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WHY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS SPELL SUCCESS FOR AMERICA'S INNER-CITY CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

It is said that economic empowerment today is linked inextricably to education. This means that Congress has the opportunity, over the next year, to give tens of thousands of America's most disadvantaged children a much brighter future. Attention from across the political and social spectrum is shifting to the astonishing success of inner-city Catholic schools in working with the very children the public schools have abandoned as uneducable. An abundance of recent research comparing public, private, and religious schools shows that Catholic schools improve not only test scores and graduation rates for these children, but also their future economic prospects—and at a substantially lower cost.

The school choice[1] measures now before Congress would give parents the option to send their children to public, private, or parochial schools of choice. Thanks to the growing body of research supporting Catholic school education, Congress can be certain that inner-city children would benefit from these measures. This research looks at the impact of Catholic schools on a range of outcomes such as grades, standardized test scores, drop-out and graduation rates, college attendance, and future wage gains.

In a study published in 1990, for example, the Rand Corporation analyzed big-city high schools to determine how education for low-income minority youth could be improved.[2] It looked at 13 public, private, and Catholic high schools in New York City that attracted minority and disadvantaged youth. Of the Catholic school students in these schools, 75 to 90 percent were black or Hispanic. The study found that:

1 For information on school choice, see Nina H. Shokraii and Dorothy B. Hanks, "School Choice Programs: What's Happening in the States," Heritage Foundation *F.Y.I.* No. 138, April 21, 1997, and the Heritage school choice Web site at *www.heritage.org/heritage/schools/*.

2 Paul T. Hill, Gail E. Foster, and Tamar Gendler, *High Schools with Character* (Santa Monica, Cal.: Rand Corporation, August 1990).

- The Catholic high schools graduated 95 percent of their students each year, while the public schools graduated slightly more 50 percent of their senior class;
- Over 66 percent of the Catholic school graduates received the New York State Regents diploma to signify completion of an academically demanding college preparatory curriculum, while only about 5 percent of the public school students received this distinction;
- 85 percent of the Catholic high school students took the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), compared with just 33 percent of the public high school students;
- The Catholic school students achieved an average combined SAT score of 803, while the public school students' average combined SAT score was 642; and
- 60 percent of the Catholic school black students scored above the national average for black students on the SAT, and over 70 percent of public school black students scored below the same national average.

More recent studies confirm these observations. As parents, politicians, and concerned observers become aware of the benefits of Catholic schooling, particularly for the poor, the rhetoric demanding action builds. Syndicated columnist William Raspberry, a self-described "Reluctant Convert to School Choice," wrote recently, "It seems as obvious for poor children as for rich ones that one-size-fits-all education doesn't make sense."[3] Furthermore, according to a recent survey conducted by Terry Moe, senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, and John Chubb, founding partner and curriculum director for the Edison Project, a stunning 83 percent of public school parents and 82 percent of inner-city poor parents want parochial schools to be included in the choice of schools to which they can send their children.[4]

THE POPULARITY OF PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE

Lawmakers and educators should use the mounting research comparing the performance of students in private and religious schools with their public school counterparts to promote real change in the U.S. educational system.

Thanks to the growing popularity of school choice,[5] three legislative proposals now before Congress would give inner-city low-income parents the opportunity to send their children to the public, private, or parochial school of their choice. These measures would empower parents to remove their children from violent or failing schools and send them to institutions in which they would be able to learn.

- **The American Community Renewal Act of 1997**, introduced by Representatives J. C. Watts (R–OK), James Talent (R–MO), and Floyd Flake (D–NY), and Senators Spencer Abraham (R–MI) and Joseph Lieberman (D–CT), would create 100 demonstration "renewal communities" in low-income urban areas featuring pilot school choice programs.[6]

3 William Raspberry, "A Reluctant Convert to School Choice," *The Washington Post*, May 30, 1997.

4 Forthcoming book by Terry Moe and John Chubb, to be published by the Brookings Institution.

5 For instance, according to a recent poll, 70.4 percent of blacks with an income of less than $15,000 a year support school choice. See David A. Bositis, "1997 National Opinion Poll: Children's Issues," Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, June 1997, Table 7.

