

Non-Catholic students must value religious education

Julian Bower's letter, "Why non-Catholics in Catholic schools" (CR, Feb. 26), raises a legitimate point, if properly understood. Given the extreme financial challenges facing our parochial and other Catholic schools, should we be "subsidizing" the education of non-Catholics who, in many cases, wish to escape underperforming public schools by enrolling in a Catholic school? After all, aren't all youngsters entitled to a decent education? Absolutely! But our Catholic schools are fundamentally and necessarily schools of religion, as one bishop expressed it to me years ago. We are not in the business of offering alternative schools simply or primarily as an escape from poor pedagogy.

However, if a youngster's family truly values a religious education, consideration should be given to a non-Catholic, where possible, for enrollment in a Catholic school. As a former superintendent of the archdiocesan schools during the late 1970s, I followed this policy, and it still seems to be not only legitimate and an instrument of evangelization, but notably lacking in prejudice.