

ARTICLES

CATHOLIC EDUCATION AS A SOCIETAL INSTITUTION

MAUREEN T. HALLINAN

University of Notre Dame

This paper conceptualizes Catholic education as a societal institution interdependent with other major social institutions in the country. A brief history of the American Catholic system demonstrates how its origin and growth were influenced by and affected the cultural, political, religious, and economic milieu in which it was embedded. In particular, the development of Catholic education interacted with the growth of the public school system. Comparisons of contemporary Catholic and public schools illustrate this interdependency while underscoring the uniqueness and contributions of Catholic education. A sociological understanding of Catholic education as a societal entity should inform decisions about the future of Catholic education and suggest ways that the institutional interdependence of Catholic and public schools can benefit both systems.

As a societal institution, the American Catholic school system is interdependent with other major social institutions in this country. Catholic schools are affected by the social agenda of the government; federal and state economic policies; political ideologies; the legal system; social and cultural norms governing work, family, and community life; and the policies and practices of the public school system. At the same time, Catholic schools have an impact on other religious and secular institutions in America, shaping values and mores, standards of performance, and norms of equity and justice.

A sociological understanding of this interdependence is critical for educators and parents as they plan the direction of Catholic education in the 21st century. With that interdependence as its focus, this paper will provide a brief history of American Catholic education, examine characteristics of contemporary Catholic schools in comparison to public schools, and reflect on the possible future direction of Catholic education in the 21st century.

HISTORY OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN AMERICA

COLONIAL TIMES TO MID-20TH CENTURY

A brief examination of the history of Catholic education in America reveals how closely connected the Catholic school system has been to other American institutions and how its expansion is a product of political, social, and religious trends in America (Coleman, 1982; Dolan, 1985). The interdependence between the formation and expansion of Catholic education and public education is illustrative. Catholic and Protestant schools were established in colonial times as parents sought to provide religious education for their children. The aim of Catholic and Protestant parents was not to create separate school systems, but simply to insure religious training for their children.

As the US population grew, religious orders of nuns, priests, and brothers from Europe and subsequently from the United States began to staff private Catholic schools for the children of middle- and upper-class families. With tuition from these schools, they opened free schools for poor Catholic children. These free schools, usually located near the parish church, evolved into parish or parochial schools. Today, 95% of Catholic elementary schools are parochial schools, and 82% of Catholic high schools are parochial or diocesan schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1999).

Both Catholic and Protestant schools were directly affected by the wave of European immigration to the United States during the 19th century. At the beginning of the century, all schooling was private in the sense that families paid tuition for the education of their children. Early in the century, however, reformers promoted and founded the "common school," publicly funded schools open to all children, regardless of their ability to pay. The distinction between public and private schools remained unclear for some time, however, and public funds supported Catholic and public schools well into the 19th century (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Gleason, 1987).

While nominally nonsectarian, common schools had a Protestant orientation. Staffed mainly by Protestants, these schools required Bible readings from the Protestant Bible and students were taught moral principles consistent with Protestant dogma. Many Catholics resisted sending their children to these common or public schools and became convinced of the need for their own Catholic schools. By the time the third Baltimore Council met in 1884, the belief that a Catholic education was necessary was widespread. Sharing this view, the bishops at the Council mandated "every Catholic student in a Catholic school" (McCluskey, 1964, p. viii).

The number of Catholic elementary and secondary schools grew rapidly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, due to growth in the native-born

Catholic population and the ever increasing immigration of Catholics from Europe. At the same time, xenophobia and anti-Catholic bias became prevalent. Severe verbal attacks were leveled against Catholic schools and the Catholic Church. The schools were called "a destroyer of American patriotism" (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993, p. 28) and were blamed for urban poverty and crime.

This external threat to Catholic education served only to strengthen a Catholic commitment to Catholic schools and to consolidate the schools into a separate school system. Catholics went on to win legal challenges to private education, and by the middle of the 20th century the Catholic school system was well established as a separate and legitimate entity (Buetow, 1970; Dolan, 1985; Gleason, 1987).

CHANGES IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION SINCE THE MID-20TH CENTURY

The second half of the 20th century was a period of remarkable change in America. Two major social trends had a direct impact on Catholic education. First, new theological and social scientific insights led to changes in religious belief and practice, resulting in major changes in Catholic school enrollment (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). Second, dramatic demographic changes affected the size and composition of the school-aged population (McLellan, 2000).

Religious beliefs and practices in the first half of the 20th century are fairly easy to describe (Greeley, 1972b; Luckmann, 1967). The dominant organized religions were Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Judaism. Protestantism was the most widely practiced religion and its various denominations were viewed as mainstream in American society. While Catholics and Jews had somewhat lower status than Protestants, they were accorded respect nonetheless. Church or synagogue attendance was a matter of obligation and responsibility, while non-attendance was judged as a moral deficiency.

In the second half of the 20th century, religiosity and Church affiliation changed dramatically (Hout & Greeley, 1987). As American society became more secularized, religious practice began to wane. The belief that the secular was replacing the sacred, known as the secularization hypothesis (Luckmann, 1967), was supported by historical events and empirical analyses. In the 1960s, the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and the sexual revolution precipitated a significant drop in Church attendance for Catholics (Hout & Greeley, 1987) and Protestants (Kelley, 1972). Marty (1979) described the change in Church participation as a "seismic shift" and Robinson (1968) referred to it as the "death of God."

As the 20th century progressed, many social scientists believed that reli-

gion would continue to be less important to individuals and that organized religion would gradually become a peripheral institution in American society (Luckmann, 1967). Others predicted that the decline in Church membership would be short-lived (Greeley, 1972a). Much recent evidence supports the latter prediction, although the explanations for increased church participation are complex.

The 1980s and 1990s evidenced a rebirth of religious faith and practice in America and worldwide. This return to the sacred was depicted as "yet another great awakening" (Barker, 1985) and as the death of the "myth of secularization" (Greeley 1972a; Hadden & Shupe, 1985; Stark & Bainbridge, 1985). However, the re-emergence of religion did not imply a return to the kind of religion practiced in the first half of the 20th century. A greater focus on personal religiosity (privatization) and a greater freedom in religious belief and practice (voluntarism) led members of organized religions to be more independent in their beliefs and more willing to deviate from the doctrines promoted by Church officials (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985).

In addition to these social, cultural, and religious influences, the values promoted by the Second Vatican Council had a profound effect on the attitudes and behavior of American Catholics. Vatican II encouraged greater freedom of thought and practice among believers. As a result, Catholics increasingly formed their own judgments about Church teachings, including its mandate to educate Catholic children in Catholic schools. Originally, this directive was intended to protect Catholic children from the negative influences of a secular society, to instill in them the fundamental tenets of their religion, and to teach them Christian morals and values. But after Vatican II, Catholics began to question whether Catholic education was still a pressing need. Many Catholic parents ignored the Church's position about Catholic schooling, enrolling their children in public schools and seeking other means of instructing their children in the Catholic faith. Religious education programs based on a new curriculum and innovative methods of teaching religion were developed and provided an alternative to Catholic schooling.

As trends toward secularization, privatization, and voluntarism coincided with the freedom and responsibility promoted by Vatican II, large numbers of priests and religious resigned from their dioceses or religious orders. As a result, the administration and faculty of Catholic schools changed from primarily religious to mostly lay persons. Most Catholics accepted this transition, and many appreciated the opportunity it provided for greater lay participation in school matters. However, some more traditional Catholics believed that schools were truly "Catholic" only if they were staffed primarily by religious. The fear that a lay faculty could not provide quality religious training led many of these conservative Catholics to withdraw their children from Catholic schools.