- **The District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997**, introduced by Representative Richard Armey (R–TX) and Senators Dan Coats (R–IN), Joseph Lieberman, and Sam Brownback (R–KS), would give some of the poorest students in the nation's capital vouchers to attend the schools of their choice.[7]
- **The Safe and Affordable Schools Act**, introduced by Senator Paul Coverdell (R–GA), includes school choice demonstration projects for children who want to escape unsafe schools and provisions to encourage states and localities to design their own school choice programs.[8]

Congress can use the strong and widespread data available on the success of Catholic school education to strengthen and promote proposals that would increase significantly the educational opportunities and choices available to America's inner-city poor.

WHY CHOOSE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS?

Not only do Catholic schools offer a safe and cooperative learning environment, but they do so at a more reasonable and much lower cost than the public schools.[9] For example:

- **Holy Angels Elementary School,** a 110-year-old institution, is located in the Kenwood–Oakland neighborhood of southside Chicago, Illinois, where three out of four people live in poverty and violent crime is the rule rather than the exception. Yet Holy Angels has managed to become one of the strongest academic institutions in the country. According to a 1994 report published by the Chicago Public Schools, four times as many Holy Angels 8th graders scored above the national average in math on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills than 8th graders attending the area's three public schools. In addition, of the 8th graders who scored above the national average in reading, twice as many were from Holy Angels as from the public schools. Tuition at Holy Angels is approximately $1,500 a year. [10]
- **St. Gregory the Great Elementary School** on West 90th Street in New York City serves only low-income black children from Harlem and Washington

6 Among the supporters of this bill are six members of the Congressional Black Caucus, which opposed school choice until Representative Floyd Flake endorsed it.

7 Similar legislation offered in 1995 by Representative Steve Gunderson (R–WI) passed the House with bipartisan support but died in the Senate. The chief opponent in the Senate was Senator James Jeffords (R–VT), whose home state is one of only two that have school choice plans in place for children living in rural neighborhoods without public high schools nearby.

8 On May 23, 1997, by a vote of 51 to 49, the Senate passed an amendment to its balanced budget plan that would allow the use of federal funds to enable victims of school violence to attend a public, private, or religious school of choice. Although the voucher language is non-binding, it signifies support for choice in the Senate. This may be the first time a school choice plan has "passed" in the Senate.

9 In 1993/1994, tuition at elementary Catholic schools averaged $1,628, not including subsidies. See "Voucher Kids: How Private Money Rescues Thousands of Youngsters from the Public School Monopolists," *Forbes*, June 2, 1997. "The average private elementary school tuition in America is less than $2,500. The average tuition for all private schools, elementary and secondary, is $3,116, or less than half of the cost per pupil in the average public school, $6,857." See David Boaz and R. Morris Barrett, "What Would a School Voucher Buy? The Real Cost of Private Schools," Cato Institute *Briefing Paper* No. 25, March 26, 1996.

10 Interview with Sister Helen Struder, principal of Holy Angels school, May 20, 1997.

Heights. It outperforms all neighboring public schools and most of the schools in its district. In 1995, 62 percent of St. Gregory's 3rd graders were reading above the minimum standard, and 92 percent functioned above the standard in math. St. Gregory charges only $1,700 a year in tuition.[11]

- **East Catholic High** in Detroit, Michigan, where the principals saved for 12 years just to buy a school bus, has not allowed lack of funding to interfere with its students' academic achievements. The school serves low-income minorities almost exclusively and has been particularly successful in teaching students who were not performing well in public schools. Nearly 75 percent of its students go to college after graduation, and only 15 percent of parents paying the $2,000 tuition fee are Catholic.[12]

Holy Angels, St. Gregory the Great, and East Catholic High are typical inner-city Catholic schools. They overcome financial hardships daily to deliver astounding results because they possess the ingredients that make schools work well: (1) strong institutional leadership and school autonomy; (2) shared values among the staff about school goals; (3) a safe and orderly environment; and (4) core curriculum requirements and high expectations for all students regardless of background.

