

Archdiocese releases standardized test scores

Students in Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Baltimore performed better than the national average on standardized test scores in every age group tested, according to data released Sept. 10 by the archdiocese.

Results of the Stanford 10 standardized test administered last school year showed that on average, seventh graders in Catholic schools placed in the 74th percentile in reading, language and math – surpassing 74 percent of all other students who took the test.

Eighth graders placed in the 73rd percentile in reading and math and the 76th percentile in language.

“These test scores demonstrate that our schools work and that our committed teachers are doing an excellent job of preparing the students we serve for high school and beyond,” Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien said. “Catholic schools remain an excellent investment for parents to make for their children’s future.”

Third graders tested in the 65th percentile in reading, the 63rd percentile in language and the 60th percentile in math. Fourth graders placed in the 75th percentile in reading, 77th in language and 72nd in math.

Fifth graders tested in the 72nd percentile in reading, 73rd percentile in language and 69th percentile in math, while sixth graders placed in the 73rd percentile in reading, 69th percentile in language and 70th percentile in math.

The release of the scores, which were to be posted on the archdiocesan Web site this week for each school, marks the first time the archdiocese has made the figures public for the entire archdiocese. Individual schools will also post their scores on their own Web sites.

Dr. Ronald J. Valenti, superintendent of Catholic schools, said it was important to make the scores more widely available as a show of “transparency.” In the past,

individuals could request scores from schools, he said.

“The scores verify what we have always stated, which was that we believe our schools are academically sound and that we push academic excellence,” Dr. Valenti said. “It’s not just a statement being made. It’s also verifiable.”

The superintendent said the Stanford 10 is “one of the more rigorous testing” instruments on the market. This is the third year that archdiocesan schools have administered the test after previously using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for many years.

The test results showed that while students in Baltimore City Catholic elementary schools scored near or above national norms, they fell below the overall archdiocesan average. Third-graders placed in the 43rd percentile for reading and the 40th percentile for math, while fourth-graders scored in the 56th percentile in reading and the 55th percentile in math.

The superintendent said students in inner-city schools often face challenges in their home life and environment that impact learning and test scores. He noted that many city students do not enter the Catholic school system until the middle-school level, “which requires a shift in discipline, expectations and demands.” Although they often enter behind their grade level, improvements are seen as students advance through the Catholic school system, he said.

Dr. Valenti said he applauds the work of teachers in inner-city Catholic schools.

“What they’ve done is herculean with these students performing despite all the obstacles that are placed before them,” he said.

Alberta Ricketts, principal of Our Lady of Grace in Parkton, said she was very pleased that her students performed above the national and archdiocesan average. She was “delighted” by the math performance of her 8th graders, who scored in the 94th percentile.

“That really knocks my socks off,” Ricketts said.

The principal has already started using the scores to help students who showed

weakness in certain disciplines and to challenge students who excelled.

Along with curriculum mapping, the scores help teachers track performance, according to Nancy Malloy, principal of Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in Ellicott City.

“We study the scores and analyze what we might need to do to help students,” Malloy said.

Dr. Valenti said the archdiocese will use the score results for professional development for teachers. He emphasized that it’s important not to place too much importance on standardized tests. Many factors go into making a good school, he said.

“We are happy with what the tests have borne out,” he said, “but we don’t rest on our laurels.”