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Catholic School Data, Trends, and Proposed Solutions

Earlier this year the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) released its "Annual Statistical Report on Catholic Schools, Enrollment and Staffing for the 2014-2015 School Year." While this report has been published in various forms since 1970, this year's statistics and trends are both sobering and disturbing. The entire report can be obtained from NCEA's publication office, but Catholic School Management takes this opportunity to highlight some of the more significant statistics and trends.

Catholic Schools Continue to Disappear

Since 1960, the number of Catholic elementary schools has declined from more than 10,500 to 5,368, a decrease of 48.9%. Over the same period, Catholic secondary schools have decreased from over 2,390 to 1,200, a decrease of 49.8%. There are now 6,568 Catholic schools in the United States, down from over 13,000 in 1964.

The most recent ten-year trend is even more disturbing. For the school year 2004-2005, there were 6,574 Catholic elementary and middle schools. That number today is 5,368, for a decrease of 18.3% over the past ten years. Catholic secondary schools in 2004-2005 numbered 1,225 as compared 1,200 today, a decrease of 2.0%. It is clear that Catholic elementary and middle schools, most of which are sponsored by parishes, are disappearing at a much more rapid rate than the Catholic high schools. It is most interesting to note that while 79.8% of the Catholic elementary and middle schools are parish or inter-parish sponsored, only 18% of high schools fall into that category. 36.4% of high schools are diocesan sponsored, while more than 45% of the high schools are private and/or sponsored by religious communities (institutes).

Implications:

Catholic high schools may very well not survive without the feeder/partner Catholic elementary schools which are disappearing at an alarming rate. It is clear that diocesan, religious community, and parish school leaders must develop and/or strengthen partnerships between and among Catholic high schools and the partner elementary schools. These partnerships will need to include not just student recruitment efforts and sharing of enrollment data, but, most importantly, curriculum articulation, strategic planning, academic camps and clinics conducted by the high school for elementary school students, sports, and other skill development camps. Board development at the parish and inter-parish school level will also need to be enhanced if these schools are to remain both viable and vital partners in Catholic education.

Enrollment Trends

In 1960, Catholic elementary schools enrolled 4,373,000 students as compared to 1,359,969 today, a decrease of 68.9%. Catholic high schools in 1960 enrolled 880,000 students as compared to 579,605 today, a decrease of 34.1%. Again, the ten-year trend is even more disturbing. In 2004-2005, Catholic elementary schools enrolled 1,793,773 students as compared to 1,382,295 in 2014-2015, a decrease of 411,478 students, or 22.9%. At the high school level, the enrollment was 626,817 in 2004-2005 compared to 557,279 in 2014-2015, a decrease of 69,538 students, or 11.1%. It is the considered opinion of Catholic School Management consultants that the Catholic high school enrollment numbers cannot, and will not, be sustained unless serious efforts are made to strengthen the long-term viability and vitality of Catholic elementary and middle schools.

Implications:

If enrollment potential is to be maximized at the high school level over the next 20 years, partnerships will need to be developed between and among Catholic high schools and Catholic elementary schools as well as parishes, diocesan offices, and religious community leaders. Moreover, Catholic

foundations and charities such as Catholic Extension, Chicago Big Shoulders, etc. will need to become far more actively involved in helping enhance the viability of Catholic elementary schools. Among the areas that will need to be strengthened at the Catholic elementary school level are:

- Governance (school boards and their appropriate committees);
- Leadership (administrative structures, administrative training, and succession planning);
- Academic programming, including instructional design, delivery, and assessment;
- The integration of current technologies with the teaching/learning process;
- Enhanced guidance and counseling programs;
- Communication programs to involve a broader range of stakeholders in supporting the mission of Catholic elementary schools as critical to the future of Catholic education;
- More effective marketing for image and enrollment;
- Comprehensive institutional advancement programs that include marketing the schools for image as well as resources through programs of fundraising, annual events, annual giving, and planned giving programs;
- Collaborative strategic planning within regions.

Public/Private School Comparisons

According to the NCEA report, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) showed that for the 2011-2012 school year (latest data available) there were 30,861 private elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Private schools account for 23.8% of all schools in the U.S. Private schools enroll approximately 4.5 million Pre-K-12 students, representing 8.3% of total elementary and secondary school enrollment in the United States. NCEA reported, "Schools which are classified as 'other religious' constitute 46.1% of private schools, Catholic schools represent 22.3% and non-sectarian 31.7%. In contrast to the number of schools, there is a higher percentage of students in Catholic schools, which enroll 42.9% of private school students while other religious schools enroll 37.3% and non-sectarian 19.8%." In 1965, Catholic

education comprised 68% of the schools and 87% of the enrollment in private education. Today Catholic schools comprise 22.3% of private schools yet enroll 42.9% of the private school population due to the fact that there are many small religiously-affiliated schools which have been established over that time. Market share for Catholic schools has decreased significantly over the past two decades.