Despite such examples of success, however, prejudice against allowing inner-city parents to choose Catholic schools for their children continues to linger among policymakers and the education elite. It often seems that just mentioning the term "Catholic schools" causes many opponents to conjure up images of medieval nuns using knuckle-rapping rulers on terrified children. Unlike many government-run schools, Catholic schools are strong on discipline, but the wholesome discipline at a Catholic school sends a clear message to students who consequently are able to learn in the school's safe and orderly environment. Researchers have agreed that the caring staff members at Catholic schools willingly devote their attention to the academic and emotional well-being of students.[13]

This difference is not lost on parents. In Cleveland, Ohio, inner-city parents immediately enrolled their children in Catholic schools during the Cleveland choice experiment,[14] a popular full choice program that recently was struck down by a lower court after a successful first year of operation. Most of the parents in this program who enrolled their children in the Catholic schools were not Catholic. They selected Catholic schools because, on balance, they deliver impressive results.

Opponents of school choice often state that Catholic schools succeed because they can pick and choose students, they have more freedom to dismiss disruptive students, and their parents are more involved in their children's education. The evidence, however, proves otherwise. According to Lydia Harris, principal of St. Adalbert, a leading Catholic school in Cleveland, "There's no cream on my crop until we put it there. It's a myth that we take discipline problems and throw them out of school. It's the other way around. I get the kids

11 Sol Stern, "The Invisible Miracle of Catholic Schools," *City Journal,* Summer 1996.

12 Susan Chira, "Where Children Learn How to Learn: Inner-City Pupils in Catholic Schools," *The New York Times,* November 20, 1991, p. B8; also based on interview with Rochelle Griffin, principal, East Catholic High, June 3, 1997.

13 A. Bryk, V. Lee, and P. Holland, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

14 Until a ruling by the Ohio Court of Appeals on May 1, 1997, striking down the Cleveland choice experiment, Cleveland had the only school choice program in place that included religious schools. It was in operation for the 1996/1997 school year.

the public schools can't handle."[15] St. Adalbert is not alone. On average, Catholic high schools dismiss fewer than two students per year, and fewer than three students per year are suspended for any reason.[16]

In 1996, Sol Stern, a contributing editor at New York's *City Journal*, wrote about how Catholic schools worked to teach their predominantly low-income minority non-Catholic clientele.[17] Stern concluded that "[Catholic schools are] constantly reminding us that the neediest kids are educatable and that spending extravagant sums of money isn't the answer. No one who cares about reviving our failing public schools can afford to ignore this inspiring laboratory of reform."[18] This is a strong admonition to those in Washington, D.C., who can direct the future of education reform in the United States.

The success of these Catholic education "laboratories" has been well researched, and that research deserves Congress's attention. As John DiIulio, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, attests, "The Catholic-school story is as solid as you can make a case.... It's not even close to the warning zone, when it comes to sociological credibility."[19]

OVER 20 YEARS OF RESEARCH: THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Over the past several years, Cardinal John J. O'Connor repeatedly has asked New York City to allow him to educate the lowest-performing 5 percent of its public school students. But even though Mayor Rudolph Giuliani responded positively, the city's board of education chose not to accept the cardinal's offer. Cardinal O'Connor may be speaking from personal conviction, but a substantial body of professional research supports his assertion that Catholic schools can do a better job of educating the country's poorest and most disadvantaged children. In fact, evidence that Catholic schooling benefits inner-city children has been mounting since the early 1980s.[20]

