



Special Report

Serving Dioceses, Parishes, and Religious Communities Since 1964

Spring 2006



The **NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION** commissioned CARA to conduct this research

to obtain a comprehensive picture of the present status of U.S. Catholic elementary schools. The researchers describe the report as “cautiously positive.” The research substantiates that there is clearly a demand for the schools: parents whose children are enrolled are generally pleased with the school and quality religious education was ranked first in importance by parents when choosing a Catholic school.

Demographic shifts—“people moved and the schools didn’t”—have proven to be the most critical reason for enrollment losses and school closures. The economic downturn in inner cities is a challenging problem for schools in light of rising operating costs and needed tuition increases. The availability of some public or private tuition assistance raises the likelihood parents will enroll their children in a Catholic school. This is good news, indeed, but addressing this issue calls for serious work

This CARA report gives a better picture of a very complex landscape. It can provide insight for Catholic educators across the country to use in planning innovative paths to the future. The National Catholic Educational Association is committed, through this research and our own planning, to lead and to assist others in finding answers to the strategic questions this report generates.

—Karen M. Ristau, *NCEA President*

PRIMARY TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND OUTLOOK: *A Special Report on U. S. Catholic Elementary Schools, 2000–2005*

According to data collected by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) the number of Catholic elementary schools in the United States declined by 339 to a total of 6,574 between the 2000-2001 and the 2004-2005 school years, a 5 percent drop in the number of schools for this period. A net decline in the number of Catholic elementary schools occurred in 87 of the 176 Latin Rite territorial dioceses whose bishops belong to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). In 49 dioceses there was no change (28 percent) and in 40 dioceses the number of elementary schools increased (23 percent).

TABLE 1: CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES AND BY NCEA REGION, 2000 TO 2005

	Elementary schools in 2005	Change Since 2000	Students per school in 2005
United States	6,574	-339	271
NCEA Regions			
New England	427	-30	244
Midwest	1,729	-143	283
Great Lakes	1,638	-134	258
Plains	763	-26	239
Southeast	808	+2	320
West/Far West	1,209	-8	267

LONG-TERM TRENDS

Recent school closures are part of a long-term realignment process affecting the Catholic elementary school system that quickened between 2000 and 2005. Some schools reached critical tipping points during this period as the demographic changes that had been taking place for more than five decades caught up with the most vulnerable of campuses—many in the Midwest and Northeast of the United States that had been established to serve the Catholic population of the early 20th century. In other areas, demographic changes have led to an increase in demand for Catholic elementary schools—often in areas with too few

campuses available. Thus, the counterweight to school closings during the 2000 to 2005 period is the continued need for waiting lists in many schools—especially those in the South and West, as well as New England. Rather than any national decline in demand for Catholic elementary schooling, the net loss of schools during this six-year period occurred in part because too few new campuses were established in areas that have waiting lists.

The most substantial problem for many of the Catholic schools that have faced fiscal problems is simple—a lack of Catholic parents and children. Eight in ten of all the schools that closed in the 2000 to 2005 period were in the Mideast Region (Delaware, Washington D.C., Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania) and Great Lakes Region (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin). These two NCEA regions encompass a geographic area that includes a majority of the Catholic elementary schools currently in operation (3,367 schools; 55 percent) and in part overlap an area known as the “Rust Belt,” which has experienced declining levels of economic activity and declining population totals through migration—primarily to suburbs and the “Sun Belt” for more than three decades.

The average year current Catholic elementary schools were established is 1936. Only 10 percent of Catholic elementary schools currently in operation were built after 1974. This distribution of schools is problematic because campuses and buildings don’t move, but people often do. Many Catholics have moved out of areas that were once Catholic population centers and no region was more affected by this than the Rust Belt. Of the top 25 declining counties—that have a combined Catholic population loss of more than 1.6 million between 1952 and 2000—11 are in the NCEA Mideast Region.

The current and emerging geographic centers for potential Catholic elementary students in the 21st century no longer closely overlap as well with the Catholic elementary school system that was primarily designed and built in the early 20th century. In 2005, 22 percent of Catholic elementary schools were located in counties that have had a loss in Catholic population or very low growth since the 1950s. Twenty-three percent are in moderate growth counties and 54 percent are in areas of high Catholic population growth.

