



Area schools named to national honor roll

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No longer is it only students who make the honor roll.

Now, Catholic high schools have an honor roll to aspire to, and two local schools have made the grade.

Brother Rice High School and Marian Catholic High School have been named to the Catholic High School Honor Roll, launched this year to recognize the best schools nationwide.

The honor serves to validate what those at Brother Rice and Marian Catholic already know.

"We knew we had an excellent program," said Sister Mary Paul McCaughey, president of Marian Catholic in Chicago Heights. "(Making the list) was a nice validation of what we thought was already happening."

An independent project of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, the Catholic High School Honor Roll was produced in consultation with a national advisory board made up of Catholic college presidents and Catholic scholars. The Acton Institute is a nonprofit international research and educational organization based in Grand Rapids, Mich.

The Catholic High School Honor Roll recognizes the nation's top schools based on academic excellence, civic education and Catholic identity. More details are available at www.chshonor.org.

"We're recognizing a number of schools that have not been recognized in the past," said Kevin Schmiesing, Honor Roll director. "I think it's very prestigious (to be named to the list) and it's a distinct honor."

Earlier this year, surveys were sent to 1,300 Catholic high schools asking them to produce documentation that demonstrated how they met the Honor Roll's criteria. Of the 250 schools that responded, 50 were singled out.

Those that made the list ranged from the 10-student St. Therese Academy in Irving, Texas, to much larger schools, such as the 2,100-student St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

In all, 25 states had Honor Roll schools, with Illinois having the largest number. Six Illinois schools made the list, including St. Ignatius College Preparatory School in Chicago, Aurora Central Catholic High School, Carmel High School in Mundelein, and Marian Central Catholic High School in Woodstock.

"I know there are many, many excellent Catholic schools throughout the country," said Brother Patrick Martin, director of the Brother Rice honors program. "This is a validation that (Brother Rice) is a wise investment."

Brother Rice, on Chicago's Southwest Side, welcomed its first class of 420 boys in September 1956. Today, there are 1,161 students enrolled in its college preparatory program, which offers students nearly 20 advanced placement classes.

Known for its academics and athletic programs, Brother Rice also offers a program for students who rank below average. The Focus program serves to give those students extra attention so they can be mainstreamed with their peers.

"We are not just a school for the elite," Brother Rice President Karl Walczak said. "We believe it's our mission to serve the entire Catholic community."

Marian Catholic was founded in 1958 and educates a co-ed student population that draws from throughout the Southland. The school has an enrollment of 1,665.

A Blue Ribbon school, Marian Catholic is known for its academics and fine arts programs. McCaughey said the school's students, who must complete two term papers in order to graduate, generally score well above the national and state ACT score averages. The high school offers competitive athletics, too.

Being named to the Honor Roll certainly is an accolade for the school, but McCaughey said it's business as usual at the school, where students often opt to take summer school courses in order to fit more elective classes into their schedules.

"We're kind of a little hidden gem here," she said.