15 Roy Maynard, "Pro-Choice (on Education)," *World*, August 17, 1996.

16 Bryk *et al.*, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*.

17 Stern, "The Invisible Miracle of Catholic Schools."

18 *Ibid.*

19 Quoted in Joe Klein, "In God They Trust," *The New Yorker*, June 16, 1997.

20 See Peter Rossi and Andrew M. Greeley, *The Education of Catholic Americans* (Chicago, Ill.: Aldine Press, 1966); Andrew M. Greeley, William McCready, and Kathleen McCourt, *Catholic Schools in a Declining Church* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1976); James S. Coleman, Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore, *High School Achievement: Public, Catholic, and Private Schools Compared* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1982); Andrew M. Greeley, *Catholic High Schools and Minority Students* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1982); James S. Coleman and Thomas Hoffer, *Public and Private Schools: The Impact of Communities* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1987); Hill *et al.*, *High Schools With Character;* Bryk *et al.*, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good;* John J. Convey, *Catholic Schools Make a Difference: Twenty-Five Years of Research* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1992); National Center for Education Statistics, *A Profile of the American High School Senior in 1992* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995); National Center for Education Statistics, *Two Years Later: Cognitive Gains and School Transitions of NELS:88 Eighth Graders* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995); National Center for Education Statistics, *High School Seniors' Instructional Experiences in Science and Mathematics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996); National Center for Education Statistics, *National Education Longitudinal Study Descriptive Summary Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996); James S. Coleman, *Equality of Educational Opportunity Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966); and Derek Neal, "The Effects of Catholic Secondary Schooling on Educational Achievement," *Journal of Labor Economics*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1997), pp. 98–123.

General Characteristics of Catholic Schools

In general, studies show that Catholic schools by design foster the academic, religious, and moral development of their students. These schools frequently are characterized by parents as exhibiting a strong sense of community and as having an environment characterized by high academic standards, discipline and order, and a strongly committed and collegial faculty.[21]

Anthony Bryk of the University of Chicago Department of Education, Valerie Lee of the University of Michigan School of Education, and Peter Holland, the Superintendent of Schools in Belmont, Massachusetts, compiled empirical evidence on Catholic school organization and its effects for a study published in 1993. They based their findings on extensive field visits to seven high schools around the country that represented the diversity of Catholic secondary education, and on an extensive analysis of data collected for the U.S. Department of Education's comprehensive study of high school seniors and sophomores, *High School and Beyond* (HS&B).[22] After studying the social and intellectual history of these schools and coupling their findings with information gathered by the National Catholic Educational Association, the authors generalized their observations to the Catholic school sector as a whole and found the following common elements:

- More internal diversity with regard to race and income than the typical public school;
- On average, an 88 percent acceptance rate for those who apply;
- Less specialized staff and less complex school organization than in the large public secondary schools;
- More advanced academic courses and fewer vocational courses, with 72 percent of Catholic school students studying an academic program and only 10 percent concentrating on vocational studies (in public schools, children are distributed approximately equally across the academic, advanced academic, and vocational tracks);
- A focused curriculum and high standards;
- A principal with discretion in hiring and firing staff;
- A written code of conduct that includes a dress code, standards for social behavior among students and faculty, and a list of prohibited behaviors; and
- A lower incidence of students' cutting class, refusing to obey instructions, talking back to teachers, and instigating physical attacks on teachers compared with public and other private schools.[23]

21 Convey, *Catholic Schools Make a Difference.*

22 The *High School and Beyond* (HS&B) longitudinal study of U.S. high school seniors and sophomores was conducted for the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement's National Center for Education Statistics by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. It was designed to complement an earlier study, the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS–72). HS&B studied high school students of the 1980s and looked at sophomores in addition to seniors. Adding the sophomores allowed for researchers to study not only dropout rates, but also changes and processes during high school. HS&B is considered by some to be a better measure of student achievements because it looks beyond grades to whether high school achievement translates into future employment gains or post-graduate work.

Impact on Academic Achievement

The seminal work on Catholic school education and inner-city children was conducted by the late James Coleman, a professor of sociology at the University of Chicago. The results were widely reported in 1981 after appearing in summary form in *The Public Interest*.[24] Using data from the ongoing National Longitudinal Sample collected by the U.S. Department of Education,[25] Coleman found that Catholic schools not only helped children achieve academically, but also provided a more integrated school setting for students with a higher likelihood for dropping out.[26]

In 1982, Coleman published *High School Achievement: Public and Private Schools* with Thomas Hoffer of the National Opinion Research Center[27] and Sally Kilgore, senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. The authors concluded that "Catholic schools, in comparison to public schools, produced higher cognitive achievement; that they were less racially segregated; and that variation across students in patterns of achievement was much less dependent upon family background."[28] In analyzing HS&B data, they found that Catholic school students—especially minority students—scored significantly higher on standardized tests even after controlling for differences in family characteristics.

Catholic schools send a higher percentage of their students to college than do public schools. For example, approximately 66 percent of the 1980 Catholic high school graduates had enrolled in a four-year or two-year college before the spring of 1982,[29] compared with fewer than 50 percent of the 1980 graduates of public schools.