Compounding the problem of long-term population loss in these regions is a weakening of attachments to parish life among Catholics as measured by their frequency of attending Mass. In 1955, 74 percent of self-identified Catholics told Gallup survey researchers that they had attended Mass at least once in the last seven days. In 2004, only 45 percent of self-identified Catholics responded similarly in Gallup surveys. With fewer Catholics regularly attending Mass, even as the Catholic population grows, the number of Catholics regularly involved with parish life has remained stable. Although the Catholic population nearly doubled between 1955 and 2004, once the percentage attending Mass weekly

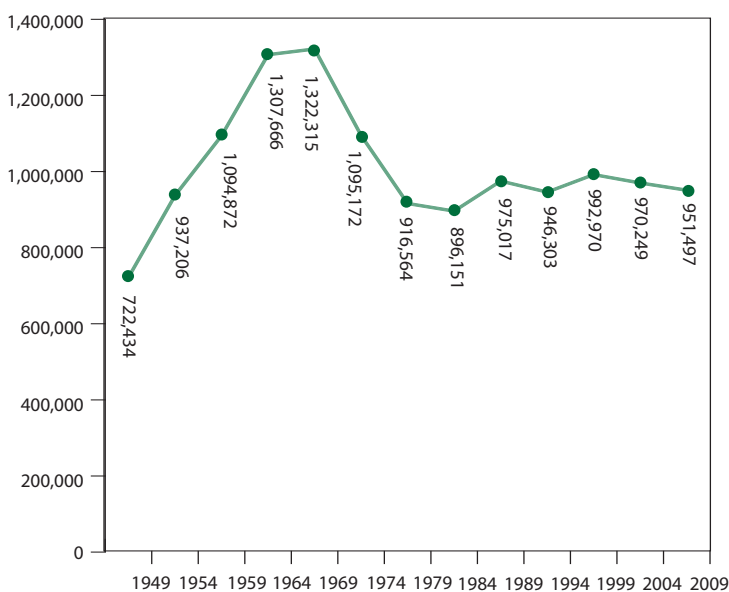
is factored in, the estimated number of Mass attending Catholics per parish is nearly identical (1,534 in 1955 and 1,544 in 2004).

A CARA analysis of diocesan baptismal counts indicates that the number of potential Catholic 1st grade enrollments, as estimated with baptismal cohorts, is also very consistent to that of the 1950s. Projecting baptismal cohort counts forward to potential enrollments for the first grade (assuming that Catholic parents who baptize their children in the faith are most likely to consider Catholic schooling and that these baptisms occur close to the time of birth) at five-year intervals from 1943 to 2003 it is possible to estimate the number of students likely to be eligible to begin the 1st grade, from 1949 to 2009. The estimated pool of Catholics ready to begin elementary school in 2004 is very similar to that of 1954.

CHOICES OF THE CATHOLIC PARENT

Even with a net number of school closings in recent years, the outlook for Catholic elementary schools is cautiously positive. The survey of Catholic parents conducted for this project indicates that 23 percent of those who had children of elementary school age during the 2000 to 2005 period have enrolled at least one child in a Catholic elementary school. An additional 4 percent attempted to enroll at least one child but could not—most often because they could not afford tuition (76 percent of these parents) and/or the school had a waiting list (31 percent of these parents). Twenty-six percent of Catholic parents who have children too young to attend elementary school say they intend to enroll them in a Catholic

FIGURE 1. INFANT BAPTISMS PROJECTED TO YEAR OF POTENTIAL ENROLLMENT FOR 1ST GRADE FIVE-YEAR INTERVALS FROM 1949 TO 2009



elementary school in the future. These parents who have or intend to enroll a child in a Catholic elementary schools often have strong connections to parish life. Parents who attend Mass at least once a month are much more likely than those attending less frequently to have enrolled a child in a Catholic elementary school (39 percent compared to 13 percent).

Overall, Catholic parents' evaluations of Catholic elementary schools are generally positive. Specifically, Catholic parents believe that Catholic elementary schools are better than public schools in terms of moral issues, discipline, and academic standards. Catholic parents are especially likely to agree that Catholic schools are better at teaching good morals and values than public schools.

