
(January 23, 2008) Floor Statement â€“ H. Res. 916 Honoring Catholic Schools Week

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Representative Daniel Lipinski

January 23, 2008

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 916, honoring the tremendous contributions that Catholic schools have made to our Nation.

Since 1974, Catholic Schools Week has celebrated the important role that these institutions play in America and their excellent reputation for providing a strong academic and moral education, as well as teaching community responsibility and outreach.

I am proud to sponsor this resolution again. And I would like to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. Fossella) for once again working with me on this resolution.

This year's theme of Catholic Schools Week is "Catholic Schools Light the Way." This theme focuses on the leadership that Catholic schools provide to our Nation, producing graduates who light the way for a brighter future for all Americans and for humankind. The theme also highlights the spiritual foundation of Catholic schools by reminding students that they are called to "light the way" for others.

Nationally, about 2.3 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 tested by the NAEP test. The graduation rate for Catholic high school students is 99 percent, and 97 percent of Catholic high school graduates go on to college or technical schools. 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. And almost one in seven students in Catholic schools is not Catholic. The success of Catholic schools does not depend on selectivity. On average Catholic schools accept nine out of every 10 students who apply.

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 percent of schools have a service program, with the average student completing 79 hours of service.

I was born, raised, and I live in Chicago Archdiocese, which has one of the most successful school systems in the country. Today more than 106,000 students attend 276 schools. In my district alone, there are five Catholic high schools and 34 grammar schools, including one of the best in my home parish of St. John of the Cross in Western Springs.

My wife and I are each products of 12 years of Catholic education. My wife in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, at St. Patrick's Grade School and Bishop McCourt High School; and myself at St. Symphorosa Grammar School and St. 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, desire to serve, and a love of learning that enabled me to go on to earn my Ph.D. 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 I began in Catholic schools 35 years ago, I still can fondly remember my teachers at St. Sym's, from Sister Mildred in the first grade to Sister Xavier in the eighth grade. And I still fondly remember Sister Diane, my coach on the Student Congress Team in high school. Millions of Americans have similar memories of sisters, priests, and lay teachers who gave their hearts and souls and made such a big difference in the lives of their students.

Mr. Speaker, Catholic schools have made a big difference in my life and in the lives of countless others. As an important complement to public schools and other private institutions, Catholic schools contribute a great deal to America. And let us not forget that every student who is taught in a Catholic school saves taxpayers money because they are not part of the local public school system.

America's Catholic schools deserve our praise and our support. And to share our praise and support, I urge my colleagues to pass this resolution.