Catholic schools also are more successful in preventing dropouts than are the public schools. For example, while 13.1 percent of white students drop out of public schools, only 2.6 drop out of Catholic schools. The dropout rates for black and Hispanic students in public schools are 17.2 percent and 19.1 percent, respectively, while the dropout rates for these ethnic groups in Catholic schools are 4.6 percent for blacks and 9.3 percent for Hispanics (see Chart 1).[30] The differences in achievement between minority and white students within each school are narrowed substantially in Catholic schools in comparison with public schools. Subsequently, Coleman concluded that Catholic schools are a better example of the "common school" ideal of American education than today's public schools.

Andrew Greeley, professor of social sciences at the University of Chicago, and his associates conducted much of the research on the outcomes of Catholic schools in a series of

23 Bryk *et al.*, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*.

24 James S. Coleman, "Public Schools, Private Schools, and the Public Interest," *The Public Interest* No. 64 (Summer 1981).

25 Data are available for independent analysis from the U.S. Department of Education.

26 Denis P. Doyle, "The Social Consequences of Choice: Why It Matters Where Poor Children Go to School," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1088, July 25, 1996. Catholic school sophomores scored 10 percent higher in science, 12 percent higher in civics, and from 17 percent to 21 percent higher in mathematics, writing, reading, and vocabulary. Catholic school seniors also consistently outscored public high school students: 10 percent to 17 percent higher in reading, mathematics, and vocabulary, and from 3 percent lower to 7 percent higher on three tests that measure ability more than achievement.

27 A nonprofit social science institute.

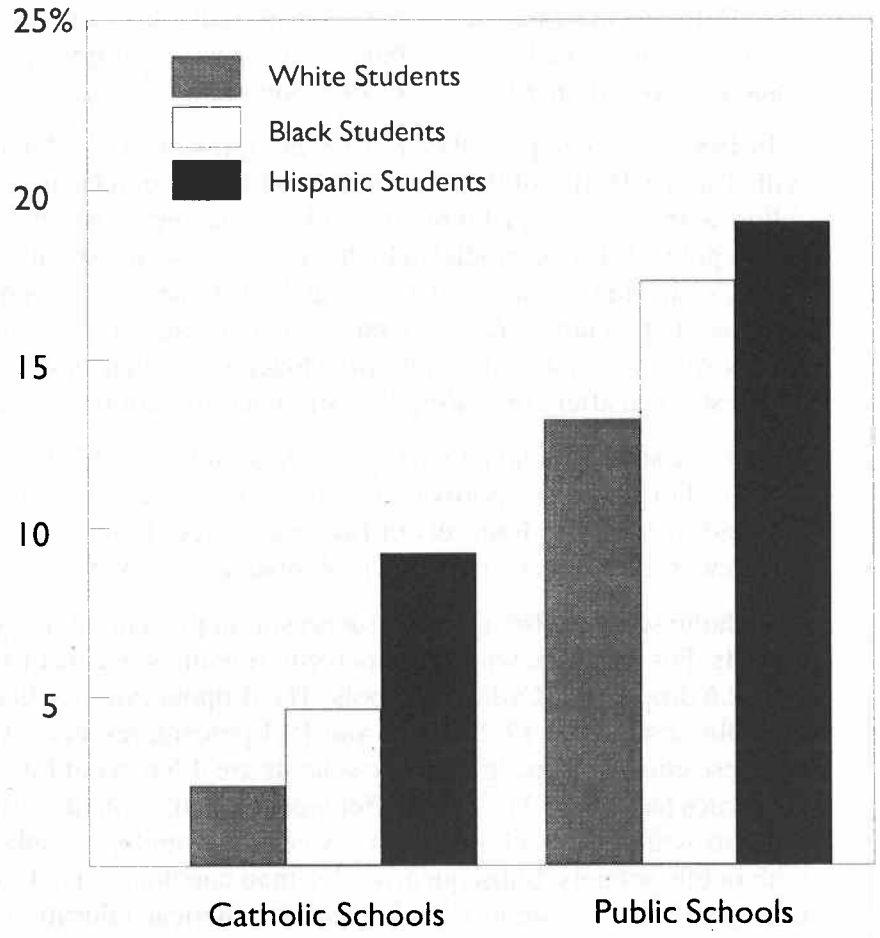
28 Coleman and Hoffer, *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities*.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

Chart 1

Dropout Rates for Racial/Ethnic Groups by School Type



Source: John Convey, *Catholic Schools Make a Difference: Twenty-Five Years of Research*, 1992.

