

CATHOLIC DIOCESE *of* RALEIGH

Office of Education
Catholic Schools

MARKET RESEARCH AND CURRENT TRENDS IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

June, 2022



From: The Catholic School Choice: Understanding the Perspectives of Parents and Opportunities for More Engagement, NCEA, 2018

“This research focuses on perceptions of the general public and primarily views from parents of children who are not enrolled in Catholic schools.”

Is there a market for Catholic schools? Yes. Satisfaction with public schools is lacking, and parents feel empowered to seek out better quality K-12 education options for their child. While concerns about tuition costs weigh heavily on the minds of many parents, a majority are open to considering a Catholic school for their child.

Are Americans, and parents specifically, familiar with the product? No. Catholic schools suffer from a low profile in this country. In fact, most receive the little information they do about Catholic schools from the news media, not from their parish or individual schools. Due to a lack of proactive communications promoting Catholic schools and what they offer, familiarity with the product is shallow. This lack of knowledge has fueled speculation and misperceptions about Catholic schools’ mission and success educating children in this country which appears to have deterred parents from considering Catholic schools.

Where do parents perceive Catholic schools are failing to meet expectations? Academic rigor and diversity in the classroom. There is a prevailing belief among parents that Catholic schools place more emphasis on religious instruction and less on academics. Catholic schools are thought to be particularly weak in STEM as many believe that a modern science curriculum conflicts with teachings of the Catholic Church (and are therefore avoided). Parents also feel strongly that Catholic schools lack a diverse learning environment. This encompasses the makeup of the student body (in terms of ethnicity, religious affiliation, socio-economic standing, and learning needs) as well as in its teaching. The research suggests parents believe Catholic schools have not evolved at the same pace as society, and as a result, is very narrow in its teachings and beliefs.

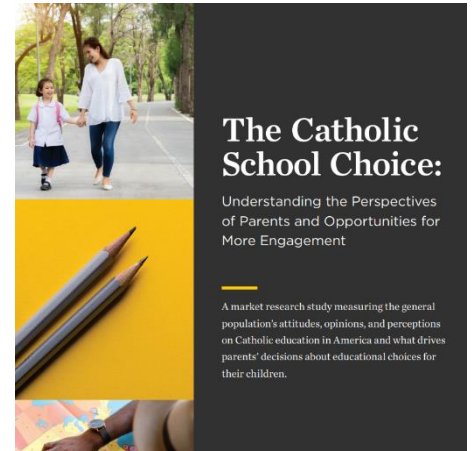
What strengths can Catholic schools leverage? Strong character development for its students. Catholic schools are widely known for providing a safe environment where students receive individualized attention in small class settings and strong character development grounded in good morals and values. Character development, however, seems to set Catholic schools apart from other private and specialized public schools (e.g., public charter schools and magnet schools). Furthermore, parents recognize a need for their child to have a strong moral background in light of recent changes in society and technology.

What’s required to increase parents’ consideration? Proactive, targeted communications. Catholic schools have an opportunity to increase enrollment in the short-term using targeted communications that bridge knowledge and perception gaps:

Information about tuition assistance programs, and

Targeted, nuanced messages to increase consideration – Catholic schools should focus external communications around those themes that do the best job persuading parents to consider a Catholic school for their child. While different groups of parents will be influenced by somewhat different messages, the themes that Catholic schools should focus on, particularly when targeting Catholic parents, include:

- Catholic schools offer a good balance between academic and religious instruction, including Catholic schools’ focus on academic excellence, including STEM.
- Catholic schools offer an environment where everyone is welcome (a diverse environment that reflects different schools of thought, cultures, beliefs, and learning needs).
- Catholic schools place an emphasis on community service and volunteerism; Catholic schools create good local community and global citizens



From: Heterogeneity in Parental Priorities for What Children Should Learn in Schools and Potential Implications for the Future of Catholic Schools, Quentin Wodon

Wodon, Q. (2022). Heterogeneity in Parental Priorities for What Children Should Learn in Schools and Potential Implications for the Future of Catholic Schools. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 25 (1).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.2501082022>

“To survive, if not thrive, Catholic schools will need to demonstrate that they provide students with a distinctive educational experience that responds to parental priorities for what children should learn in schools. That educational experience should ideally be attractive not only to parents who already have children enrolled in Catholic schools, but also to parents who are willing to consider Catholic schools for their children but have not enrolled their children in one.”

