



THE BEAUMONT ENTERPRISE

11/05/2004

Catholic high school receives high praise

The Enterprise

BEAUMONT - Monsignor Kelly Catholic High School recently was named one of the top 50 Catholic high schools in the nation.

The honor confirms to the community that Kelly High School is a quality place for Catholic education, said Principal Roger Bemis.

The Catholic High School Honor Roll was compiled by the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty.

The organization judged the schools on their academic excellence, Catholic identity and civic education.

"I think it's just reinforcement, just confirmation that we are doing a good job in the areas that are important to us and to Catholic education in general," Bemis said.

Kelly High School was founded in 1895 by the Dominican Sisters as Our Lady of Perpetual Help. A series of name changes and locations followed.

The Kelly name was adopted in 1964 to honor Monsignor Edmund A. Kelly for his untiring efforts and interest in education.

Kelly High School enrolls about 500 students, according to 2003-04 figures.

Kelly High School has added the Catholic High School Honor Roll logo to its Web site and likely will make a banner for the school building, Bemis said.

Parents weren't surprised by the distinction.

"I know that Kelly is a very good school," said Pilar Davila, a Kelly High School mom.

Davila, 50, who teaches English as a Second Language classes as part of the city of Beaumont library system, has two sons who graduated from Kelly High School and a daughter in 10th grade there.

The school teaches everything from morals to math, she said.

"And they learn," Davila added.

Norma Motiee, a 44-year-old bookstore owner, has a 10th-grade daughter at Kelly High School and another daughter who graduated from Kelly and now attends Texas A&M University.

"I kind of knew they would be really, really up there," she said of the Top 50 list.

Motiee said that Kelly students seem better prepared for college than many other children she knows.

Her family is not very religious, she said, so the Catholic aspect of the school was not a main factor for them.

They do like the fact that civic responsibility is stressed at the school and that students must earn community service hours every year.

"I've been very happy with Kelly," she said.

Test scores indicate strong academics at the school.

In 2003-2004, 90 percent of Kelly students took the SAT college entrance exam. They had an average score of 1082. A perfect score is 1600.

The national average for public schools was 1026 and the state average was 992.

In 2002-2003, Kelly students had even higher scores and participation on the SAT. Students made an average 1111, with 97 percent taking the test, according to records from the high school.

Kelly also has a high number of students taking Advanced Placement classes.

In 2003-2004, students took 113 AP tests. Of those tests, 76 percent scored a 3 or higher. The year before, students took 135 AP tests and scored 3 or higher on 80 percent of them.

Colleges often give course credit for scores of 3 or higher.

For the state, students scored 3 or higher on 51 percent of their tests in 2003-2004. The year before, they scored 3 or higher on 52 percent.

Davila said she was proud of her children's school and its accomplishments.

"For me, it's like an opportunity to have our children there. It's a privilege," she said.

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