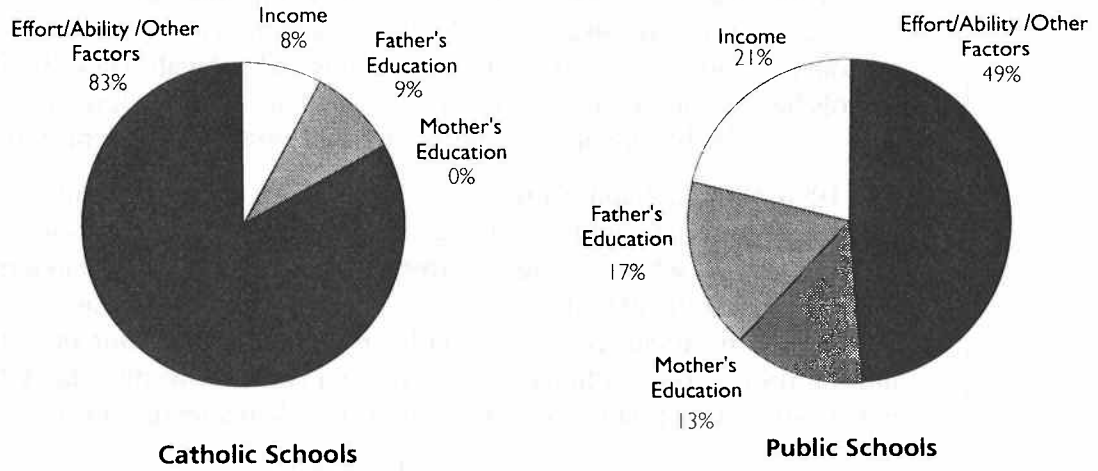
studies that began in 1966 with *The Education of Catholic Americans* and continued into the 1980s. Their analysis of HS&B data showed superior performance among whites, blacks, and Hispanics in Catholic schools in every single category, including math, science, and vocabulary. Greeley's *Catholic High Schools and Minority Students*, published in 1982, claims that "not only was the achievement of minority students in Catholic schools higher than that of minority students in public schools, but that these differences were the greatest for the most disadvantaged youth—those from poor families, those whose parents had a limited education, and those enrolled in nonacademic curricular programs."[31]

John Convey, a professor in the Department of Education at the Catholic University of America, evaluated studies on Catholic schools published between 1965 and 1991. He

31 See Bryk *et al.*, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, p. 57; see also Greeley, *Catholic High Schools*.

Chart 2

Determinants of Academic Performance of Minority Students: Catholic Schools vs. Public Schools



Source: John Convey, *Catholic Schools Make a Difference: Twenty Five Years of Research*.1992.

identified important indicators of effectiveness and concluded that, among other things, Catholic elementary and secondary school students, on average, scored better on tests of academic achievement than public school students. In *Catholic Schools Make a Difference,* Convey reports that, in a series of studies based on National Assessment of Educational Progress[32] data, Catholic school students received consistently higher scores than public school students and that whites, blacks, and Hispanics received higher scores in Catholic schools in every single category (reading, science, and mathematics).

Recent Studies

The early studies comparing public and Catholic schools found that children in Catholic schools outperform children in public schools, but one of the main criticisms of these findings is that they fail to account for the possibility of selection bias.[33] This bias, opponents contend, leaves public schools with the low-performing students. Yet parochial schools appear to be most beneficial for those who need a good education: low-achieving, low-income, and inner-city minority students. Recent research continues to support the previous findings while attempting to control as accurately as possible for the occurrence of selection bias.

32 Since 1969, the National Assessment of Educational Progress has conducted assessments of samples of the country's public and private school students at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels. It has produced nearly 200 reports in 11 instructional areas about American students' academic performance.