However, Catholic parents also have areas of agreement regarding some aspects of Catholic schooling that are not seen as favorably. Two-thirds of parents "somewhat" or "strongly" agree that Catholic schools serve primarily middle and upper income students. Slightly fewer "somewhat" or "strongly" agree that public schools are a better financial value than Catholic schools (57 percent).

Catholic parents who have enrolled a child in a Catholic elementary school are most likely to cite the following aspects of that school as being "very important" to this decision: quality religious education (81 percent), safe environment (79 percent), quality academic instruction (78 percent), and discipline and order (65 percent). And 99 percent or more of school leaders surveyed for this project say their schools are at least "somewhat" able to provide each of these aspects. However, it is somewhat apparent that school leaders may not be completely aware of the relative importance parents enrolling children place on some of these school aspects.

In the surveys, both Catholic parents enrolling children and Catholic elementary school leaders were provided a list of school aspects. School leaders were

TABLE 2: HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT DIFFERENT TYPES OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS?
Percentage of Catholic parents responding:

	"Somewhat" or "Strongly" Agree	"Strongly" Agree Only
Catholic schools are better at teaching good morals and values than public schools	76%	29%
Catholic schools serve primarily middle and upper income students	66	16
Catholic schools are better at providing discipline, when needed, than public schools	64	17
Catholic schools require students and parents to do too much fundraising to keep up with the money spent in public schools	63	17
Catholic schools have higher academic standards than public schools	63	17
Public schools are a better financial value than Catholic schools	57	20
Public schools have more up-to-date technology than Catholic schools	50	12
Public school campuses are less safe than Catholic school campuses	49	10
Charter schools provide an environment that is similar to Catholic schools	46	4
Catholic schools cannot accommodate students with disabilities	39	8
Catholic schools don't release enough information about test scores for me to know how good they are academically	36	5
Teachers at Catholic schools are not as likely as those at public schools to be certified or have as many graduate degrees	35	7
Catholic schools have too much trouble keeping good teachers	32	3
Principals at Catholic schools can be trusted more than those at public schools	31	5
Catholic school students are more racially and ethnically diverse than those in public schools	22	4

asked, "In your experience how important is each of the following to parents who decide to send their children to this school?" A comparison of their responses to the levels of importance expressed by Catholic parents who have enrolled children provides some insight into the differences between what actually is important to parents who have or will be enrolling children and what Catholic elementary school leaders perceive as being important to the parents of their students.

Figure 2 (next page) is arranged so that

the vertical axis represents the percentage of Catholic parents that say an aspect is "very important" to their decision to enroll their child. The horizontal axis represents the percentage of school leaders who say an aspect is "very important" to the parents enrolling children at their school. The dashed line running from the lower left corner to the top right corner is a line representing "perfect agreement" between school leaders and parents and any dot on or close to this line represents similar responses from both parents and school leaders.

