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## Southwest Side Catholic School named top in the nation

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The Southwest Side of Chicago can now lay claim to one of the top Catholic high schools in the nation because of recent honors bestowed on Brother Rice High School.

"It was a way of recognizing the hard work of our kids," said Brother Pat Martin, head of the honors program and a sophomore geometry teacher at the school, Brother Rice was recently named one of 50 schools to make the inaugural Catholic High School Honor Roll. Martin led the award application process that earned the all boys school a spot on the Honor Roll.

To make the list a school had to meet three marks of excellence: academics, Catholic identity and civic education. Besides receiving a place on the top 50, Brother Rice was also recognized as a leader in Catholic identity. That category recognized the high school's required four-year theology course, retreat program, sacramental life and involvement in daily prayer among other things.

Academics included standardized test scores and the number of Advanced Placement and college-credit courses offered. Civic education included community outreach and business, economic and political classes that give students what Martin called "skills they can use to create a better world."

"Brother Rice is robust in terms of all the aspects of the school, not just academic," said Jean Searls, a senior British literature teacher. "From the inside out, from the ground up, there is that attention to detail."

The all-boys school was founded by the Christian Brothers in 1955. It is situated on 26 acres of land and has 70 faculty members and nearly 1,200 students. Brother Rice also has an excellent reputation for its sports teams.

"[I like] this particular high school because our kids allow us to be a part of their lives to help them grow up into young men," said Martin, who has taught at seven Christian Brothers schools. "Our boys work hard, and we have teachers who demand that they work hard."

Sophomore Mark Meyer is one of those hardworking students. He is taking a full course load including honors classes, plays in the band and has won state Math Bowl championships. "Brother Rice is kind of my second home," said Meyer, who lives eight miles from campus. "I spend so much time here."

Marion Catholic High School in Chicago Heights and St. Ignatius College Preparatory School are the other two Chicago area schools to make the honor roll. With a total of seven schools, Illinois has the most schools on the Honor Roll of the 25 states with schools on the list. The 50 school winners were picked from the 250 that applied. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago has 41 high schools.

The Catholic High School Honor Roll is an independent project of the Action Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. According to the Honor Roll director, Dr. Kevin Schmiesing, the award was a natural first step for the Institute in beginning its outreach to schools.

"When we looked around we found that there weren't that many other organization that were assessing Catholic High Schools," Schmiesing said. "The schools needed strength in all the areas to make the Honor Roll. And that is something that is unique to the program, that it doesn't just rely on academic excellence.

"I think Chicago had the most [awarded schools] of any city," Schmiesing continued. "So I think that speaks highly to the level of Catholic education in the area."