33 One widely held theory holds that children in Catholic schools have more caring parents because the simple act of placing children in private schools means they are more engaged in their children's education; thus, there is a selection bias which leads to higher academic achievement. Using more sophisticated databases and other research mechanisms, recent research attempts to control this bias by searching for other reasons parents place their children in religious schools (for example, proximity to home, religious beliefs, and racial composition of the school).

In a study published in 1995, William N. Evans and Robert M. Schwab of the University of Maryland School of Economics used two measures to evaluate the relative effectiveness of public and Catholic schools: the decision to finish high school and the decision to start college.[34] Using HS&B data and paying particular attention to selection bias, the authors found that attending a Catholic high school raised the probability of finishing high school and entering college for inner-city children by 17 percentage points. "This is twice as large as the effect of moving from a one- to a two-parent family and two and one-half times as large as the effect of raising parents' education from a high school dropout to a college graduate," observed Evans and Schwab. They also noted that Catholic schools have a particularly strong effect on students with the lowest probability of graduation—inner-city black pupils, students in urban areas, and students with low test scores.

In 1996, William Sander, professor of economics at DePaul University in Chicago, published the results of a study examining the effect of a Catholic grade school education on the test scores of whites, using data from HS&B.[35] Sander found that non-Catholics benefited the most from attending a Catholic grade school—even more than Catholics themselves. Looking at the effects of Catholic grade school education on 10th grade test scores and controlling for selection bias, Sander found an improvement in mathematics, reading, and vocabulary test scores of students after they had attended a Catholic grade school for eight years.

In 1995, Sander and Anthony C. Krautmann, an associate professor of economics at DePaul University, examined the effects of Catholic schooling on high school dropout rates and educational attainment for all races.[36] Paying careful attention to selection bias and using HS&B data, they found that Catholic schools had a significant negative effect on the odds of dropping out. Specifically, Catholic schooling reduced the odds of dropping out by at least 10 percent compared with public schools.

In 1997, Derek Neal, an associate professor in economics at the University of Chicago, published a detailed analysis of the effect of Catholic secondary schooling on high school and college graduation rates and future wages. To control for selection bias, Neal used data from the National Catholic Educational Association (which provides directories with the address and enrollment of every Catholic school in the United States), the Survey of Churches and Church Membership (which provides the total number of people in most religious denominations by county), and the 1980 census to construct measures of access to Catholic secondary schooling for each county in the United States.[37]

Neal merged this information with the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and found that African-American and Hispanic students attending urban Catholic schools were more than twice as likely to graduate from college as their counterparts in public schools: 27 percent of black and Hispanic Catholic school graduates who started college went on to graduate, compared with 11 percent from urban public schools. In addition, the probability that inner-city students would graduate from high school increased from 62

34 William N. Evans and Robert M. Schwab, "Finishing High School and Starting College: Do Catholic Schools Make a Difference," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics,* November 1995.

35 William Sander, "Catholic Grade Schools and Academic Achievement," *Journal of Human Resources,* Vol. 31, No. 3 (1996), pp. 540–548.

36 William Sander and Anthony C. Krautmann, "Catholic Schools, Dropout Rates, and Educational Attainment," *Economic Inquiry,* Vol. 33, No. 2 (1995), pp. 217–233.

37 Neal, "The Effect of Catholic Secondary Schooling on Educational Attainment."

percent to at least 88 percent when those students were placed in a Catholic secondary school. Furthermore, when compared with their public school counterparts, minority students in urban Catholic schools can expect roughly 8 percent higher wages in the future.

The latest study in this area, conducted by University of Oregon economists David Figlio and Joe Stone,[38] attempts to minimize selection bias as much as possible. Unlike most authors who used either HS&B data or National Longitudinal Survey of Youth data from earlier periods, Figlio and Stone used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS)[39] to measure differences between public and private schools in the performance of their students in mathematics and science.[40] They employed a rich set of variables (for example, race, religious affiliation, and where the parents went to school) to determine who decides to attend school in the public, religious, and non-religious private sectors. As a result, their findings are less likely to be merely symptomatic of the fact that higher-ability students tend to enroll in private schools.