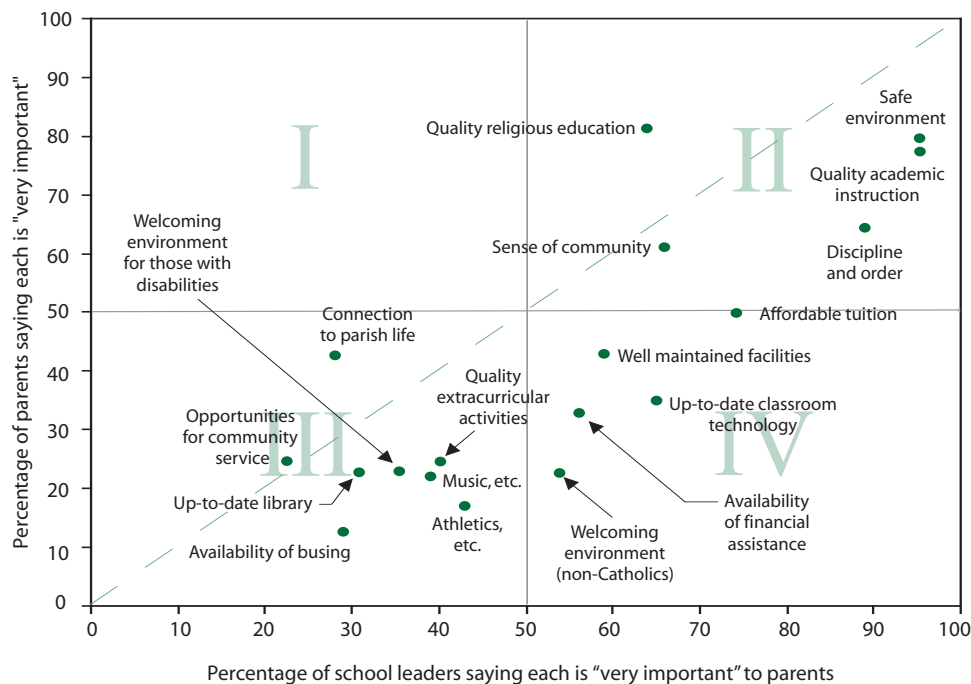
Cell “I” represents those aspects that are very important to a majority of these parents, although only a minority of school leaders perceive these as important to parents. As one might expect, this cell is empty and thus school leaders are not unaware of some factor that is very important to many Catholic parents.

Cell “II” represents those aspects that a majority of parents and school leaders either consider or perceive as being “very important” to enrollment decisions: quality religious education, safe environment, quality academic instruction, discipline and order, and a sense of community. Quality religious education, discipline and order, and a sense of community lies well above the dashed line, indicating a disconnect between how school leaders perceive the importance of quality religious education among parents enrolling children and how prevalent this perception actually is among parents. At the same time, school leaders tend to be slightly more likely than parents enrolling children to see a safe environment, quality academic instruction, discipline and order, and a sense of community as being “very important” to parents.

Cell “III” contains the school aspects that are unlikely to be central to the decisions of Catholic parents who have chosen to enroll a child. However, 43 percent of Catholic parents enrolling children say a connection to parish life is “very important” to their decision but only 28 percent of school leaders perceive this as being “very important” to parents of their students.

Cell “IV” contains those aspects that a majority of school leaders perceive as being “very important” to the parents who enroll their children at their school but which only half or fewer of the Catholic parents enrolling children in Catholic elementary schools actually consider being “very important” to their decision. Perhaps most surprising here is the aspect of an affordable tuition, which 74 percent of school leaders perceive as being “very important” to parents compared to only 50

FIGURE 2. SCHOOL LEADER PERCEPTIONS OF “VERY IMPORTANT” ASPECTS vs PARENT RESPONSES FOR “VERY IMPORTANT” ASPECTS



percent of Catholic parents who responded that this is “very important.”

AFFORDABILITY

Figure 3 (next page) demonstrates the relationship between the household income level of Catholic parents and 1) their likelihood of enrolling a child in a Catholic elementary school and 2) the importance they place on affordable tuition. Forty-five percent of Catholic parents earning \$125,000 or more in household income have enrolled a child in a Catholic elementary school. As one might expect among those parents enrolling children who are of this income group, only 25 percent indicate that an affordable tuition was “very important” to their decision. This relationship is mirrored among other income groups. Catholic parents with lower household incomes are less likely to enroll and more likely to consider an affordable tuition as being “very important.”

Catholic parents who have a child of elementary school age and have not enrolled

a child in a Catholic elementary school are most likely to cite the following as being at least “somewhat” of a problem: tuition costs (54 percent), insufficient tuition assistance (47 percent), and child’s school preferences (33 percent). Many school aspects related to the availability of up-to-date technology and resources, extracurricular programs, and after school care at Catholic elementary schools are of relatively low importance to Catholic parents.

Tuition data provided in the school leader survey conducted for this project shows that the average tuition for the first child enrolled in the 1st grade or higher in Catholic elementary schools jumped 17.8 percent, after adjusting for inflation, from \$2,276 per year to \$2,681 between 2000-01 and 2004-05. School leaders are most likely to cite tuition costs and insufficient tuition assistance as reasons parents are dissuaded from sending children to their school. One of the most consistent factors identified as increasing the probability that Catholic parents will enroll a child in a Catholic elementary school is the avail-

ability of publicly or privately funded vouchers, tax credits, or scholarships that can assist parents in paying tuition or other costs.

