

## (January 23, 2007) Lipinski Statement on Catholic Schools Week

H.Res. 51: Catholic Schools Week Resolution - Floor Speech

Representative Daniel Lipinski (IL-3)

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 51, Honoring National Catholic Schools' Week and the tremendous contributions that Catholic schools make to our country. Since 1974, Catholic Schools' Week has celebrated the important role these institutions play in American education, and their excellent reputation for providing a strong academic and moral education, as well as teaching community responsibility and outreach.

This year's theme of Catholic Schools' Week is "Catholic Schools: The Good News in Education." This theme has multiple meanings for Catholic schools. At the center of Catholic education is the "Good News" - or gospel - of Jesus, and salvation. Jesus taught love and service. And the history of Catholic schools reveals an ongoing emphasis on the gospel values of reaching out and serving others.

But the "good news" in Catholic education is also the good news of success in shaping the lives of so many young men and women. Nationally, about 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. On average, Catholic school students surpass other students in math, science, and reading in the three grade levels of the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) test. The graduation rate for all Catholic high school students is 95%, and 83% of Catholic high school graduates go on to college. These are amazing statistics in America today.

Catholic schools are also highly effective in educating minority students and disadvantaged youth. The percentage of minority students in Catholic schools has more than doubled in the past 30 years, today representing more than one-quarter of all those enrolled. Almost one-in-seven students is not Catholic. And the success of Catholic schools does not just come from selectivity. On average, Catholic schools accept about 9 of 10 students who apply.

One of the reasons for the "good news" of Catholic schools is that in addition to learning reading, writing and arithmetic, students also learn responsibility-and how to become persons of character and integrity. Community service is a priority in Catholic schools. 94% of schools have service programs and students perform an average of 79 hours of service. Catholic schools attempt to promote complete intellectual, spiritual, athletic, and social development of their students. The commitment to the development of the whole person is a fundamental one that corresponds to the core Catholic sensibility of "finding God in all things."

I was born, raised, and live in the Chicago Archdiocese which has always had one of the most successful school systems; today, more than 106,000 students attend 276 schools. In my district alone, there are 5 high schools and 34 grammar schools - including one of the best at my home parish of St. John of the Cross. The success of students in archdiocesan schools is phenomenal, with the high schools having an amazing graduation rate over 99%. In addition, 95% of these graduates go on to college. This is a record to be proud of.

My wife and I are each products of 12 years of Catholic elementary and secondary schools. 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 twelve years of Catholic education provided me with the knowledge, discipline, desire to serve, and love of learning that enabled me to go on to earn my PhD and become a teacher before I was elected 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 much less than they could - 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 35 years ago that I started school, I can remember my first grade teacher, Sister Mildred, my second grade teacher, Miss Ivers, and the memories go on. I will never forget Sister Diane, my coach on the Student Congress team in high school; to this day, when I speak before a crowd I sometimes envision the supportive nods she gave when I was a nervous young kid making my first public speeches. Millions of other Americans have similar memories of teachers who gave their heart and soul and made such a big difference in the lives of their students.

Mr. Speaker, as an important complement to public schools and other private institutions, Catholic schools contribute a great deal to America. They have made a big difference in my life, and in the lives of countless others. As Father William Davis, interim secretary for education at the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, said, "High achievement rates, high retention rates, high moral values, and high student and parent satisfaction are the distinctive marks of a Catholic school. That's the good news and we want to share it." For this good news America's Catholic schools deserve our praise and our support, and to show our praise and support I urge my colleagues to pass this resolution.