by the Michigan Constitution have been enacted elsewhere. Michigan's absence is noticeable across the Midwest and is a source of continual concern for parents seeking alternatives and policy makers. With the state allocating some \$7,000 per student enrolled in a public school, the 107,218 students enrolled in non-public schools last year saved state taxpayers approximately \$750,526,000. ■



**School Choice in the United States**

- States without tuition tax credits, vouchers or scholarship programs
- States with tuition tax credits, vouchers or scholarship programs

# SCHOOL CHOICE: LEGISLATIVE AND JUDICIAL MEASURES

During the 2011–2012 legislative session, Michigan lawmakers passed several measures aimed at improving school choice options for parents. Michigan Catholic Conference supported these efforts, as they give parents a greater opportunity to choose where and how their children are educated. The Legislature:

- Eliminated the cap on charter schools,
- Extended the ability for non-public school students to receive “shared time services,” or instruction from public school faculty on non-core subjects,
- Expanded the “dual enrollment” policy by streamlining the process and providing an opportunity for non-public school students to obtain college credits while still in high school.

While Michigan Catholic Conference continues to advocate for increased options for parents and their children, the elimination of the state's “Blaine Amendment” is necessary for Michigan elected officials to consider options such as tuition tax credits, vouchers, or scholarship programs that have proven successful in nearly every Midwest state and other parts of the country. Over the years, the U.S. Supreme Court has routinely upheld school choice programs that have passed other state legislatures. A few examples include:

**Mueller v. Allen (1983):** allowed income tax deduction for tuition, textbooks, and transportation in Minnesota for parents attending all schools, including those religious in nature.

**Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District (1993):** ruled that the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution does not prohibit the use of public funds to pay for an interpreter for a hearing impaired child in a Catholic high school.

**Zelman v. Simmons-Harris (2002):** upheld the constitutionality of the Cleveland Scholarship Program, declaring that even if a voucher is used to send a child to a religious school, it does not violate the establishment of religion clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

## SCHOOL CHOICE SERVES LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Expanded school choice options have not only been held constitutional, they have also shown to specifically benefit low-income students and families. For example, the *Opportunity Scholarship Program*, created in Washington, D.C. in

2004, provides eligible low-income students with a scholarship to attend a non-public school of their parent's choice. Since its implementation, the program has been successful in raising graduation rates and providing a superior education for the District's children. A study in 2010 revealed that the program “significantly improved” students' chances of graduating from high school; 82% of the students who were offered a scholarship graduated, as opposed to 70% of those who applied and did not receive a scholarship due to limited enrollment.<sup>4</sup> In 2011, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship was expanded to ensure that public schools, charter schools, and non-public schools were working together to offer “quality education experiences for the District's students”, many of whom would otherwise have no choice but to attend a failing school. During 2012–2013, the program awarded 299 children with scholarships who “previously attended a public or private charter school designated as ‘in need of improvement.’”<sup>5</sup>

Another program that has been successful toward providing low-income families with quality educational options for their children is the *Louisiana Scholarship Program*. Through this program, which was launched in 2008 and expanded in 2012, students in low-income families are awarded scholarships so that parents can afford to send their children to the school of their choice. In order to be eligible to apply for the scholarship, students must be enrolled in a “failing” school and must have a family income of less than 250% of the federal poverty level. According to data from the program, at least 90% of the children that chose to attend non-public schools with the voucher were African-American. The program, along with other programs around the country, provides minorities and low-income families with the opportunity for a superior educational experience.

While Catholic schools have consistently demonstrated how they offer quality opportunities for low-income families, Michigan is unable, due to state constitutional limitations, to further expand educational choice programs. Regrettably, due to the strict prohibition on any form of state aid to Michigan's faith-based schools, the state has fallen behind in providing parents with greater choice in education. Despite this challenge, Catholic schools continue to post test scores that are among the very best in the state and throughout the country. ■

# PROMOTE GREATER EDUCATIONAL CHOICE FOR MICHIGAN'S STUDENTS

The results of a Catholic school education are clear in the caliber of students they foster. Students attending non-public schools, regardless of their background or income level, perform well academically and take on leadership roles in their communities. Despite the struggles faced in this state, Catholic schools have continued to provide tens of thousands of children each year with the knowledge of faith, academics, and opportunities for service.

