

(February 8, 2006) Floor Debate Honoring Catholic Schools Week

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Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 657, honoring National Catholic Schools Week and the tremendous contributions that Catholic schools have made to our country.

Since 1974, Catholic Schools Week has celebrated the important role that Catholic schools play in American education, and their excellent reputation for providing a strong academic and moral education, as well as teaching social responsibility.

This year's theme of Catholic Schools Week is: "Catholic Schools: Character. Compassion. Values." These words embody the mission of Catholic education beyond providing top-notch academic training. Compassion is at the heart of the Catholic faith. It teaches so many young men and women the strength of character and the strong convictions that they need to be successful adults and to contribute to our society.

My wife and I are each products of 12 years of Catholic elementary and secondary school: my wife in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, at Saint Patrick's grade school and Bishop McCourt High School; myself in Chicago at Saint Symphorosa Grammar School and Saint Ignatius College Prep. Like so many others, I understand how important Catholic schools are in providing a spiritual, moral, and intellectual foundation. My 12 years of Catholic education provided me with the knowledge, discipline, and the love of learning that enabled me to go on and earn my Ph.D. and become a teacher before I came to Congress.

As we recognize Catholic Schools Week, we must pay special tribute to the dedicated teachers and administrators who sacrifice so much, usually getting paid less than they could elsewhere, to dedicate their lives to teaching at Catholic schools. I have fond memories of my teachers, who taught me not only the value of a good education but also the values of faith and service. Although it was almost 35 years ago, I can still remember Sister Mildred, my first grade teacher; Miss Ivers, my second grade teacher. And the memories go on.

I will never forget Sister Diane, who was my student congress coach when I was in high school. To this day, when I speak in front of crowds, I still envision Sister Diane sitting there, nodding, giving me confidence when I was a nervous young kid trying to make my first public speeches. I related these memories while attending a celebration at Saint Richard's School last week. After the celebration, many people came up to me with similar memories, memories of teachers who gave their heart and soul and made such a big difference in the lives of their students.

To thank these men and women and their tireless contributions and service, I held a breakfast last week at Saint Lawrence High School during Catholic Schools Week. We talked about the successes of Catholic schools and also the challenges that they face. Nationally, more than 2.4 million young people are enrolled in nearly 8,000 Catholic schools. These schools have more than 160,000 full-time professional staff, boasting a student-teacher ratio of 15-1.

The Chicago archdiocese has had one of the most successful school systems. Today, more than 106,000 students attend 276 schools. In my district alone, there are 34 grammar schools and five high schools. The success of students in the Chicago archdiocese is phenomenal. The high schools have an amazing graduation rate of 99 percent, and about 95 percent of those graduates go on to college. This is clearly a record to be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, as an important complement to our public schools and other private institutions, Catholic schools contribute a great deal to America. They have made a big difference in my life and a big difference in the lives of countless others. They deserve our praise and our support; and I urge my colleagues to pass this resolution, the Kennedy resolution, honoring Catholic schools during this Catholic Schools Week.