“When tuition must cover costs, it remains a constraint for many parents interested in Catholic schools. This also means that to attract students, Catholic schools must perform better than public and charter schools (and other types of private schools) in some dimensions that matter to parents—even though they often have fewer resources to do so. This is a rather difficult task, but it is the challenge with which Catholic schools in the United States are confronted”

“There is scope for growth if Catholic schools were able to convince more parents to enroll their children in the schools. Yet apart from the issue of affordability that has not been discussed here, convincing a larger share of parents to enroll their children in Catholic schools requires paying attention to their priorities. How this is to be done will vary between individual schools and school districts, but some broad lessons seem to emerge from the analysis.”

“First, Catholic schools need to compete more forcefully in the areas of academic excellence and the acquisition of skills...Second, Catholic schools need to think hard about how they can help students deepen their faith...Third, the findings about the emphasis (or lack thereof) placed by various groups of parents on the role of schools in deepening their children’s faith may be related to findings about the priority (or lack thereof) granted by various groups of parents to the role of schools in teaching children to accept and embrace diversity.”

“The importance of the right of parents to choose within reasonable bounds the type of education that their children should receive is enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). That Article states that “[e]veryone has the right to education,” that it should be free and compulsory, at least at the elementary level, and equally accessible to all based on merit at higher levels. The Article states next that “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.” Educating the whole person is not a prerogative of Catholic or religious schools—it should be (and often is) an aspiration for all schools. Finally, and this relates to school choice, Article 26 states that “[p]arents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.” When parental priorities are heterogenous, the ability for parents to choose between different types of schools for their children is a necessity for educational pluralism and it matters for the fulfilment of the right to education. As I have argued elsewhere, Catholic schools contribute in an important way to educational pluralism and thereby to the right to education (Wodon, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c). Unfortunately, in the United States, measures of educational pluralism based on the market share of various types of schools are in decline. Stemming the long-term decline in enrollment in Catholic schools would help ensure that parents indeed have the ability to “choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2276&context=ce>

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b <https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.2501082022>

From: The Potential of Catholic Schools: Public Virtues through Private Voucher,

Joseph Prud'homme, Washington College

Prud'homme, J. (2022). The Potential of Catholic Schools: Public Virtues through Private Voucher. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 25 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.2501052022>

“Philosophers of education have long debated the question of whether public or private primary and secondary schools provide students the best opportunity for educational success (Gross, 2018). This debate is now especially pronounced in terms of broad-based school choice programs, that is, initiatives extending tuition grants or tax credits to qualifying parents, making it easier for children to enroll in private schools—including, should parents choose, religious schools. Since programs of this nature permit state resources eventually to reach schools run by religious organizations, one major line of opposition has taken the form of constitutional challenges involving the separation of church and state.”

“Godwin and Ruderman, for example, document that students educated in religious schools in the United States have the same, if not more, levels of social trust and tolerance than public school graduates, and they demonstrate no increased prejudice levels and have a high level of willingness to engage in community service, including service in demographically diverse communities (2014, pp. 165-169)”

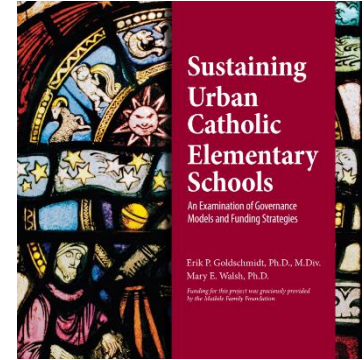
“Many Catholic schools in the United States either currently or potentially receiving students funded by the assistance of voucher or tax credit programs are likely committed to forging, at the appropriate time, young minds that are in fact capable of fully understanding and sympathetically engaging the diversity that defines contemporary social life. Freddoso, for example, notes that to engage non-believers on their own terms with “integrity” and “charity,” showing their views in their best possible light, has “been a staple of the Christian and especially the Catholic educational tradition since the beginning” (1999, p. 239). The traditional expression of Catholic philosophical engagement with differences in moral value is through natural law reasoning, with the works of Thomas Aquinas providing a highly regarded source of insight”

