

# Pittsburgh Post-Gazette®

## Catholic high schools in Diocese of Pittsburgh get high marks

### Tim Grant

THREE high schools in the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh recently received national recognition, and nearly all students who graduate from high schools throughout the diocese are bound for higher education.

Those upbeat observations were among several expressed this week by the superintendent of schools for the Pittsburgh Diocese in his annual news conference marking the start of the new school year.

"The centerpiece of all our work is faith," said Superintendent Robert Paserba. "Excellent academics are important. Instilling values is important. But without faith, there is no reason for Catholic schools."

Paserba sees a thriving private school system that is financially sound and strongly supported by a loyal community that recognizes the value of Catholic school education.

While the diocese does not yet have an official enrollment count for this school year, officials expect about 29,000 students in pre-school through 12th grade, with a decrease on the elementary level and an increase in high school students.

Three Catholic elementary schools were closed in June: St. Stephen, Hazelwood; James Lavelle, West Mifflin; and Good Samaritan, Ambridge.

Average elementary school tuition this year is \$2,550, an

increase of \$200. Average high school tuition increased by only \$100, to \$6,400.

Catholic high school enrollment increased by 100 students, but officials anticipate a decline this year in pre-kindergarten and elementary school. Paserba would only say that enrollment at that level will be lower than last year's 21,000 mark.

The diocese's policy calls for 60 percent of the total school cost to be funded from tuition, 25 percent from parish subsidies, and 15 percent from fund raising and other sources.

"Not only have our parishes been able to attain these funding goals, but at the same time, many of our schools have increased their enrollments," Paserba said.

Paserba pointed out that three of its high schools -- Oakland Catholic, Seton-LaSalle and Quigley Catholic in Beaver County -- are included in the Catholic High School Honor Roll, a list of 50 top Catholic high schools in the United States. The list is made by the Acton Institute, a nonprofit organization that promotes religion and liberty and is based in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Two other area schools selected for the list were Aquinas Academy, an independent Catholic school in Hampton, and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Coraopolis, run by the Felician Sisters.

The award is based on

academic excellence, Catholic identity and civic education, according to Anthony Pienta, academic program manager for the Acton Institute.

"Each of those areas have equal weight," he said.

Paserba said more than 97 percent of the Class of 2004 in the Pittsburgh Diocese enrolled in post-secondary education after graduating.

"We expect similar results when final figures for the 2005 class are compiled," he said.

Test results indicate students in the Pittsburgh Diocese also continue to score higher than the national average in math and reading on the TerraNova, a national standardized test used by both public and parochial schools.

Public school students are required to take the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment test, called PSSA, and some Catholic schools do so voluntarily. Paserba said Catholic school students again will not take the PSSA this year.

"We've concluded that the TerraNova test matches our curriculum best of all the tests out there," he said. "The curriculum that we're teaching is the curriculum that we're testing. With our internal review, we've chosen the test that best suits what we're teaching in our schools."

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