The freedom of post-Vatican II Catholics to send their children to non-Catholic schools and the change from religious to lay faculties and administration in Catholic schools reduced the number of Catholic schools in America. In the early 1960s, Catholic schools were staffed by 113,000 religious and 63,000 lay teachers, compared to a tenth as many religious and about half as many lay teachers today. Thirty-five years ago, 13,000 Catholic schools were operating in the United States, compared to 8,000 in 1995 (McLellan, 2000). In 1966, a high of 52% of Catholic children attended Catholic schools (Neuwien, 1966), compared to a low of 20% in 1991 (Schaub & Baker, 1993). In 1965, 5.6 million students attended Catholic schools, compared to less than half that number today (McLellan, 2000).

Another perspective on change in the Catholic school system is obtained from a market analysis of the schools. Examining change in the market share of elementary-school-aged children from the mid-1960s to the present, McLellan (2000) calculated change in the proportion of school-aged children attending Catholic elementary schools. He found that while the private school share of elementary school enrollment has remained at about 15% since 1960, the Catholic school share of that population has been decreasing steadily. In 1960, 89% of the elementary school students attending private schools were enrolled in Catholic schools, compared to only 46% in 1995. These data show a dramatic decline in the size of the American Catholic school system during the second half of the 20th century.

Accompanying the profound religious and social change occurring in America in the second half of the 20th century was a demographic transition of considerable magnitude. The changing composition of American society had a direct effect on societal institutions, and in particular, religious and educational institutions. For example, the large numbers of Hispanics who immigrated to the U.S. since mid-century doubled membership in the Catholic Church. Their enrollment in Catholic schools partially offset the shrinking Catholic school attendance.

Other demographic and social changes also affected Catholic schools. The White flight of the 1970s left inner-city schools populated by low-income students. Inner-city Catholic schools were attractive to many parents, not necessarily for the religious education they provided, but because they provided a better education than inner-city public schools. Consequently, the non-Catholic enrollment in these schools increased. In 1972, more than 98% of all Catholic high school students were Catholic. By the 1990s, that percentage had dropped to approximately 80%. A similar pattern may be observed in Catholic elementary schools (McLellan, 2000).

The social class composition of Catholic schools has also changed over the past few decades. During the late 19th and early 20th century, Catholic schools enrolled large numbers of children of Catholic immigrant parents, most of whom were from the lower economic strata of society. Today, almost

half of all students in Catholic secondary schools in the United States are from households in the top quarter of the income distribution (i.e., \$50,000). The proportion of wealthy students comprising the Catholic school student population has doubled since the early 1970s. Almost one-fifth of all Catholic secondary school students are from families with annual incomes of more than \$75,000, compared to only 7% of public secondary school students with similar incomes. This increase in the socioeconomic status of students enrolled in Catholic schools has been referred to as the "eliting" of the Catholic school system (Baker & Riordan, 1998).

A closer look at the family income of students in Catholic schools reveals that while the income distribution of Catholic school families has changed over the past few decades, it has not simply increased. Until the 1960s, the income of Catholic school students had been normally distributed, whereas now it is bimodal. Wealthy students living primarily in the suburbs create one mode of the distribution. While Catholic schools have always staffed a number of elite schools that enroll the children of wealthy families, this trend is increasing. As more Catholics attain higher income levels, the demand for these schools is growing. At the same time, Catholic schools are serving a larger number of low-income students, primarily in inner-city schools. These students form the second mode of the income distribution of Catholic school families. Consequently, rather than characterizing the Catholic school system as becoming more elitist due to the growing number of wealthy students it enrolls, one can more aptly describe it as more pluralistic, serving both ends of the income distribution.

This brief historical overview of the American Catholic school system reveals how the evolution of Catholic schools was shaped by social, political, cultural, and religious factors, including immigration, social movements, religious prejudice, theological advances, and population changes. These external factors account for the particular features of Catholic schools today. At the same time, the evolution of the public school system was being shaped by many of the same social forces. The growth of each school system affected the development of the other. The Catholic school system was established to provide a Catholic education for its students. Public schools originated to provide a non-religious education for American children. Each school system would look different today if it had evolved in a different environment, with different social actors, and in the absence of the other school system.

COMPARISON OF CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC AND PUBLIC SCHOOL OUTCOMES

To appreciate the contribution of Catholic schools to American life and to better understand the interaction between Catholic schools and other societal institutions, it is necessary to examine the outcomes of Catholic schooling.

This is best accomplished by comparing Catholic and public school students on selected criteria. Besides providing a baseline against which to evaluate Catholic schools, a comparative analysis of Catholic and public school outcomes should reveal ways the two school systems might assist each other in an effort to improve American education.

Catholic and public schools can be compared in terms of academic achievement and nonacademic outcomes. With respect to academics, considerable attention has been given to recent research demonstrating that Catholic school children consistently attain higher standardized test scores than public school children. This result is referred to as the "Catholic school advantage." While critics argue that the differences in achievement are small, they are statistically significant and consistent across grade levels and over time (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Greeley, 1982; Hoffer, 2000).

It should be noted that these comparisons are based on public and Catholic school mean scores. Individual Catholic and public schools may differ from the mean, with some Catholic schools falling below public school test score averages and some public schools achieving higher scores than many Catholic schools. This implies that some public and Catholic schools offer a very high quality education, while some schools in both sectors fail badly in this regard.

The more interesting question is how to account for the academic advantage of Catholic schools. Recent field studies and ethnographies, as well as new survey analyses provide explanations. Several studies show that the "Catholic school advantage" is partly accounted for by differences in the strength of the academic programs offered in Catholic and public schools (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982). Students in Catholic schools, including low-ability pupils, are typically exposed to a challenging academic curriculum while low-ability students in public schools are often assigned to classes that are neither interesting nor challenging. Further, Catholic school students take a greater number of academic courses than public school students (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982). In short, a more challenging curriculum is required of all students in Catholic schools.

Another explanation for higher Catholic school test scores is that Catholic schools have stricter discipline than public schools. Research shows differences in Catholic and public school students' perceptions of school discipline and order (see Table 1). Catholic school students sense greater discipline in their schools than public school students. To the extent that an orderly environment fosters learning, these differences likely affect student achievement.

Researchers also explain the higher test scores of Catholic school students as a result of the sense of community found in Catholic schools (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982). Bryk et al. (1993) argue that a communally organized school exhibits three characteristics. First, the school pro-

vides numerous activities to involve students and teachers, creating a high level of interaction and shared academic and nonacademic experiences. Second, the role of the teacher extends beyond the classroom, to include counseling, support, and friendship with students. This increases students' commitment to the school and gives them a sense of membership. Teachers also exhibit high levels of collegiality and loyalty to their school. Third, teachers and students share a common understanding about the importance of learning and the value of respectful social interactions. Further, they have an appreciation for the dignity of the individual and a commitment to the community. These characteristics of Catholic schools are believed to teach students the importance of learning and to encourage and support them in their efforts to achieve (NCES, 1999).

Catholic and public schools also can be compared in terms of nonacademic outcomes, such as social development and sense of civic responsibility. Catholic and public schools endorse similar methods to foster student social development, including respecting individuals and their property, valuing racial and ethnic diversity and multiculturalism, promoting conflict resolution, and helping students develop a sense of responsibility for others. The communal nature of Catholic schools provides additional support for efforts to promote student social development (Jacobs, 1998). The strong dedication of Catholic educators to a mission of service and commitment to the common good also increases the effectiveness of the efforts of Catholic educators to develop a sense of civic responsibility in their students (Youniss & Yates, 1997).

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: ACHIEVEMENT OUTCOMES

Differences in the academic achievement and social development of students in Catholic and public schools are investigated using three data sets. The first analysis examines the curriculum assignments and subsequent achievement of sophomores in high school. These data are part of a larger study following student assignments to ability groups from middle through high school.

The students analyzed comprise the population of regular 10th-grade students who were in five public and one Catholic high school in a medium-sized urban school district and who had been in one of those schools in 9th grade. Special education and limited English proficiency students were excluded. Students who left these schools after 9th grade or entered these schools at the start of 10th grade (about 10% of the student body) were also excluded. Approximately 10% of the remaining students were excluded because of missing data.