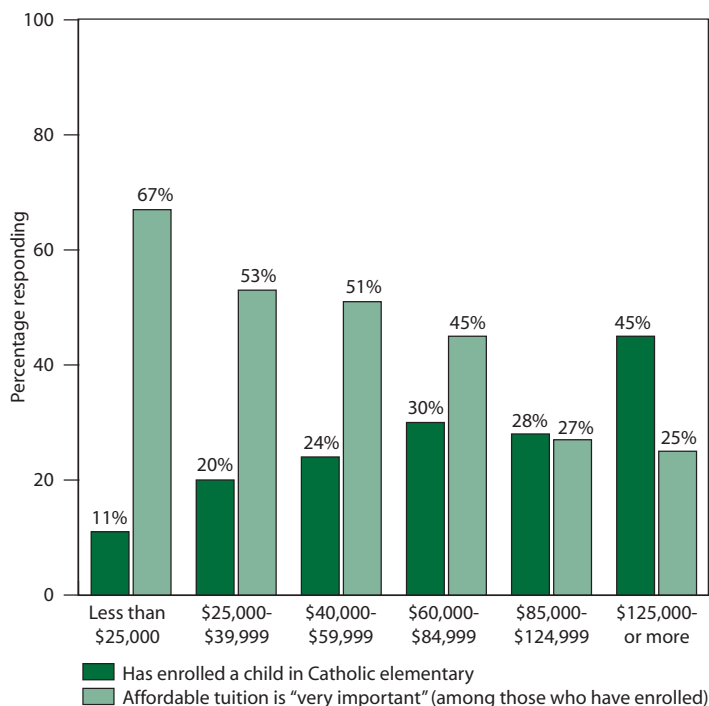
PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL LEADERS AND SUPERINTENDENTS

Survey responses from Catholic school leaders and diocesan schools superintendents reveal a cycle of forces that are linked to the economic and demographic realities noted above. Enrollments are the central issue of concern. Below are a few of the representative comments that describe the biggest challenges schools face and reasons for their financial instability.

School Leaders (principals or pastors of parishes with affiliated schools):

- *Enrollment because enrollment drives the school and has a huge part in what our tuition will be within the next five years. The number of children being baptized in the parishes that support us is very low. People seem to be moving away.*
- *Maintaining enrollment and affordable tuition. Since we are in the heart of [City Name] and there have been massive layoffs within the electronic/computer industry, many parents have lost jobs and are choosing to move to other areas or choosing schools without tuition.*

FIGURE 3. LIKELIHOOD OF ENROLLMENT AND AGREEMENT THAT AN AFFORDABLE TUITION WAS "VERY IMPORTANT" TO ENROLLMENT DECISIONS BY PARENTS' CURRENT HOUSEHOLD INCOME



- *Recruiting new families and keeping enrollment up while at the same time keeping costs down. The cost of running the school (esp. salaries, benefits, and maintenance) is increasing faster than we can increase tuition.*

Diocesan Superintendents:

- *Being a rural diocese in a seven year drought, some families relocate and some no longer have even the minimum discretionary money for Catholic schools. Also, the challenge to provide benefits and a just salary has boosted tuition.*
- *Demographics—large Catholic families moving out and non-Catholic families moving into rural areas; smaller families in general; rising costs—employee benefits such as health insurance; lower Sunday collections resulting in less parish subsidy.*
- *Decline in enrollment; loss in jobs; parents of low income; lack of financial support from parishes.*

Analysis of the survey responses reveals a strong connection between enrollment and school finances—with both being the most commonly cited issues of concern noted by school leaders and superintendents. When enrollments decline at a school the result has often been a fiscal crisis with, on average, 57 percent of annual income at Catholic elementary schools being derived from tuition. When these revenues fall with enrollments, schools must rely on increased subsidies from parishes or dioceses or other fundraising to cover shortfalls. If this can not be achieved the result is usually an increase in tuition for existing students, which may in turn decrease enrollments further. The analysis indicates that the schools least likely to be able to rely on tuition as a part of their annual income are in the Mideast, Great Lakes, urban inner city areas, and rural areas. Schools with smaller enrollments and those with more low income students are also among the least able to rely on student tuitions for income. Even more worrisome, the survey of school leaders reveals that these schools that cannot rely heavily on tuition, and instead need parish and/or diocesan subsidies to make their budgets, are among the *most* likely to have been notified of a possible reduction in these subsidies in the future. These are likely the schools currently most at risk of closing.

