



# ARCHDIOCESE OF CINCINNATI

Office of Educational Services

August 28, 2020

Dear Editor,

On August 23, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* published an article entitled, "Meager Results for Ohio Private School Vouchers" that asserted private schools divert funding away from public schools and fail to "meet the academic caliber set by the neighboring public school districts." The metric used in this article, comparing public districts to non-public schools on state testing, is deeply flawed and overly simplistic. This inaccurate analysis is at best misguided, or worse, inherently biased against non-public schools, including many faith-based schools that parents freely choose with state scholarships. This is more of an "apples to blueberries" than an "apples to apples" comparison.

According to the Ohio Department of Education, private school enrollment makes up 9% of students in the state. Of those, Catholic schools educate about 67%, less than 25% of this population attend Catholic schools on EdChoice scholarships. State tests are only mandated for those who receive scholarships; not for the entire student population. The data used in the article inaccurately compares this fraction of private school students to entire public school districts.

These state test scores reflect just one facet of the overall assessment plan for students in Catholic schools. In Catholic schools, most feature national and diocesan standardized testing, end of course exams, religious education tests, data from progress monitoring, and comprehensive student work portfolios. The narrow summation of Catholic schools in this article fails to demonstrate the well-documented association of higher proficiency the longer a student remains in a non-public school. Dramatic improvements in performance typically take more than one year to achieve for those who became scholarship eligible because of educational or economic disadvantages. A data point not mentioned in the article is the graduation rate from Catholic high schools in Ohio is 96%, including EdChoice scholarship students.

Catholic schools do not exist in opposition to public schools. Catholic schools and public schools are not competitors, but partners. Parents deserve to choose freely from many exceptional school options, representing the best learning environment for their children. The Catholic schools in Ohio are grateful to the State of Ohio for leading the nation in supporting the parental right to choose the educational option that best matches their family values.

The average cost of educating a public school student in Ohio is \$12,472 (2019) of which the state contributes on average 43% to the public schools' budgets, and the local community's share (property taxes) averages 42%. According to the National Catholic Education Association, Catholic schools spend, on average, \$6,293 per elementary school student and \$16,357 per high school student, or an average of

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\$11,325, per pupil. EdChoice Scholarships, when available, only provide a maximum of \$4,650 per student at the elementary level and \$6,000 at the high school level, meaning that Catholic schools must find additional resources to fill the gap, relying on the generosity of communities that believe in the schools' mission and are committed to serving as many children as possible.

In conclusion, Catholic school students are far more than a test score, and to reduce the Catholic school experience to a single number is to disparage the hard work of our mission-driven educators. Rather than setting a false comparison between Catholic and public schools, it would be better to focus educational discussions around the needs all students have this fall. Whether online, hybrid, or in-person, all educators are working tirelessly to serve the academic, emotional, and social needs of each and every student.

Sadly, the *Enquirer's* article is likely to exacerbate the tension between public and non-public schools at a time all school leaders should be coming together as partners in the all-important work of serving the 1.72 million K-12 students in Ohio. Perhaps everyone needs to have a little more faith in education to carry all of us through these tough times.

Catholic Superintendents of Ohio

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