In these schools, students were grouped by ability in both English and mathematics. Based on examination of the curriculum guides and interviews with counselors and teachers, we classified the public schools' 10th-grade English classes into four levels: Basic, Regular, Honors, and Advanced. We

classified the public schools' 10th-grade mathematics classes into Very Basic, Basic, Regular, Honors, and Advanced classes. The Catholic school's group structure included only Basic, Regular, and Honors 10th-grade classes in both English and mathematics.

All these students took a state-mandated standardized test in March of 10th grade. This test was constructed and scored by a national testing agency and was a variation of one of their standardized tests administered to high school students. The student's percentile score is used in these analyses. This score is based on national norms used by the testing agency.

Figures 1a and 1b present the distribution of students' test scores by ability group for the public and Catholic school students in English. The column on the right of Figure 1a shows the frequency and percentile distribution of public school students in 10th-grade English. The majority of the students, 53%, are assigned to the Regular ability group, with 34% assigned to the Honors group. Comparing this distribution to the Catholic distribution in Figure 1b shows that students are more likely to be assigned to the Basic class in the public schools (7.1%) than in the Catholic school (3.2%). However, students in the public school are more likely to be assigned to the Honors or Advanced group (39.9%) in the public schools than in the Catholic school (27.4%). This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that the Catholic school advantage is most beneficial for low-ability students (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Greeley, 1982).

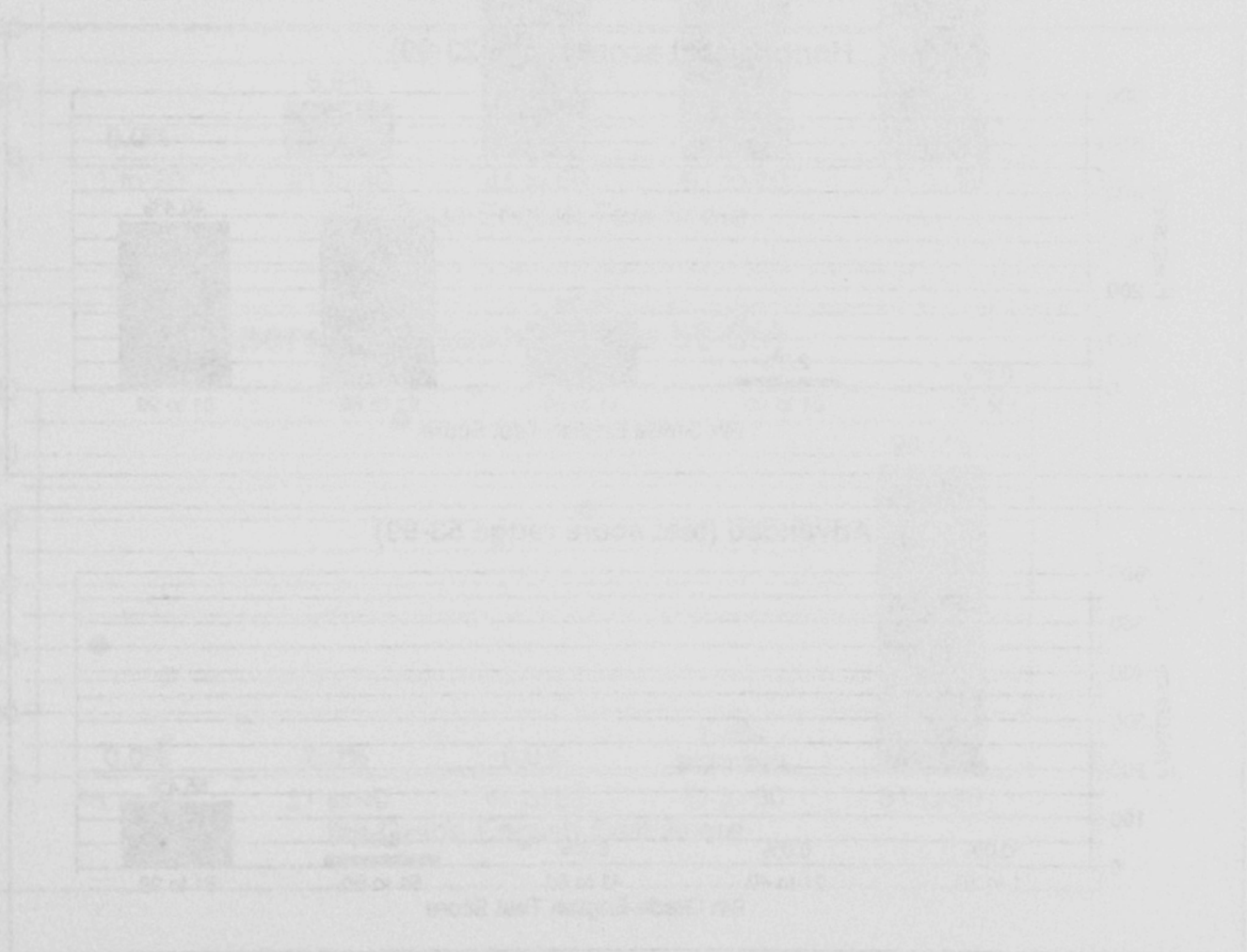


Figure 1a
Frequency of Standardized Test Scores By Ability Group Level
 10th Grade English - Public School (N = 2479)