substantial

TIPPING POINTS

Although changing demographics are highly correlated with patterns of change in Catholic schools, these are longer-term trends, which cannot completely explain the 5 percent decline in the number of Catholic elementary schools in the short-term. The temporal and geographic changes noted above were undoubtedly influencing enrollments in the 2000 to 2005 period, but one must ask what led to a quickening in the decline in the number of schools and students?

TABLE 3: ANNUAL TUITION FOR THE FIRST CHILD ENROLLED—1ST THROUGH 8TH GRADES

	2004-05	2000-01
Less than \$700	5%	7%
\$700 to \$1,799	19	34
\$1,800 to \$2,499	25	29
\$2,500 to \$3,249	26	21
\$3,250 or more	25	9
Unadjusted Dollars (nominal \$)		
Average tuition	\$2,681 (+28%)	\$2,099
Median tuition	\$2,500 (+28%)	\$1,950
2005 Dollars (real \$, adjusted for inflation)		
Average tuition	\$2,681 (+18%)	\$2,276
Median tuition	\$2,500 (+18%)	\$2,115

The analysis presented here reveals a convergence of these long-term trends with several other short-term events that created “tipping points.” These tipping points are *not* the root cause of school closings. Instead they represent events that precipitated closings that otherwise would have occurred eventually. In general terms, tipping points are often discussed as the events that occur within a process that precipitate an increase in the tempo. This is precisely the pattern of change identified among Catholic elementary schools in the 2000 to 2005 period.

There are a number of local and national tipping points that affected schools during the last half-decade. At the local level, these included the September 11 terrorist attacks, hurricanes and other natural disasters, layoffs in local industries, rapid shifts in the housing market, and other specific events described by school leaders and diocesan superintendents. On a national level, schools were profoundly affected by an economic recession that began in 2001 and lasted through 2003. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) the recession lasted from March 2001 to November 2001, as gross domestic product, adjusted for inflation, declined slightly from the levels of late-2000. However, the economic downturn can also be measured by job statistics as occurring between 2000 through 2003, where the average unemployment rate increased from 4 percent to 6 percent with a peak level of unemployment in June 2003 of 6.5 percent. An economic downturn would be expected to negatively affect parish and diocesan giving among Catholics in general as well as the ability of some Catholic parents to afford school tuition.

There is evidence of changing patterns of financial giving among Catholics during the 2000 to 2005 period. The availability of parish and diocesan school subsidies are indirectly dependent on the giving of Catholics. CARA’s national series of polls have shown a 10 percentage point decline among Catholics who say they have given to their diocesan appeals since early 2002. The CARA Catholic Poll (CCP) surveys, as well as other published poll results, indicate that many of those who report a decrease in their giving have been most affected by personal economic factors.

At the same time that many parents were affected by the economic downturn, school leaders were attempting to respond to financial changes that made it increasingly difficult to provide Catholic schooling without the need for greater parish and/or diocesan subsidies. Many school leaders cited their school’s biggest challenge as being the costs of running a school—especially those associated with providing healthcare and other employee benefits, energy costs, and costs associated with the maintenance of facilities. Costs for benefits have risen at rates well above inflation in recent years. The National Coalition on Health Care reports that in 2004 employer health insurance premiums increased by 11.2 percent from 2003. That is an increase four times the rate of inflation and represented the fourth consecutive year that these premiums experienced double-digit increases.