Figlio and Stone found large, positive differences in test scores for black and Hispanic students who attended religious schools, an effect even more pronounced in urban areas. These positive effects are consistent with Neal's finding that Catholic schools have a significant positive effect on black and Hispanic student performance (measured as a reduced risk of dropping out), but have no substantial effect for the general student population. Figlio's and Stone's "religious schooling effect" was even stronger than Neal's findings for blacks and Hispanics in urban areas, particularly in large central cities.[41] They also found that black and Hispanic students from the 8th to 12th grades gain the most from religious schooling because religious schools yield high academic results.[42]

In addition, Caroline M. Hoxby, a Harvard economist who studied the effectiveness of school choice programs, found that competition from Catholic schools increased academic achievement at both public and Catholic schools.[43] Hoxby's findings led her to state that greater private and Catholic school competitiveness raises the academic quality of public schools and the high school graduation rates of public school students. Hoxby also found that public schools reacted to this competition by increasing teachers' salaries. Through choice, she concluded, students at both public and private (including Catholic) schools would increase the amount of time spent in school by about two years, and their math and reading test scores would improve by about 10 percent. Consistent with Neal's findings, Hoxby also noticed a wage increase of 14 percent for private school graduates.

38 David Figlio and Joe Stone, "School Choice and Student Performance: Are Private Schools Really Better?" (University of Wisconsin Institute for Research on Poverty, forthcoming in 1997).

39 The NELS is the third major longitudinal study sponsored by the NCES, after the National Longitudinal Study of 1972 and HS&B, that surveyed high school seniors and sophomores (HS&B) through high school, post-secondary education, and work and family formation experiences. The two previous studies provided measures of educational success and reasons for academic success and failure. The NELS expands this knowledge by following children since 8th grade and updating the information through the 1990s.

40 Researchers usually focus on math and science because schools keep better records on these subjects than on reading. Achievement in math and science is also a better indicator of post-schooling earnings.

41 Neal's data are for urban areas only.

42 Figlio and Stone, "School Choice and Student Performance."

43 Caroline M. Hoxby, "Do Private Schools Provide Competition for Public Schools?" National Bureau of Economic Research *Working Paper* No. 4978, 1994; and "The Effects of Private School Vouchers on Schools and Students," in Helen Ladd, ed., *Holding Schools Accountable* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1996), pp. 177–208.

CONCLUSION

The professional academic literature continues to illustrate that Catholic schools benefit inner-city children. Catholic schools offer strict academic and disciplinary guidelines, involve parents, and have caring teachers and administrators. Children trapped in inner-city ghettoes succeed in Catholic schools because these schools offer a quality education in a safe and caring environment.

In a recent article promoting vouchers for inner-city students, former Clinton White House adviser William A. Galston[44] and the Brookings Institution's Diane Ravitch[45] argue that "we cannot afford to write off another generation of urban schoolchildren."[46] As they point out, "in many lower-income urban areas, the traditional ideal of the 'common school' is realized at least as well in Catholic schools as in the public schools; Catholic schools in the inner cities are typically not less, but rather more integrated across lines of race and ethnicity."[47]

The Community Renewal Act, the District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997, and various school choice provisions of the Safe and Affordable Schools Act for the first time would allow low-income inner-city children to receive a quality education at a reasonable price. If they ignore the research and personal stories on the benefits of Catholic schools, federal and state policy makers will be turning their backs on America's poor children. As syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer has observed, the "great crisis in American education is...at the elementary and high school levels, where thousands of kids—particularly inner-city minority kids—are getting educations so rotten that their entire life prospects are blighted." What they need is "top-flight preparation during kindergarten through grade 12, so that [they] can get into the college of their choice meeting the same academic standards as their Asian and white counterparts."[48] Catholic schools offer this "top-flight" education—and at a bargain price.

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44 Galston is a professor at the University of Maryland School of Public Affairs.

45 Ravitch is a nonresident senior fellow in the Brookings Governmental Studies program.

46 Diane Ravitch and William A. Galston, "Scholarships for Inner-City School Kids," *The Wall Street Journal,* December 17, 1996.

47 *Ibid.*

48 Charles Krauthammer, "Race and Classrooms," *The Washington Post,* May 23, 1997, p. A29.

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