

## Catholic Schools Today

In these times of economic hardship one cannot escape the headlines in the morning paper reporting more job losses, stocks tumbling, banks failing, and mortgages foreclosing. These current events and their impact might cause one to wonder, why do families continue to send their children to Catholic schools?

The Catholic School system in the United States has a proud tradition of reaching out and helping families in need by providing tuition and scholarship assistance. For example, while the average tuition (nationally) for an elementary school pupil is \$3,159, this is in fact only 53.8% of the actual costs per pupil of \$5,870. Approximately 93% of elementary schools provide some form of tuition assistance. The high school average tuition is \$8,182, which is 80% of the actual cost per pupil of \$10,228. 97% of Catholic high schools offer various forms of tuition assistance.

Even given these statistics and the many creative ways that schools make up the difference between rising per pupil costs and the tuition charged, it is a sobering reality that many families have been directly impacted by the state of the economy, and that some are stretched and stressed to such a point that they've had to withdraw their children, or are considering withdrawing them from private schools. National enrollment trends in the Catholic school system seem to reflect this reality, although reasons other than financial also may impact a family's decision about where to send their children to school. While enrollment peaked in the early 1960's (with more than 5.2 million students in over 13,000 schools), the past decade has seen a continued decline in enrollment and school closures. Between the 2000 and 2009 school years, 1,429 schools closed, or 17.5% of the Catholic schools in the country. Student enrollment declined by 460,507 or 17.4%, primarily in elementary schools.

So, back to the question: why do families continue to send their children to Catholic schools? Why do families continue to make this investment for their children's educations? In these times of diminishing returns on balance sheets, it seems that thousands of Catholic families know it pays to make the wise investment.

The top four reasons, reported by the National Catholic Education Association ([www.ncea.org](http://www.ncea.org)), why parents send their children to Catholic schools align directly with this year's theme for Catholic schools week, *Dividends for Life*. Those reasons are:

- Faith formation
- High academic standards
- Values-added education
- Safe-school environment

Catholic parents look to the Catholic school as a partner in the faith formation of their children. They look to the Catholic school as one of the carriers of Catholic identity, and as a place where their children will come to know, love, and serve God, now and for life. Catholic schools provide an environment of high expectations for a student's success, a place where great value is placed on rising above the minimum required and reaching for the maximum achievable. In an age where the secular values of pop culture wage a tug of war with those striving to live a moral life, the Catholic school is a place where morals, and the values of Christian discipleship are taught and lived. And in these times when parents need a system of support while they raise their children to be disciplined, self-reliant adults, the Catholic school provides an environment where discipline is valued and fostered, a place where it is safe to be a child.

From January 30 to February 6, 2010, Catholic schools across the country will celebrate Catholic Schools Week. This annual event is a time to reflect on the amazing contribution Catholic schools

have made to our country. Join with us and celebrate *Dividends for Life: Faith, Knowledge, Morals, Discipline*.