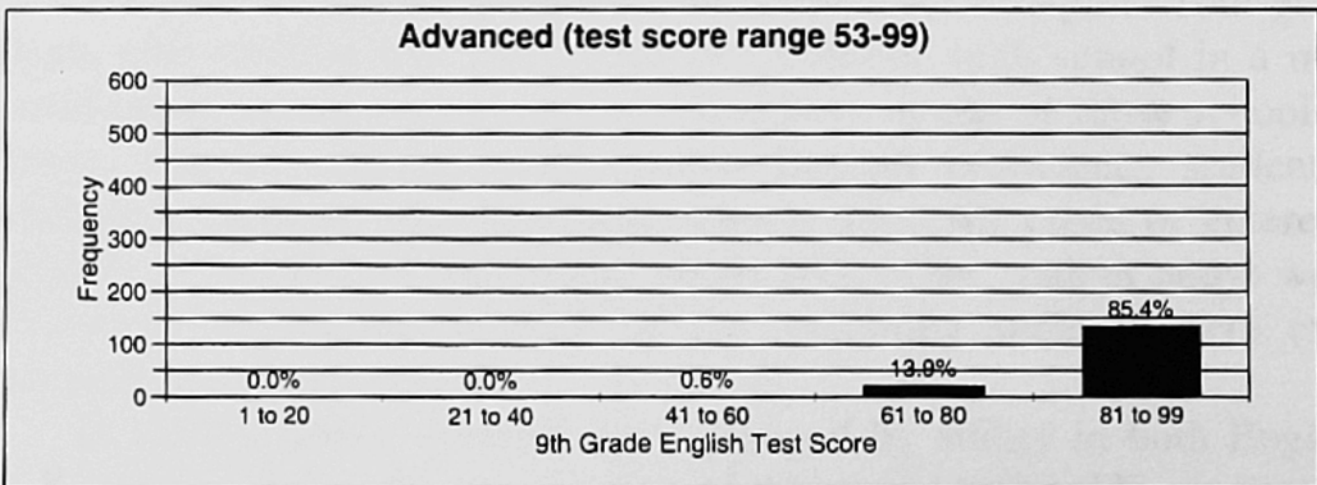
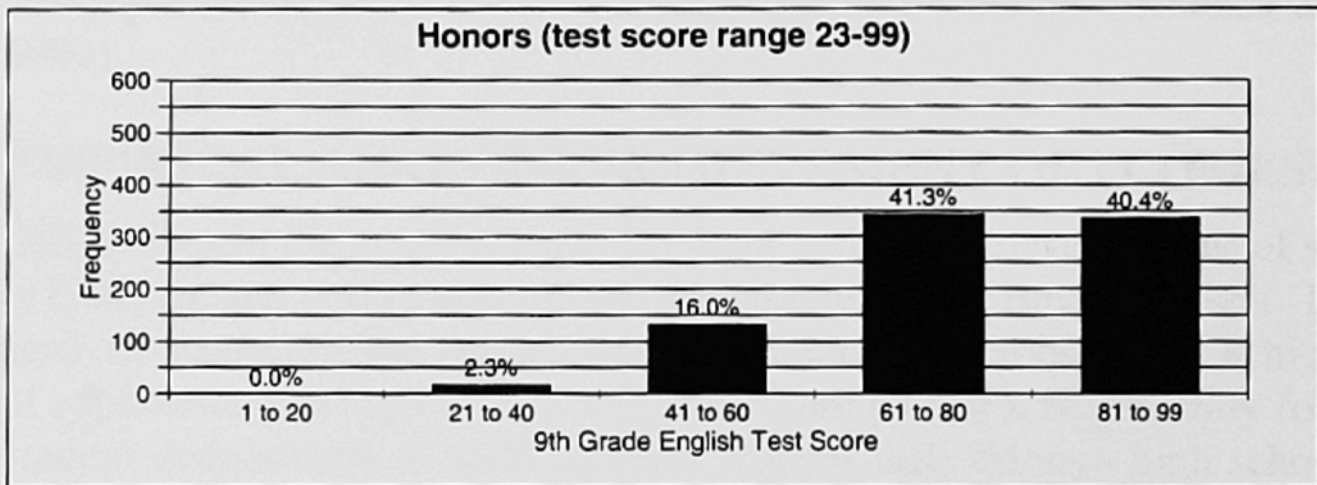
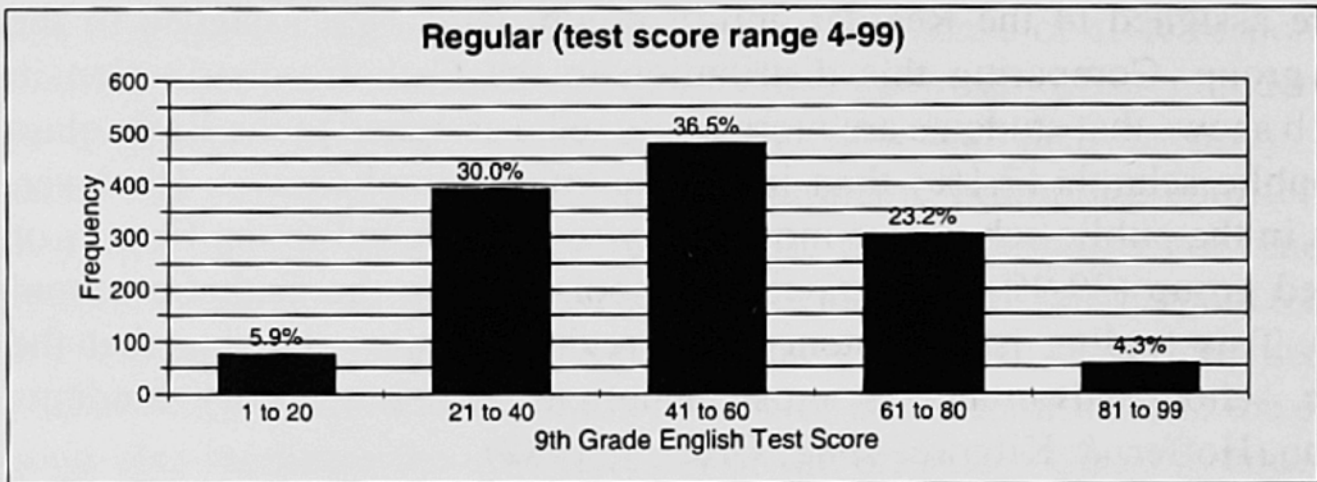
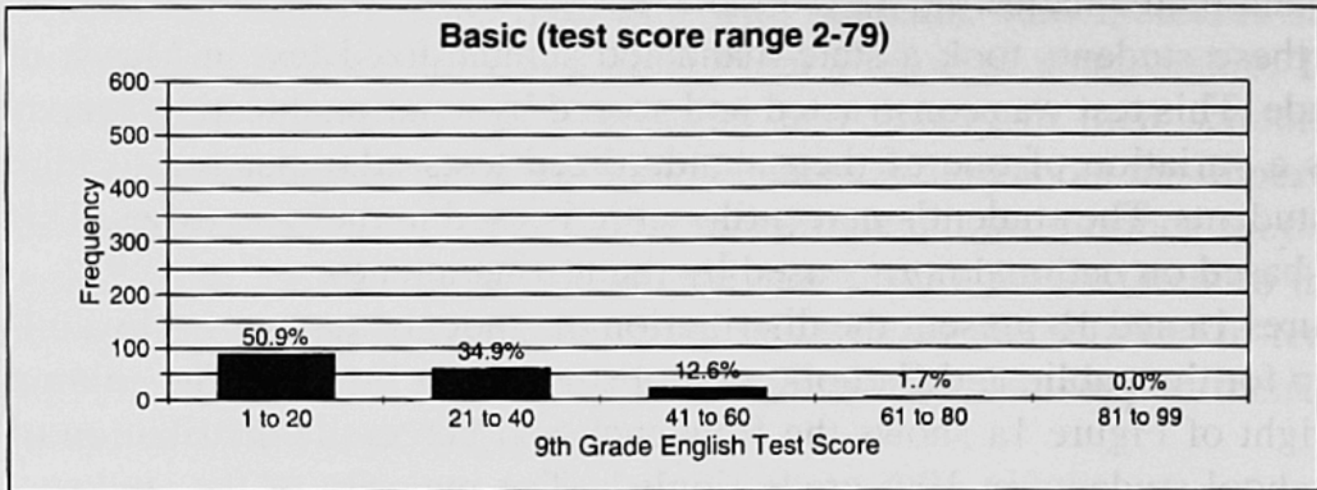
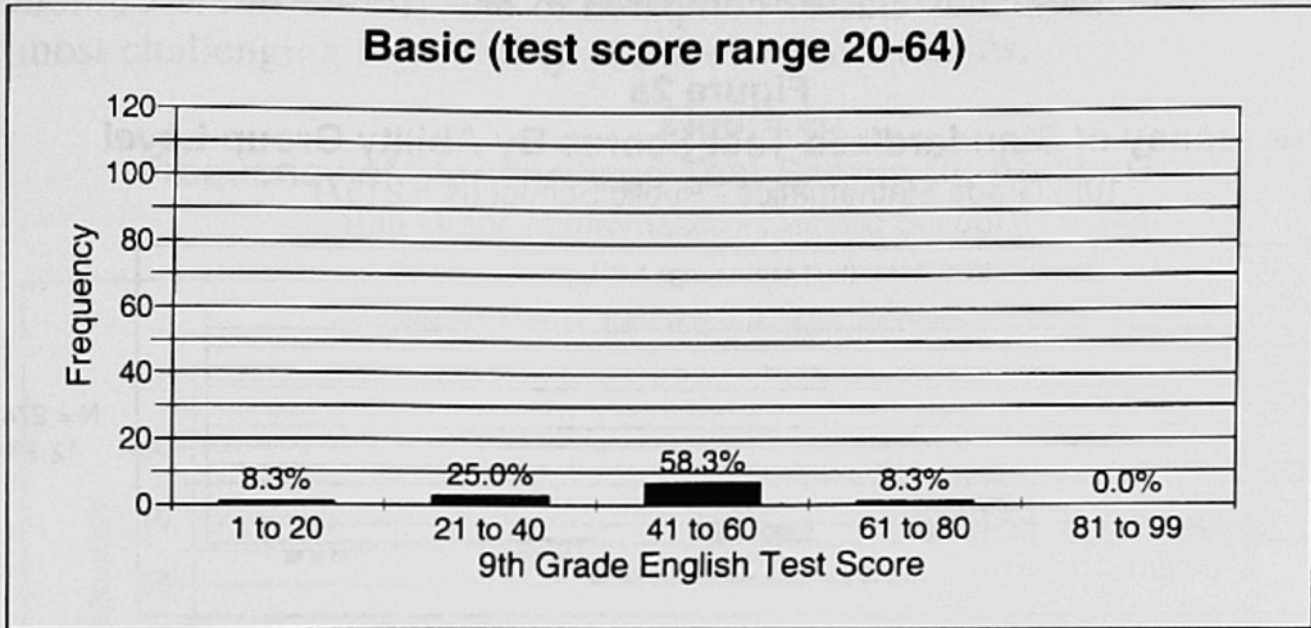
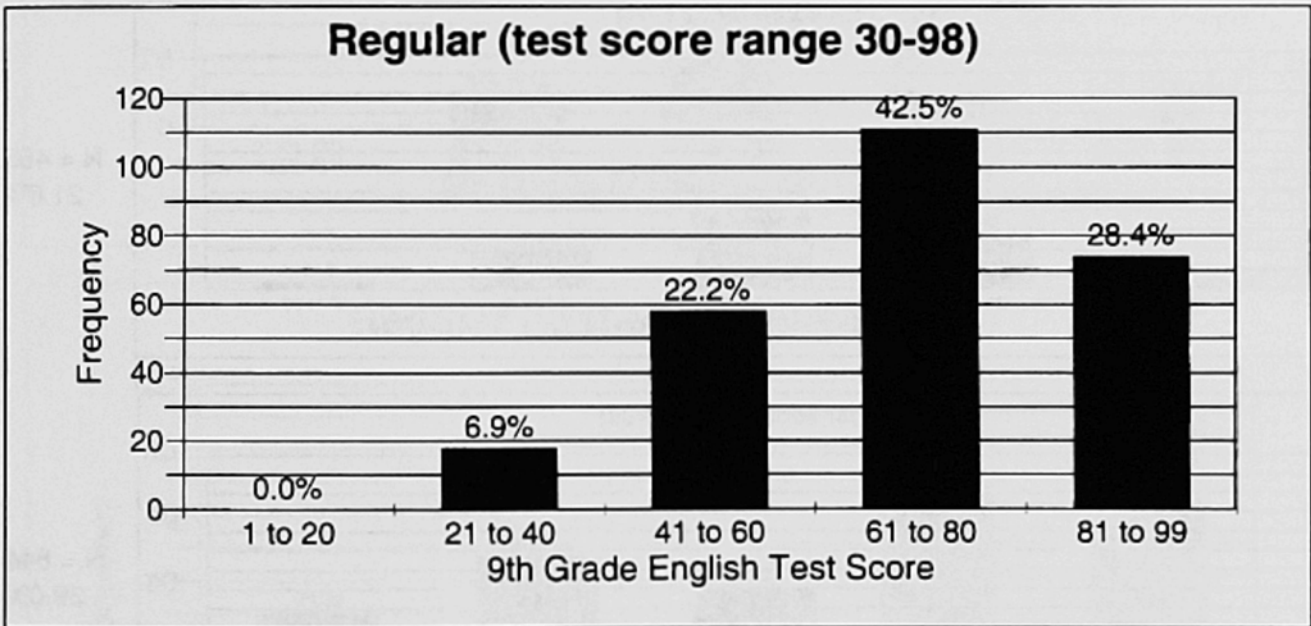


