

Schools earn A+ in study

The Catholic Review

As we prepare to celebrate National Catholic Schools Week, Jan. 30-Feb. 5, I thought it beneficial to revisit the study on the economic benefits of Catholic schools, which was shared with community leaders two weeks ago and covered by our Catholic and other media.

The study was conducted independently by Anirban Basu, noted Baltimore economist, and his team at Sage Policy Group, Inc. We asked Basu to quantify the benefits of Catholic education because we thought it would make a persuasive argument with many audiences, including parents, students, educators, benefactors, elected officials and other leaders in our community.

Those of us close to Catholic education can well attest to the many benefits of our schools, whose graduates:

- Pray better and more often
- Are more frequent in Sunday Mass attendance
- Have happier marriages
- Volunteer more for Church, community and charitable initiatives
- Are more attuned to issues of social justice and pro life
- And respond more often to Christ's invitation to become a priest, sister or brother

Now we have a study that indicates – in the estimation of one of the region's most respected economists – that our schools go well beyond these impressive achievements in leaving a lasting mark on graduates and the greater community.

Good for MD's Economy

For the survey period (the 2008-09 school year), Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore saved Maryland taxpayers more than \$380 million in per pupil expenses

and provided an additional \$393.3 million into the local economy in income and revenue, according to the study.

And the projected savings to Maryland taxpayers is conservative, given last week's article in the Baltimore Sun, which cited 2008 data from the National Center for Educational Statistics, revealing that "Maryland spends \$15,100 per pupil each year, or about double the cost of tuition at most private and parochial schools," the reporter wrote. In fact, this is nearly three times the average tuition for families with children in our k-8 schools.

Better Graduation/College Entrance Rates

Catholic schools out-perform public schools in Maryland when it comes to graduation rates, too. Basu's study cites double-digit increases in graduation rates for Catholic school students across all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Perhaps most glaring was the disparity among minority students living in the city, where the increase was the largest. The study shows graduation rates for these students to be 17 percent higher than their public school counterparts.

When analyzing the comparisons with Maryland public schools, it is important to point out that the public school system here was just ranked number one nationally for the third consecutive year. While we don't see ourselves in competition with public schools, we are realistic about the factors that parents consider when making educational choices and like the way our schools stack up against the "best" public schools in America.

The disparity in college attendance for graduates of Catholic vs. public schools was also highlighted. While 47.6 percent of Maryland high school seniors went on to attend a four-year college in 2009, more than 81 percent of Catholic school graduates entered a four-year college. He also noted that Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese graduated 100 percent of their seniors, with a full 97 percent entering either a four-year or two-year college.

Catholic School Grads Earn More

Basu's study also calculated projected lifetime earnings for Catholic school graduates versus students in the public school system. He determined that over a

10-year period, the total number of Catholic school graduates over that time period will earn \$5.2 billion more than the same number of students graduating from public schools.

“Catholic school graduates can expect to earn roughly \$225,000 (in 2008 dollars) more than their public school counterparts,” Basu added. Prepared for an argument that his study failed to consider that children attending our schools likely come from families more engaged in their children’s education, he noted that, in fact, his projections do take into account such off-setting factors, making the findings all the more impressive in my view.

Among other findings, the report concluded that Catholic school students produce higher test scores, support more jobs, income formation and business sales in the broader economy, and are more likely to emerge as societal leaders and organizers. It also noted that Catholic schools are capable of stabilizing older neighborhoods and their presence is of disproportionate benefit to lower income families.

I am most proud of these independent conclusions about our schools. While numbers certainly do not represent the fullness of the benefits of a Catholic education, they certainly do make a compelling case for anyone previously on the fence about them. They also, I hope, confirm both for the many parents sacrificing mightily to give this education to their children as well as for our teachers and principals who certainly could make more money in other systems, that our schools and our children are worth every hard-earned penny of their investment!

A blessed Catholic Schools Week!