In addition to impressive academic and leadership results, studies routinely provide strong evidence that educational choice schools “advance civic values” and “are better at promoting political tolerance, volunteerism, and political knowledge than traditional schools.”<sup>6</sup> Back in his 1885 encyclical, *Spectata Fides*, Pope Leo XIII referred to Catholic schools as the place where “good citizens are brought up for the state,” as the schools emphasized a wider sense of obligation and self.

The U.S. bishops have called all Catholics to advocate for Catholic schools and the students within them, not just parents and teachers, as it is also the duty of the parish community to provide support for Catholic education. In order to promote the common good, Michigan Catholics and the

state’s elected officials are called upon to encourage greater educational choice to benefit all students, regardless of where they live or are enrolled.

While the intent of this publication is to promote the presence and excellence of Catholic schools in Michigan, it is imperative that sound public policy be enacted to benefit students enrolled in public schools. The Blaine constitutional language is often cited as the reason for a sometimes adversarial relationship between public and non-public advocacy groups, yet children and their education must always be the primary concern for parents and policy makers. According to Article VIII, Section I of the 1963 Michigan Constitution: “Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” Michigan Catholic Conference believes this important language applies to all schools, regardless of their public or non-public nature, and will continue to advocate for policies that benefit each and every student.

Contact information is listed below for those wishing to learn more about the Catholic schools in their communities.

<b>Archdiocese of Detroit</b>	Dept. of Evangelization, Catechesis & Schools	(313) 237-4661	<a href="http://www.aod.org">www.aod.org</a>
<b>Diocese of Gaylord</b>	Office of Catholic Schools	(989) 732-5147	<a href="http://www.dioceseofgaylord.org">www.dioceseofgaylord.org</a>
<b>Diocese of Grand Rapids</b>	Office of Catholic Schools	(616) 246-0590	<a href="http://www.dioceseofgrandrapids.org">www.dioceseofgrandrapids.org</a>
<b>Diocese of Kalamazoo</b>	Office of Catholic Schools	(269) 349-8714	<a href="http://www.dioceseofkalamazoo.org">www.dioceseofkalamazoo.org</a>
<b>Diocese of Lansing</b>	Department of Education & Catechesis	(517) 342-2482	<a href="http://www.dioceseoflansing.org">www.dioceseoflansing.org</a>
<b>Diocese of Marquette</b>	Office of Catholic Schools	(906) 227-9135	<a href="http://www.dioceseofmarquette.org">www.dioceseofmarquette.org</a>
<b>Diocese of Saginaw</b>	Office of Catholic Schools	(989) 797-6651	<a href="http://www.saginaw.org">www.saginaw.org</a>

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510 South Capitol Avenue  
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For additional free copies of  
this **focus**, contact the Michigan  
Catholic Conference at:

**Phone:** (800) 395-5565

**Fax:** (517) 372-3940  
[bstarrak@micatholic.org](mailto:bstarrak@micatholic.org)

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1. “The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing,” National Catholic Education Association, [www.ncea.org](http://www.ncea.org) 2. “Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Elementary & Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium,” Committee on Education of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (June 2005), <http://old.usccb.org/bishops/schools.pdf> 3. “The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing, United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2009–2010,” National Catholic Education Association 4. “Evaluation of the Impact of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program,” Institute of Education Sciences, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/> 5. D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, August 2, 2012, [www.dcscholarships.org](http://www.dcscholarships.org) 6. “Research Demonstrates Benefits of School Choice,” Council for American Private Education, <http://www.capenet.org/pdf/Outlook362.pdf>