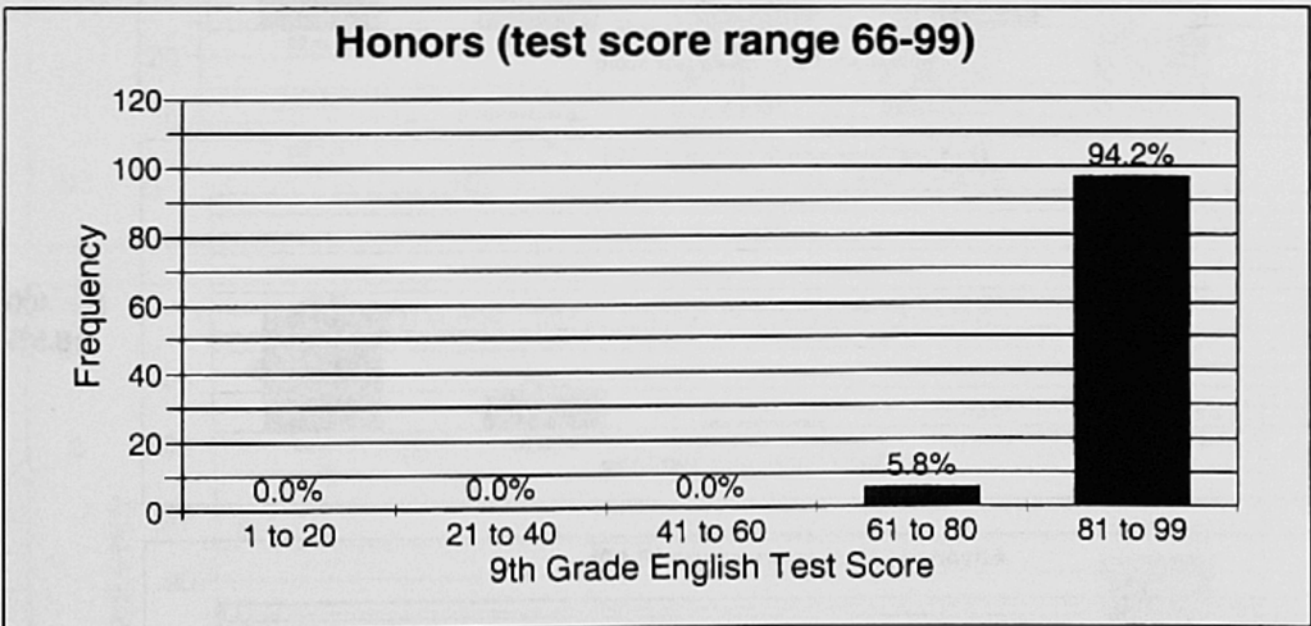
Figure 1b
Frequency of Standardized Test Scores By Ability Group Level
 10th Grade English - Catholic School (N = 376)



