

# CSAANYS NEWS



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## MATTERS OF PRINCIPAL

by Sister Carol Cimino, Executive Director, CSAANYS

### The Public Good

Back in January, I was invited to say a few words to the Rensselaer County Legislature on the occasion of their passing a resolution honoring Catholic Schools. I drew a few chuckles when I told the lawmakers that Catholic schools create taxpayers-taxpayers with a conscience.

But the debate over the mythical "wall of separation" between Church and state has heated up again with President Bush's proposal to create a government office to aid faith-based religious service agencies. That has led to the fear that perhaps Catholic schools will fall into that category, as, indeed, they should. After all, we provide an excellent education to thousands of youngsters, operate before-and after-school programs, maintain breakfast and lunch programs, run parent-training opportunities, do job training and even see to it that children are socialized. All of this does what the Constitution charges the "people of the United States" to do, namely, "to promote the general welfare."

How do we count the public benefit of the Catholic schools? Usually, we point out the more prominent members of our society who have attended Catholic school-people like Tim Russert and Al Roker of NBC, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Mario Cuomo, Regis Philbin and Mary Higgins Clark. But what about the countless graduates, mothers, fathers, laborers and managers, veterans and office-holders, taxpayers and all who are products of Catholic education? Can anyone doubt that our nation is strong and prosperous because of them?

Years ago, the superintendent of a large archdiocese announced that, the next day, all the Catholic schools would be closed and that the children should go to their local public school and demand to be enrolled. The sheer volume of demand caused the public school district to yell "uncle" and the archdiocese received whatever it was they were demanding.

Currently, five Catholic schools in the Buffalo area are waging a battle against the Ken-Ton school district to get what they have coming to them, namely \$3 million in computer equipment that is rightly theirs under last summer's court decision in *Mitchell v. Helms*.

The district is predicting doom and gloom if the Catholic schools win. "One can only imagine the domino effect on many other districts, including some already in dire financial straits. This would have ... well-endowed exclusive private schools receiving equipment from some poor districts....," writes a Ken-Ton board member (Jan. 15). Sounds like the sky is falling....

If there were indeed a "wall of separation" as Jefferson would have it, then, in truth, the government would have to deny our children police protection, garbage collection, water usage and even services of the fire department. The Constitution does not mention a wall or any other architectural construct. In fact, it wasn't until the *Everson* case in 1947 that the issue of the wall was raised, as it was not even considered in 1925 in *Pierce*. In the 1947 case, the issue was raised as to whether or not a district's providing bus transportation would be constructed as an establishment of religion. Since then, how many times has the issue been raised in the courts? The most ridiculous was the suit brought by PERL challenging the use of electricity from the Catholic school to the Title I van parked out on the street; could the public school van use Catholic electricity? (!)

We think it's time to stop all this nonsense and concentrate on what would happen if there were no Catholic schools. We're saving districts and citizens billions, performing a public service and oh, by the way, producing taxpayers-with a conscience.

### SUMMER SCHOOL

The Summer School 2001 Handbook is very explicit with the following points which concern Nonpublic Schools:

☞ "A district that offers its resident students summer school programming may not require summer school students to pay anything for any part of the program."

☞ "Resident students who, in the previous school year, had attended nonpublic schools or any school other than that of the district in which they reside, are none the less entitled to attend the summer school of the public school district in which they reside." (Formal Opinion of Counsel #149 Volume 4, page 231 of Education Department Reports)

☞ "Entitlement may not be restricted based on the source of funds supporting the summer school nor may it be limited by setting an enrollment limit."

☞ "Any public school district instructional program in July and August is a summer school."

### REGENTS WEIGH VO-TECH CREDITS

High school students in vocational classes may soon be able to earn credits in math and other basic skills needed for a Regents diploma.

The Board of Regents announced that students could get up to 7.5 of the 22 class credits needed to graduate by taking vocational or technical classes that include course work in English, math, science or other skills. The plan calls for a "career and technical" endorsement on the diplomas.

In researching the plan, the state Education Department interviewed automotive, construction and food catering companies. Many agreed that the flexibility and statement on the diploma of the field of training would help graduates find jobs. "What the Regents have done here is to say, 'There's more than one way to prepare for a Regents exam'."

source: State Education Commissioner Richard Mills

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE INSTITUTE AT MANHATTAN COLLEGE**

June 24-29 marks the fifth annual Catholic School Leadership Institute at Manhattan College. Entitled "Called to Care: Spirituality, Service and Social Justice", this five-day gathering will bring together experts such as James Cultrara from the NYS Catholic Conference to discuss social teaching and political action, Sr. Carol Zinn, NGO representative to the United Nations to discuss global issues, Kay Furlani from the Archdiocese of Newark to present a student project on sweatshops and child labor and Sr. Clare Fitzgerald to highlight the Church documents on social justice. The institute will also be available as a course for three graduate credits.

