



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Committee on Catholic Education

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January 11, 2023

The Honorable Marco Rubio
U. S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Darin LaHood
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Rubio and Representative LaHood,

National Catholic Schools Week is celebrated in the United States each year during the last week of January. In observance of this annual celebration, I would like to express my gratitude for introducing the bipartisan resolutions in the Senate and House recognizing the contributions of Catholic schools during National Catholic Schools Week.

For over 200 years Catholic schools have served those in most need, providing an excellent education while caring for the whole child, body, mind, and spirit. From St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's small house in the mountains of Maryland, where her religious order offered a free education to poor girls in 1809, to St. John Neumann's parochial system which was first established throughout Philadelphia in the late 1850s, Catholic education has played a foundational role in our country and has made a lasting contribution to the nation.

Catholic schools provide the nation with a model of education and formation that begins with a profound understanding of the nature of the human person, and sees as its end the flourishing, and ultimately, the salvation of each person. Catholic schools form students in humility, wisdom, and virtue so that they may recognize and love what is true, good, and beautiful. This becomes the foundation for a life ordered to service of God and others, a freedom in Christ that the world alone cannot provide. We recognize the primacy of parents in the education of their children and seek to incorporate families ever more deeply into the life of the school and the Church.

Catholic social teaching instills a love of community and country with graduates contributing to civil society at all levels, most notably among our nation's leaders, including at the highest levels of government and public service.

At the height of enrollment in the 1960s, over 5 million students attended a Catholic school in the United States. While attendance declined into the 1990s, the COVID pandemic brought parental choice in education to the forefront of the education conversation. Parents had a new vantage point from which to view their children's education, and they sought educational settings that best fit the needs of their children. Among these many options, Catholic schools stood out because they prioritized their students' needs, even in the uncertainty of a pandemic.

In the Spring of 2020, when the nation shut down, Catholic schools converted to online learning in a matter of days, not weeks, determined to minimize disruption in learning. And in the fall of 2021, when most school districts opted for remote learning, 85% of Catholic schools opened in person, with most remaining schools opening for in person learning by the end of the year.¹

That effort has resulted in significant academic achievement: Catholic school students outperformed public and charter school students in the first post-COVID National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2022. Catholic schools performed higher than public schools in both reading and math in 4th and 8th grades and Catholic school students' average scores were 15 points higher than the average scores of their grade 8 public school peers.² As many observed, if Catholic schools were a state, they would be the highest performing state in the country, and minority students and those receiving free and reduced-price lunch saw strong learning outcomes despite the pandemic disruption.

Catholic schools have intentionally served the underserved since the beginning – and still do today. Enrollment in school year 2021-22 was over 1,680,000 in almost 6,000 schools including 21.5 percent of students from racial minority backgrounds, 18.6 percent from Hispanic heritage, and 20.3 percent from non-Catholic families. And underprivileged students thrive in Catholic schools with a 98% graduation rate and 85% of graduates attending 4-year colleges.³

For all these reasons, we are tremendously proud of the contributions of Catholic schools to our nation, and grateful for your support of Catholic schools by leading the bipartisan resolution which highlights the following:

Whereas Catholic schools instill a broad, values-added education emphasizing the lifelong development of moral, intellectual, physical, and social values in young people in the United States;

Whereas Catholic schools are an affordable option for parents, particularly in underserved urban areas;

Whereas Catholic schools produce students strongly dedicated to their faith, values, families, and communities by providing an intellectually stimulating environment rich in spiritual, character, and moral development;

Resolved, That the [House of Representatives and the Senate]— supports the dedication of Catholic schools, students, parents, and teachers across the United States toward academic excellence; and

the key role they play in promoting and ensuring a brighter, stronger future for the Nation.

¹ https://images.magnetmail.net/images/clients/NCEA1/attach/Data_Brief_22_Catholic_School_Enrollment_v4.pdf

² <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>

³ https://www.ncea.org/NCEA/Who_We_Are/About_Catholic_Schools/Catholic_School_Data/NCEA/Who_We_Are/About_Catholic_Schools/Catholic_School_Data/Catholic_School_Data.aspx?hkey=8e90e6aa-b9c4-456b-a488-6397f3640f05

I am grateful for your esteemed recognition of students at Catholic schools, their families, and to the dedicated educators who devote themselves to the Church's education ministry, and to the local communities that support our Catholic schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas A. Daly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Most Reverend Thomas A. Daly
Bishop of Spokane Chairman,
USCCB Committee on Catholic Education