N = 12
 3.2%



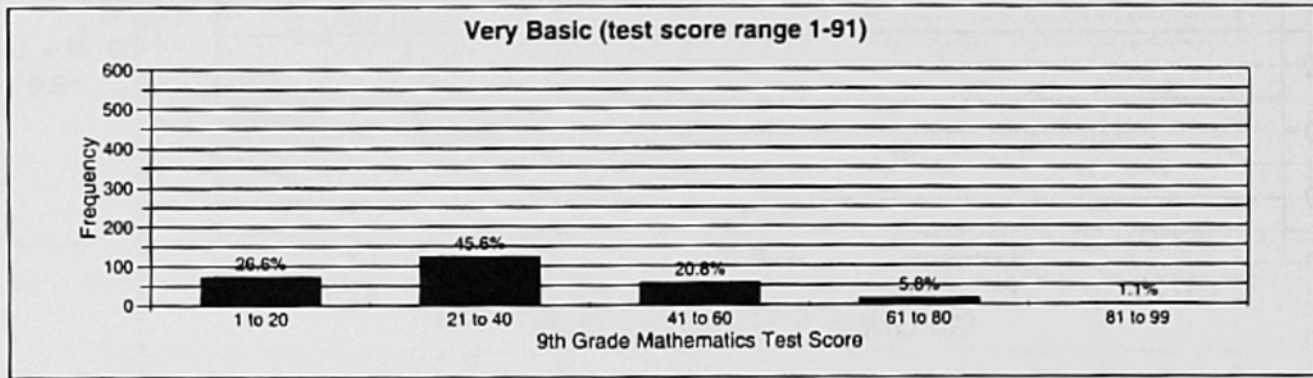
N = 261
 69.4%



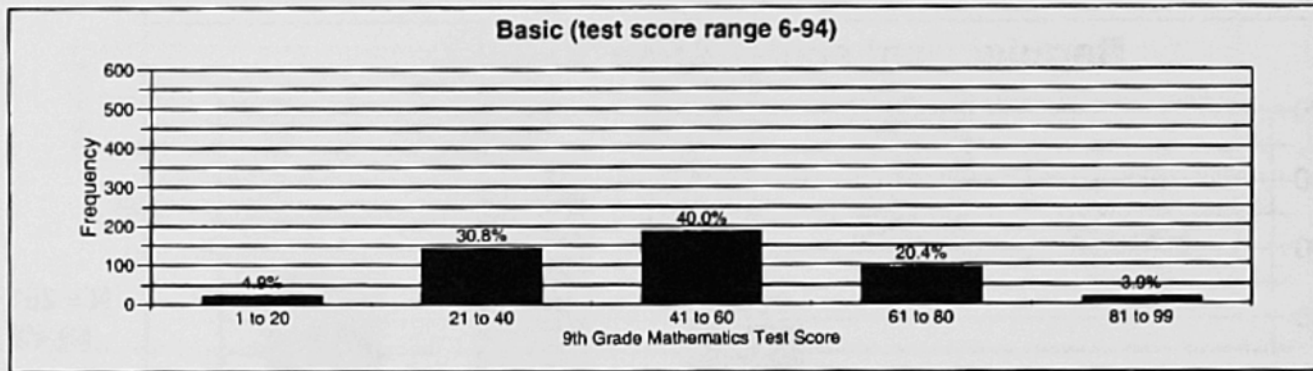
N = 103
 27.4%

Figures 2a and 2b show the same pattern of low-ability students being assigned to higher level classes in the Catholic school than in the public schools. Over 34% of the public school students are assigned to the Very Basic or Basic mathematics classes compared to only 10.9% in the Catholic

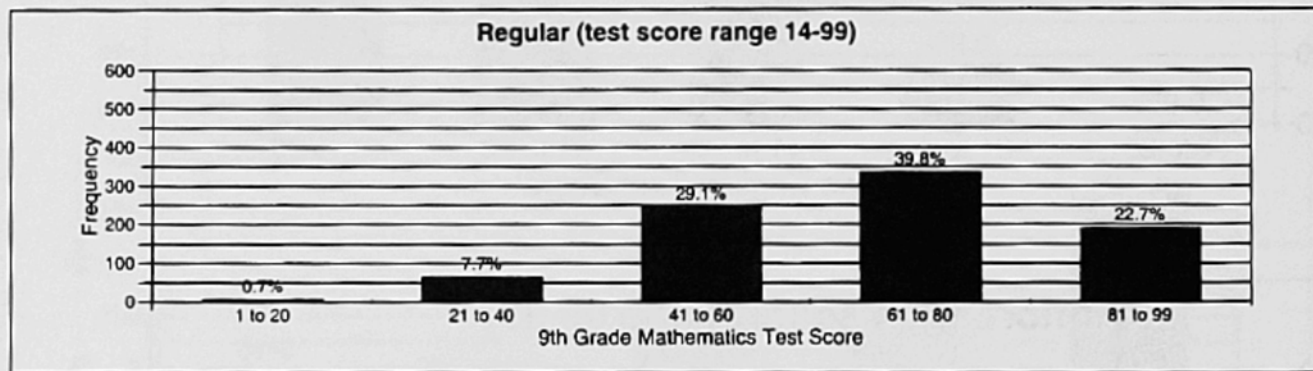
Figure 2a
Frequency of Standardized Test Scores By Ability Group Level
 10th Grade Mathematics - Public School (N = 2157)



