

Dr. Nancy Grasmick's retirement is a loss for Catholic schools



Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, superintendent of Maryland public schools, meets with Dr. Ronald J. Valenti, former superintendent of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, in 2006. (CR file photo/Owen Sweeney III)

Today's announcement that Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick is stepping down as the longtime superintendent of Maryland public schools may well be a loss for Catholic schools as much as it is for public ones.

During her 20-year tenure, Dr. Grasmick has been a consistent ally of the Catholic school system - a rarity in a nation where public and private systems often view one another with suspicion.

With her support, Maryland's private and parochial school athletic associations approved standards of competition for athletics, with the state sanctioning Maryland Interscholastic Athletic Association events.

Dr. Grasmick's department has long administered the state program that provides nonreligious textbooks in nonpublic schools. She also supported a plan that allows teachers in the Catholic school system to process their re-certification requirements through the archdiocesan superintendent's office.

For the last several years, Dr. Grasmick has served on Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien's Blue Ribbon Committee on Catholic Schools that has examined ways of strengthening Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.



Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick visited Archbishop Curley High School in Baltimore in 2006. (CR File/Owen Sweeny III)

I interviewed Dr. Grasmick in 2006 after she spent some time visiting Archbishop

Curley High School. She was investigating the Baltimore City school to gain insights that might be applied to the reform of public high schools.

Dr. Grasmick told me that some of her counterparts in other parts of the country react with “pure shock” when they learn of her cooperation with private schools.

“In most states, it’s a very contentious relationship between the public schools and the nonpublic schools,” she said. “There’s no communication and little respect. It’s like a competition.”

The superintendent said she believes that education, whether offered in public or private schools, must benefit all children.

For the good of education throughout the state, let’s hope Dr. Grasmick’s successor feels the same way.