Another short-term event of at least some importance was the public accusations of sex abuse by clergy reported in the media in 2002. Yet only 15 percent of Catholic parents with children of elementary school age or younger say their decision to send a child to a Catholic elementary school was “very much” impacted by allegations of abuse. Other factors, including tuition costs and the availability of financial assistance were substantially more important to enrollment decisions of parents than the sex abuse crisis. Instead, the impact of allegations of sex abuse was more a factor at the diocesan level. Yet here too it is difficult to disentangle the impact from other long-term changes including declining numbers of priests and Mass attendance. Many dioceses, some more affected by allegations than others, undertook reorganization during the 2000 to 2005 period. In some cases this included the closing and merging of parishes and schools—often in areas where Catholic populations had been in decline for decades. The allegations of sex abuse that surfaced in the 2000 to 2005 period were not a primary factor in school closings, but were part of the forces leading to changes—less so in parents’ minds and more so in decisions at the diocesan level.

ENSURING STRONG SCHOOLS

The short-term financial crunch of the 2000 to 2005 period is among the simplest of problems to understand but also among the most difficult to solve. Yet as the survey of parents showed, tuition assistance in some form is among the *most* important factors in

boosting the probability of enrollment in Catholic elementary schools. Both parents and school leaders were unlikely to cite things like extracurricular activities or an up-to-date library as being central to enrollment decisions. Instead, many Catholic parents who want to send a child to a Catholic elementary school do not primarily make this choice for the computers or the drama programs. More often than not they say it is for the combination of quality religious education and quality academic instruction—the two aspects school leaders are most likely to say their school is “very” able to provide.

The continued success of Catholic elementary schools depends less on providing something new or flashy. Instead success comes from making what these institutions already do best more affordable for the average Catholic family.

In some areas, Catholic school leaders have also had success reaching out to non-Catholics to increase enrollments. Schools with the highest percentages of non-Catholic students are in the Mideast and in the urban inner city, areas heavily affected by migration patterns. The survey results show that school leaders are careful to consider that non-Catholic parents may be more attracted to the academic reputation of their schools rather than its ability to provide religious education. Catholic schools in urban areas continue to be an attractive alternative. However, these schools are among those with the highest costs and tuitions, perhaps limiting future enrollment expansions.

WAITING LISTS

Outside of some areas in the Rust Belt and some others in the inner city, most Catholic schools are healthy. This continues to be reflected in the numbers of schools that have waiting lists for enrollment. About three in ten Catholic elementary schools had waiting lists during the 2004-05 school year. This is nearly unchanged from five years ago. However, mirroring enrollment trends, the number of children on these waiting lists has declined from an average of about 26 in 2000-01 to 17 in 2004-05. In some areas, this may reflect growing frustration or even parents giving up in areas where the number of schools is insufficient for the rate of Catholic population growth.

Newer schools, suburban schools, and those in New England, the Southeast and the West/Far West are most likely to have waiting lists and comparatively large numbers of students waiting to enroll on these lists. Nearly four in ten schools that were established after 1975 or those that have had new construction in the last three decades have a waiting list, whereas only 22 percent of older campuses do. The newer school sites with waiting lists also have a higher average number of students on these lists than the older schools that have such lists (21 students compared to 13 students). Suburban and urban non-inner city schools are more likely than

rural and urban inner city schools to have a waiting list and have larger numbers of students on these lists.

In response to a question about the schools “biggest challenge” in the next five years, more than 100 school leaders cited increasing enrollments and/or grade levels. Once again, this represents the dynamic that Catholic people move, schools don’t. In high Catholic population growth areas—many in suburbs or in urban non-inner city areas—there are shortages of space in Catholic elementary schools, even though many of these schools currently have comparatively high tuitions.

This again is a simple problem to understand but difficult to solve. Building new Catholic schools or expanding existing campuses in the 21st century is a much more expensive task than building schools in the early 20th century. These efforts require the acquisition of significant start-up funds, initiating capital campaigns, and understanding local demography and demand for Catholic schooling.

The Catholic Church and its school leaders need to better understand when and where Catholic families are coming from and build and plan accordingly. This requires some tough decisions about the viability of schools in areas affected by Catholic population loss and economic downturns. It also requires a commitment to understanding the needs of areas where there is Catholic population growth and increasing demand for enrollment in Catholic elementary schools. Perhaps most important, the research shows that availability of vouchers, tax credits, scholarships, and other forms of tuition assistance make it *more* likely that Catholic parents will enroll their children in Catholic elementary schools.