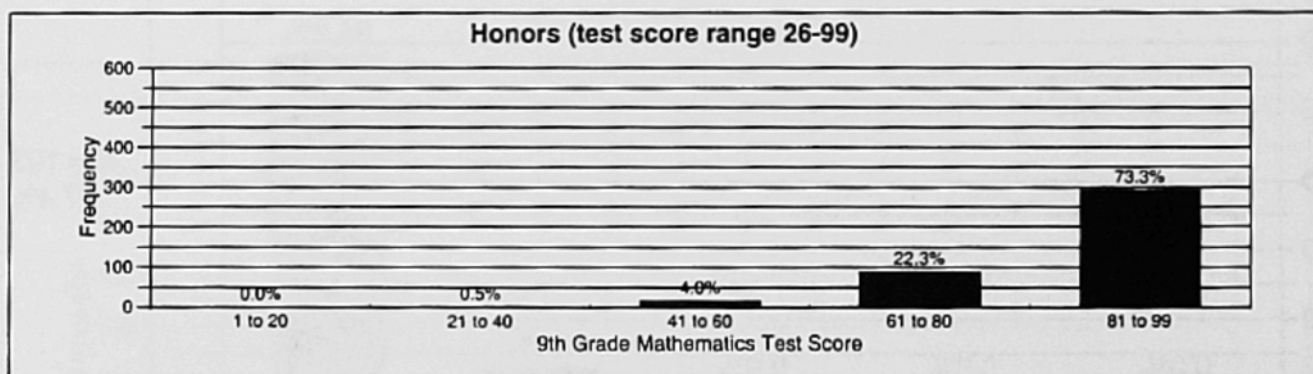
N = 274
12.7%



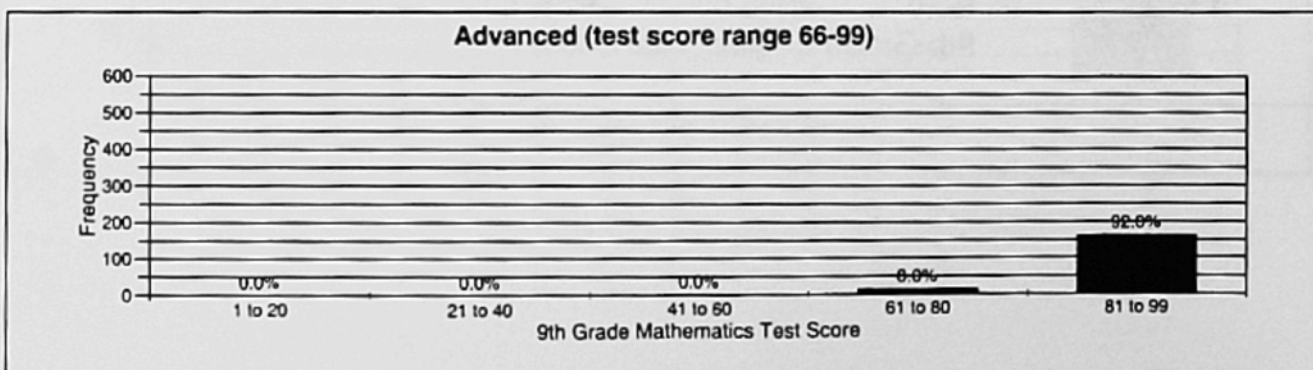
N = 465
21.6%



N = 844
39.0%



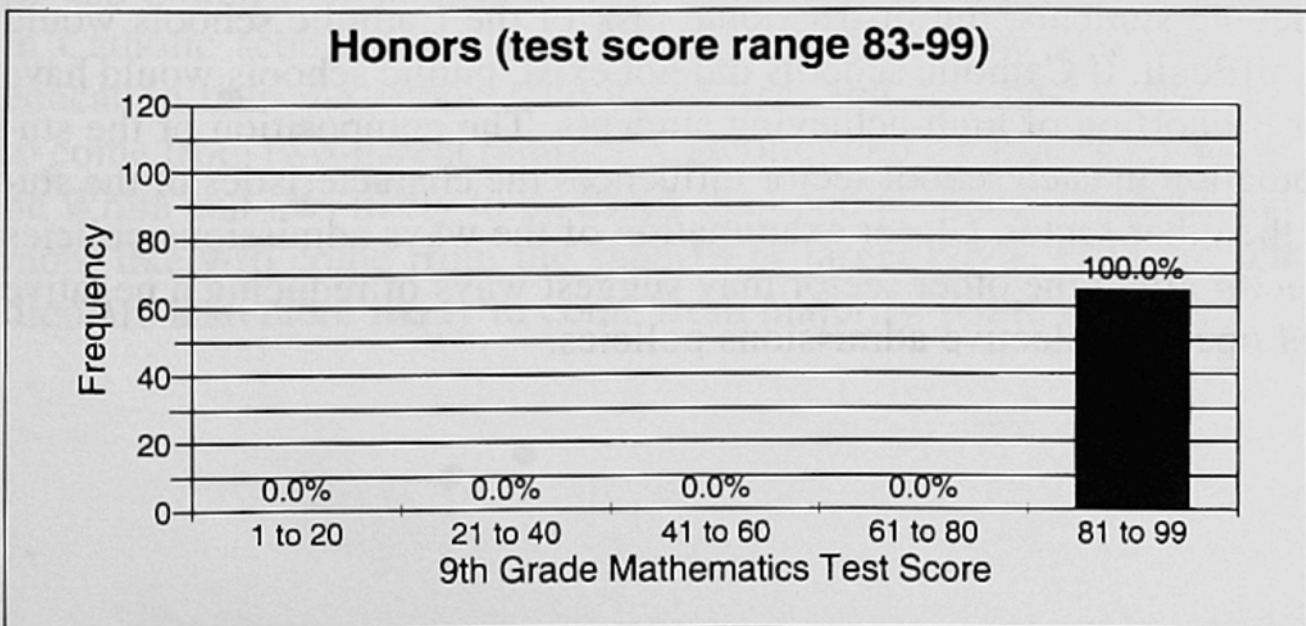
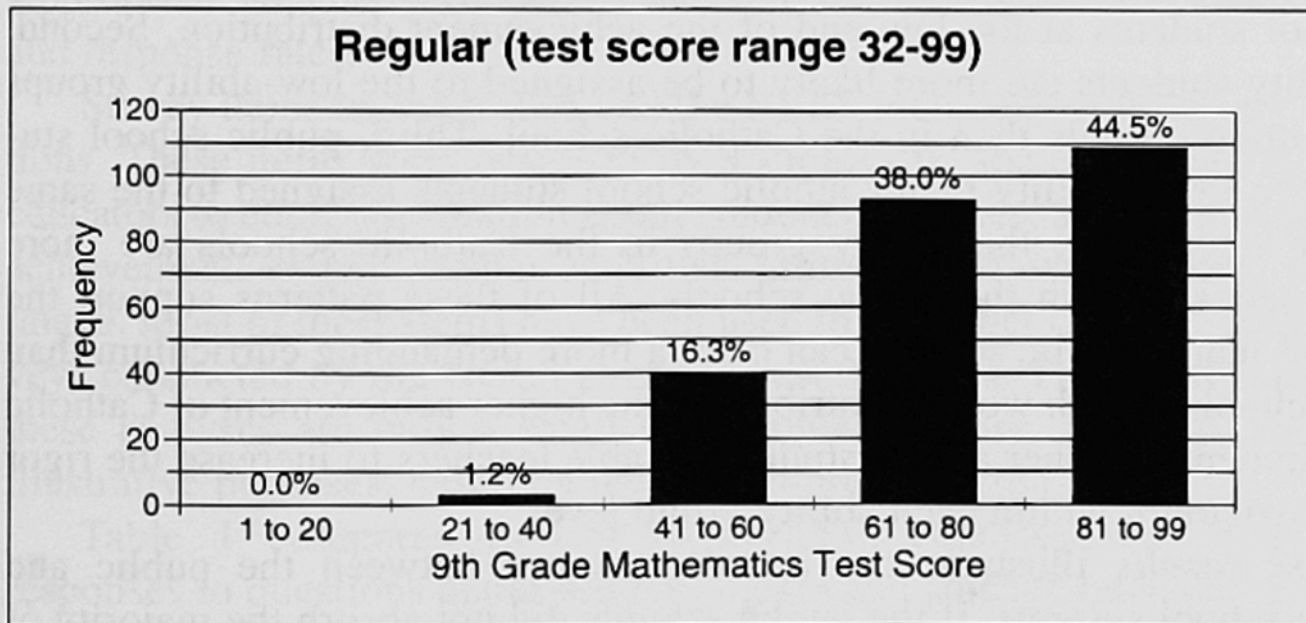
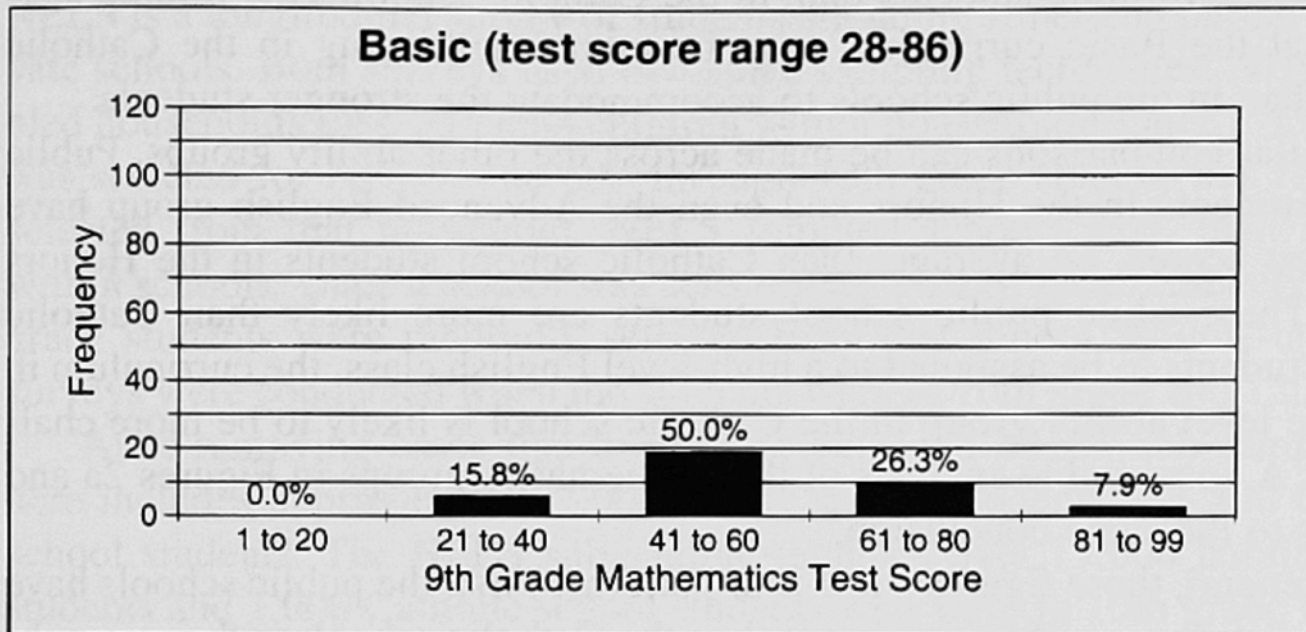
N = 400
18.5%



N = 176
8.2%

school. At the same time, 26.7% of the public school students are assigned to Honors or Advanced mathematics, compared to 18.7% in the Catholic school. Again, Catholic school students are less likely to be assigned to a low-ability class than in public school but also less likely to be assigned to the most challenging high ability classes in mathematics.

