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THE "STATE" OF EDUCATION

by Sister Mary Anne Brawley, DC

Education became a topic of national attention in late September when the USA's 50 governors met for a Summit Conference at the University of Virginia.

The Summit was announced on Monday, July 31. On Wednesday, September 13 there was a pivotal White House meeting in preparation for the summit. Both the President and the National Governor's Association ignored the Catholic School community in this data gathering session. Almost as an after thought, both NCEA and USCC were invited to pre-summit sessions convened by U.S. Education Secretary Lauro F. Cavazos on September 21 and 22. Therefore, in the words of a NCEA official, Catholic education "was not categorically omitted."

What do we have to do to get our message across? It's no easier at the state level. On August 2nd I wrote to Governor Cuomo to voice our concern about educational choice:

Dear Governor Cuomo:

USA TODAY for Aug. 1, 1989 announced that President Bush has scheduled an Education Summit "to share ideas and to explore options for education progress." The President said to the Governors, "working together, you and I can raise the level of learning in the classrooms of America."

As a representative of the Non-public School community of NYS, I encourage you to take an active role in these Sept. 27 and 28 deliberations. Certainly, NYS has reason to want to improve the quality of its education.

New York ranks 2nd among the states in public education spending per pupil (\$6,497) and 3rd in average public school teacher salary (\$33,600). Yet New York students' SAT scores are down 5 points in one year (889 from 894), and the drop-out rate for the same period is up (37.1% from 35.8%). In fact, New York ranks 6th in the nation in school drop-outs.

These facts lead one to believe that all solutions don't take money. I think that our Catholic schools are a living proof that support of and attention to students account for success more than cash outlay.

I am enclosing for your study a copy of testimony presented this spring to the Assembly Education Committee. It is a modest proposal written for a specific purpose. If you see its merit, we would be glad to discuss it further with you before you attend the Governors summit.

In much of the education reform rhetoric, the last one mentioned is the student. Isn't it time we consider the long term interest of our children?

I sent the governor a copy of the Council of Catholic School Superintendents' proposal for an experimental program of choice in New York City. I received no acknowledgement; so on Sept. 20th, I reiterated my position in a letter to Dan Kinley, the governor's educational aide. Still no response.

Governor Cuomo attended the summit and called for more federal money, "If you really are for these things, you really are going to have to produce the resources." As far as I can ascertain from published reports, no governor addressed the contributions of non-public schools nor the place of non public schools in the question of educational improvement. Research proves we are a viable option. Must it always be politically inexpedient for our government officials to support our place in educational reform?