Only 15 percent of Catholic elementary schools are in an area where there is a publicly funded voucher, tax credit or scholarship program that can assist parents in paying tuition for Catholic elementary school. Campuses in these voucher areas have higher enrollments, on average than those at schools without this assistance available (296 students compared to 279 students). Also 37 percent of Catholic parents in areas that have either publicly or privately financed vouchers or scholarships have enrolled a child in a Catholic elementary school compared to only 22 percent of parents living in areas without this assistance.

CONCLUSION

The 2000 to 2005 period was one of painful, yet in many cases, necessary adjustments for Catholic elementary schools in the United States. Many of these campuses in areas that no longer have large Catholic populations struggled to stay open or closed their doors in the 2000 to 2005 period. However, in other areas of the country where the Catholic population has been increasing rapidly (such as Los Angeles, Dallas, Las Vegas, Miami) demand for Catholic schooling is likely to become even stronger in the

This report summarizes findings from a series of surveys and trend analyses regarding Catholic elementary school education in the United States. This study was commissioned by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). CARA researchers used NCEA schools databases and CARA surveys of Catholic school leaders (principals and pastors of parishes with schools), diocesan superintendents of education, and a national random sample of Catholic parents. The survey of Catholic parents was conducted in November 2005 and includes 1,419 respondents (margin of error of ± 2.6 percentage points). Parents included in the sample self-identified as Catholic and had at least one child age 18 or younger. The school leader survey was conducted in Spring and Summer 2005 and includes elementary school principals and pastors at parishes with an affiliated Catholic elementary school. Some 269 pastors and 510 principals completed questionnaires for a total of 780 respondents (margin of error of ± 3.3 percentage points). The survey of diocesan school superintendents was conducted in September 2005 and includes the responses of 143 superintendents (margin of error of ± 3.6 percentage points).

future. Thus the period studied here in part represents a realignment of Catholic elementary schooling to meet changes in the Catholic population that have been occurring for more than five decades. In this respect, the future of Catholic elementary schooling, on a national level, remains as strong as it has ever been. As

the results of this study indicate, this strength can be further solidified by ensuring the availability of tuition assistance programs for parents, continuing to emphasize the quality religious education provided by Catholic schools, and building new campuses in emerging Catholic population centers.

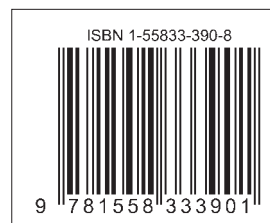
The results of this study support the notion that many school campuses need to seek out new funding sources. Where to look for these? One largely untapped source is the alumni of Catholic elementary schools. According to CARA's CCP poll series, more than four in ten Catholic adults have attended a Catholic elementary school in their youth. Increased national awareness about declining opportunities for Catholic children today to experience this same type of education may create an increased willingness to financially give to Catholic schools. The survey of Catholic parents conducted for this project indicates that more than eight in ten of those who had attended a Catholic elementary school as a child rate this experience as either "excellent" or "good." The future of Catholic elementary schools currently most threatened may in part depend on the willingness of those who attended these campuses decades ago to help ensure Catholic children today can get the type of education they were able to receive.

Overall, Catholic elementary schools are healthy—some even to the point of having to turn away, at least temporarily, parents who seek to enroll children. However, few if any of these campuses operate without needs and some are dangerously close to closing their doors. The responsibility to ensure Catholic parents continue to have the option of sending their child to a Catholic elementary school rests with many, including school leaders, teachers and staff, parishes, dioceses, Catholic parents themselves, as well as those who have been fortunate enough to spend at least a part of their primary school years in a Catholic elementary school.

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Copies of the full (275 pages) report may be purchased from the National Catholic Educational Association at <http://www.ncea.org/store/index.asp>

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CARA was founded by Catholic leaders in 1964 to put social science research tools at the service of the Catholic Church in the United States. For information on CARA and its mission of research, analysis, and planning, contact: CARA at 2300 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20007 • Phone: 202-687-8080 • Fax: 202-687-8083 • CARA@georgetown.edu • <http://cara.georgetown.edu>

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