“The Church, in turn, has a rich tradition of rational assessment through philosophical analysis of the world surrounding her. True to this history, US Catholic secondary schools are known to most consistently offer high school instruction in philosophy, a discipline grounded in rational and critical assessment of a range of moral values. The American Philosophical Association reports that “parochial schools offer the most consistent opportunities for teaching philosophy” below the collegiate level. Reinforcing the tradition of philosophical instruction in Catholic schools are the findings of Klenig, which show that a robust level of trust in teachers and administrators is necessary for both students and parents to allow critical reasoning such as philosophy to be thoroughly engaged in high school curricula (2018, pp. 133-143). Evidence indicates that “parents who can choose private schools are more satisfied with their child’s school” (Rhinesmith 2017, p. 585). This in turn results in higher levels of trust in the schools’ staff and curricula, allowing for parents to accept courses, such as philosophy, that expose students to contending values. For these reasons, philosophy courses can further be seen as deeply rooted within Catholic secondary education.

” This conclusion allows us to hold—at a time when Catholic education is likely to gain opportunities both for growth and renewed criticism—that Catholic schools can instill values early, while cultivating a deep capacity for critical openness later in the educational process. As such, Catholic schools can indeed fulfill the charge of supplying contemporary society with open-minded, empathic, and critically engaged public leaders.”

From: Sustaining Urban Catholic Elementary Schools: An Examination of Governance Models and Funding Strategies. Goldschmidt, Erik P. and Walsh, Mary E. Boston College, 2011.

https://www.changingourworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Sustaining_Urban_Catholic_Elementary_Schools.pdf



“Clearly, most Catholic schools cannot be supported by tuition alone. Parish schools, particularly in urban areas, are a financial burden for their associated parish and increasingly for the diocese. Scholarship drives, development programs, patron programs, and other donor support have effectively engaged the philanthropic community. Leveraging economies of scale has resulted in reduced spending through eliminating redundancies in operations, increasing purchasing power, and sharing resources across schools. Endowment programs have allowed schools to fiscally invest in their future. Collaborative partnerships with colleges and universities, community organizations, and other schools have increased access to resources and expertise. Federal funding is a largely underutilized resource to which high-poverty Catholic schools are entitled. Catholic schools in many states benefit from voucher programs, tax credits, early childhood funding, transportation assistance and funding for textbooks.”

“The future of urban Catholic elementary schools requires that we identify, implement, measure, and market models that demonstrate effective governance, financial sustainability, and academic quality. Efforts to sustain Catholic schools will not succeed without a renewed commitment to recognize these Catholic schools as a vital and authentic expression of the church’s overall mission.”

Governance: “School governance is a key area that many dioceses are examining closely. Catholic schools as institutions of the Catholic Church are governed in accordance to both civil law and Canon Law.¹⁸ The term governance refers to the articulation of mission, policy development and enforcement, establishment of core priorities, and employment and evaluation of key leadership (e.g., the principal).¹⁹ The governance model establishes the framework within which administrators manage the operations of the schools. Catholic dioceses and schools utilize a variety of models to arrange these aspects of governance. Some models have been utilized for decades, whereas others are more recent. Furthermore, many schools have established boards which are charged with a defined set of governance responsibilities.”

Funding Strategies: Catholic elementary schools, particularly in urban areas, require substantial financial support beyond tuition and fees. This section summarizes the various funding strategies identified by this study and offers specific examples of schools, dioceses or foundations that are implementing these strategies.

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| 3.1 Tuition and Fees | 3.9 Niche Programming |
| 3.2 Parish Subsidies | 3.10 Endowments |
| 3.3 Diocesan Subsidies | 3.11 Patrons Programs |
| 3.4 Large-Scale Scholarship Funds | 3.12 Private Philanthropy |
| 3.5 Development Programs | 3.13 Federal Funding |
| 3.6 Leveraging Economies of Scale | 3.14 State and Local Government |
| 3.7 Catholic University Outreach | |
| 3.8 School-Community Partnerships | |

Funding Innovative Trends in Governance and Finance: The variety of governance models and funding strategies examined in this report demonstrate innovation in urban Catholic education Overall, this set of governance models and funding strategies point to promising options for a better future for Catholic elementary schools. Without endorsing one particular model or strategy, common themes of innovation can be extracted to guide the exploration, development, and implementation of practices that will improve the sustainability of urban Catholic schools