Good News – National Graduation Rates and College Attendance

NCEA reports the following graduation rates for American high schools:

<u>Type of School</u>	<u>Graduation Rate</u>
Catholic	99.0%
Other Religious	97.8%
Non-Sectarian	95.2%
Public Schools	78.2%*

*Actual high school diplomas presented

NCEA reports the following college attendance comparisons:

<u>Type of School</u>	<u>*College Attendance %</u>
Catholic	85.7%
Other Religious	62.1%
Non-Sectarian	56.1%
Public Schools	39.5%

* % of high school graduates who attend 4-year colleges

Implications:

This is remarkably good news which should be utilized in Catholic school marketing programs on a regular, consistent, and frequent basis. The ability to couple this information with the success that Catholic elementary school pupils enjoy in the most rigorous Catholic and private high schools is also worthy of regular publication. The implications of this good news need to be marketed not only at the individual school level, but even more broadly through diocesan and national campaigns.

School Boards

NCEA reports that since 1994, when data on boards was first collected, the percentage of schools with boards has increased from 14.3% to the current level of 85.1%. However, no mention is made of the type of board being utilized. It has been the experience of Catholic School Management consultants that the vast majority of parish and inter-parish elementary and middle schools utilize Advisory/Consultative Boards, while the vast majority of religious community-owned high schools and an increasing percentage of diocesan-owned high schools utilize Boards of Limited Jurisdiction. Generally, boards that have limited jurisdiction (sometimes known as Boards of Specified Jurisdiction) have members that take a more active “ownership” of the school thereby strengthening their viability and vitality.

Tuition and Costs

On average, Catholic elementary school tuition is \$3,673, or 68.1% of cost per pupil. The average Catholic high school freshman tuition is \$9,622, or 81.6% of cost per pupil.

Over 90% of both elementary and secondary schools provide some form of financial assistance, although virtually all report that their financial assistance funds are woefully inadequate.

Implications:

It is clear that the vast majority of Catholic elementary and secondary schools need to enhance their endowments and provide more scholarships and financial aid on an ongoing basis. Again, it is the experience of Catholic School Management consultants that schools with Boards of Limited Jurisdiction generally have more sophisticated and successful development programs, including programs of annual giving, planned giving, and periodic capital campaigns. All of these programs will need to be strengthened in the years ahead in an effort to ensure that financial assistance and scholarships are available. Perpetuating the affordability of Catholic schools at all levels is critical to their future, and central to the mission of Catholic education.

Catholic School Management, a division of Christian Brothers Services, is a full-service, comprehensive, consulting organization supporting Catholic Education with research, direct consultative guidance, training programs and publications. CSM provides the highest level of professional and personalized service to Catholic educational institutions both within the United States and internationally.

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Catholic Schools – Critical to Church Vitality

In its Winter 2015 bulletin, “The CARA Report,” the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University reported that “Catholic schools are linked to Church vitality.” Presenting at the November 2014 U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ annual meeting, CARA researcher Mark Gray highlighted excerpts from a variety of past CARA research. These included:

- A CARA 2012 survey of Catholic teenagers, aged 14 to 17, discovered that 14% had attended a Catholic school and 18% had some Catholic schooling plus parish religious education, but 2 in 3 had no exposure to Catholic schools at all.
- Weekly Mass attendance among members of the Millennial generation (born 1982 or later) is 34% for those who attended a Catholic primary school and 39% for those who attended a Catholic secondary school, but only 5% for those who never attended a Catholic school.
- The proportion of never-married Millennial male Catholics who ever considered becoming a priest or brother was 26% among those who attended a Catholic primary or secondary school, but only 9% for those with no Catholic schooling.
- Similarly, the percentages of young Millennial Catholic females who ever considered becoming a sister or nun were 13% among those who attended a Catholic primary school, 16% for secondary school, but only 6% for those who never attended Catholic school.

Mark Gray went on to note that while only 37% of Post-Vatican II Catholics (born 1961-1981) and 23% of Millennial Catholics attended a Catholic school, half or more of new priests and brothers attended Catholic primary schools as did 41% of new sisters and 45% of young lay ecclesial ministers.

Implications:

It is clear from the above research that Catholic schools are not only important today in integrating elements of faith with day-to-day learning, but they are critical to the long-term viability and vitality of the Catholic Church. All of us at Catholic School Management stand ready to assist bishops, diocesan superintendents, school board leaders, pastors, and school administrators in strengthening Catholic schools for the future. At the very least, more attention needs to be paid to governance structures, board member training, administrator training, enrollment management, development programs, strategic planning, clarity of mission, and effective and proven marketing programs.

Catholic schools are important to children, families, society, and to the future vitality of the Catholic Church.