Plan to join your colleagues in New York City this June for a very worthwhile week studying this timely and very important issue. Call CSAANYS for more information.

### **EXAMS**

In response to pressure from many educators relative to the heavy testing schedule for grade 8 students, the Board of Regents agreed to allow schools to keep secret the results of the new eighth grade science and social studies tests scheduled for the spring of 2001. The test results will be given to teachers, students and their parents. The policy will only be in effect for one year. Starting next year, the results will be publicized along with the other tests. Withholding the results this year will help schools get a handle on how middle school students are doing. Academic performance at the middle-school level has been of concern statewide.

### **FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

- The University of Rochester Institute for Catholic Education sponsors "Cultivating a Garden of Hope". This institute is designed for anyone who has an interest in shaping the future of Catholic education for the 21st Century.
- KidNeeds.com, a worldwide resource and global marketplace where children with special needs, their families and other caregivers can learn, shop and explore.

For more information, e-mail: [info@KidNeeds.com](mailto:info@KidNeeds.com)

### **YOUTH VIOLENCE EPIDEMIC NOT OVER, BUT EFFECTIVE PREVENTION PROGRAMS EXIST**

Surgeon General's Report Finds

The epidemic of youth violence in the United States is not over, even though arrest rates for violent crimes by youths have dropped substantially in recent years, according to a report released January 17, 2001 by Surgeon General David Satcher.

Youth homicide, robbery and arrest rates in 1999 were actually lower than they were in 1983. This drop was largely due to a decrease in the use of firearms by youths since the peak years of mid-1990s. At the same time, however, arrest rates for aggravated assaults remain nearly 70 percent higher than 1983, and self-report studies indicate that the proportion of youth involved in violent behavior and the rates of violent offending have not declined since the mid-1990s.

The report found strong evidence that exposure to violence in the media can increase children's "aggressive behavior" in the short term and concluded: "Research to date justifies sustained efforts to curb the adverse effects of media violence on youths."

## **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

Education is on the front burner and has the attention of executives, and legislators on national, state and local levels. This year will be key for advocates of school choice to make their voices heard - - not once but consistently. The defeats of voucher proposals last fall gave national focus to the principle of school choice.

Jay P. Greene's report from the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research suggests that expanding educational freedom offers policymakers a cost-effective strategy for improving student achievement. "Educational freedom is not only a good in and of itself, but it also appears to help students learn." He developed a composite measure of educational freedom for each state based on:

- availability of government - assisted nonpublic school options (e.g., vouchers)
- availability of charter school options
- ease of choosing to homeschool one's child
- ease of sending a child to a different public school district without changing residence

There are more players on the field of choice and increased opposition from groups such as teacher unions and Boards of Education. Our voices will be important.

On the national level, there are some positive signs. President Bush, Secretary of Education, Paige, and Representative John A. Boehner, Chair of the House Education and Workforce Committee are inclined not to close the door on any course of action that may prove successful for education advancement. The 50/50 party split in the Senate and the slim majority of Republicans in the House for the 107th Congress are going to call for much bipartisan effort.

The 106th Congress failed to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The 2001 budget, however, continued most programs and effected significant change, increasing special education grants to states and the initiation of a school modernization bill which was open to the private sector. This new Congress will be faced with the reauthorization of ESEA. Specifics of the education bill, together with the points suggested by the Administration, will bear watching. We need to be alert that we not lose the gains of the past and be ready to advocate for what is our just share as we move ahead.

On the state level, one of our main concerns is academic intervention services. The state mandated that those children who do not score adequately on the state exams receive whatever help is needed to improve. Mandated services should receive added funding to meet this mandate. This has not happened and there will be a major effort to see that it is provided. Also on the list of issues is an increase in the mileage limit for bus transportation for students in the nonpublic schools, and the proposals for tax relief or credit for all parents for the education of their children.

Now is the time to let your legislators know your wishes and your needs. We have not put enough pressure on them in the past. Now is the time for the state to enhance not inhibit educational freedom.

### **NONPUBLIC SCHOOL CONFERENCE, 2001**

Members of the Conference Planning Committee met recently to review suggestions for the Fall Conference relative to theme, keynote speaker, workshops, format, etc.

We'll let you know the results next month. Mark your calendars now! October 29 and 30, 2001.

**It will look new; it will be different; it will be exciting!**