Figure 2b
Frequency of Standardized Test Scores By Ability Group Level
 10th Grade Mathematics - Catholic School (N = 348)



However, examining these data more closely reveals another pattern that sheds greater light on the results. Figures 1a and 1b show the range and distribution of test scores in each ability group for each school sector. The majority of students in the Basic English classes in the public schools obtained test scores below the 20th percentile on a nationally based norm. Almost all students scored under the 40th percentile. In contrast, the majority of Catholic school students in the Basic group scored between the 40th and 60th percentile. These data indicate that the Basic group in the public schools has lower performing students than in the Catholic school. This finding suggests that the Basic curriculum may be more challenging in the Catholic school than in the public schools to accommodate the stronger students.

Similar comparisons can be made across the other ability groups. Public school students in the Honors and even the Advanced English group have lower test scores, on average, than Catholic school students in the Honors group. Thus, while public school students are more likely than Catholic school students to be assigned to a high-level English class, the curriculum in the same level ability group in the Catholic school is likely to be more challenging. A comparable analysis of the mathematics groups in Figures 2a and 2b leads to the same conclusion.

In general, these figures show four patterns. First, the public schools have a wider distribution of achievement than the Catholic school, with more public school students at the low end of the achievement distribution. Second, low-ability students are more likely to be assigned to the low-ability groups in the public schools than in the Catholic school. Third, public school students have lower ability than Catholic school students assigned to the same group level. Finally, the ability groups in the Catholic schools are more homogeneous than in the public schools. All of these patterns support the argument that Catholic schools can offer a more demanding curriculum than public schools, which would contribute to the higher achievement of Catholic school students. Higher ability students enable teachers to increase the rigor of the curriculum within each ability group level.

These results illustrate the interdependence between the public and Catholic school systems. If the public schools did not absorb the majority of low-achieving students, the instructional task of the Catholic schools would be more difficult. If Catholic schools did not exist, public schools would have a greater proportion of high-achieving students. The composition of the student population in each school sector influences the characteristics of the students in the other sector. Closer examination of the ways admissions policies of one sector affect the other sector may suggest ways of reducing a negative impact of open or selective admissions policies.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSES: NONACADEMIC OUTCOMES

In this study, nonacademic outcomes of public and private schools are compared by analyzing student responses in two large national surveys: the National Household Education Survey of 1996 (NHES) and the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS). Both of these data sets were collected and are distributed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education.

The NHES is a cross-sectional survey of American households. The NELS is a longitudinal survey of students attending American public and private schools. Both surveys used two-stage sampling techniques. NHES sampled households first, and then children within households. Once a household was selected for NHES, one 6th- through 12th-grade student was randomly selected from that household. NELS sampled schools first, then students within schools. Once a school was selected for NELS, approximately 36 8th-grade students were randomly selected from that school. Follow-up NELS surveys were conducted when the students were in 10th grade and 12th grade.

After removing cases due to missing data, the NHES sub-sample used here includes approximately 7,000 public school students and 400 Catholic school students. The NELS sub-sample includes over 12,000 public school students and 1,000 Catholic school students who were in 10th grade in 1990. Appropriate weights, provided by the NCES, are used to correct for sampling and response rates.

Survey items on the NHES and the NELS include a wide variety of questions. These items were designed by sociologists, social psychologists, and educators to elicit information about students' families, academic careers and achievement, extracurricular activities, attitudes and expectations, and self-image. Most of these items have been used in a number of large, national surveys conducted by the NCES over the past 30 years. The items selected for these analyses are only a small sub-sample of those available, chosen for illustrative purposes, based on theory and previous research.

Table 1 compares student background characteristics and student responses to questions about school climate and student satisfaction for public and Catholic students in the NHES survey. The data show that the children in Catholic schools have significantly higher income and level of parental education than the public school children, and are considerably more likely to come from two-parent families. Catholic school children are more likely to be White and less likely to be Black than public school children and they are more likely to come from the suburbs or larger cities. Catholic school children are also more likely to come from majority White schools.

Table 1
Differences Between Public and Catholic School Students
in the National Household Education Survey of 1996 (N = 7,587)

	6th-12th Grade	
	Public	Catholic
	N = 7,118	399
Household income (mean thousands of dollars)	37.6*	51.5
Highest level of parental education (mean years)	13.8	15.1
% students who report no father/stepfather in household	28.3	15.7
% students who are in two-parent families	68.0	79.4
Race/ethnicity		
% White	66.3	74.2
% Black	16.8	8.0
% Hispanic	13.1	13.8
% other	3.9	4.0
Community size		
% rural	27.0	11.5
% in suburbs	17.2	29.6
% in city <50,000	30.6	23.6
% in city >50,000	25.2	35.3
% students who report school is >75% same race as student	45.5	54.1
% students who report doing community service activities	47.4	70.7
% students who report their parents do community service activities	52.5	66.1
% students who report their school arranges community service activities	83.8	93.0
% students who report their school requires community service activities	15.6	52.4
Student opinions (mean; -2 = strongly disagree, 2 = strongly agree)		
Student is challenged at school.	0.7	1.1
Student enjoys school.	0.7	0.9
Teachers maintain discipline in classroom.	0.8	1.1
Principal maintains discipline in school.	1.1	1.4
Students and teachers respect each other.	0.5	1.0
Student opinions count in school.	0.5	0.8
Family monitors student progress.	1.3	1.4

* All public/Catholic differences are statistically significant at the .05 level.

Considering school involvement, the data show that Catholic school students and their parents are more likely than public school families to engage in community service activities and Catholic schools are more likely to arrange and require these activities. Moreover, Catholic school students are more apt than public school students to feel challenged at school and to enjoy school. More Catholic school students think their teachers and principal

maintain discipline and that teachers and students respect each other. They also have a greater tendency to feel that their family monitors their school progress and that their opinions are heard in school. These results are consistent with the belief that Catholic schools have a sense of community that encourages positive social interactions, student and parent involvement in school, and a sense of social responsibility. The marked differences between Catholic and public school students on these items suggest that the positive climate in Catholic schools may be an important factor in Catholic school success.

Table 2 presents characteristics of the 10th-grade Catholic and public school students in the NELS survey. Catholic school students score approximately 5% higher on a composite standardized achievement test in English and mathematics than public school students, come from higher income families, and attend schools with a slightly higher proportion of White students and a lower proportion of Black students. These background data are similar to the NHES statistics.

Table 2
Differences Between Public and Catholic School Students
in the National Longitudinal Study of 1988 (N = 13,519)

	10th Grade, 1990	
	Public N = 12,655	Catholic 864
Standardized test composite (mean; st. devs. approx. = 9.0)	50.7*	55.0
Socioeconomic composite (mean; st. devs. approx. = 0.7)	0.0	0.4
Race/Ethnicity		
% White	74.5	76.4
% Black	12.1	8.7
% Hispanic	8.8	8.7
% other	4.6	6.3
Locus of control composite (mean)	0.0	0.1
Range -3.0 to 1.6: a higher score indicates more feeling of control.		
Student self-concept composite (mean)	0.0	0.1
Range -3.6 to 1.2: a higher score indicates higher self-esteem.		
% parents who have not attended a school meeting this year	48.2	23.0
% students who expect they:		
won't finish high school	0.6	0.5
will finish high school only	9.4	2.9
will attend college or vocational school	31.3	11.8
will finish four-year college	31.9	43.0
will have schooling after college	26.8	41.8

Student opinions (% who agree)

Teachers are interested in students in my school	74.6	87.0
I don't feel safe in my school.	8.4	4.9

Student values (5 who say it is very important to:)

Be successful in my line of work	84.5	90.6
Find the right person to marry	76.3	79.8
Have lots of money	44.2x	42.0
Have strong friendships	80.7	85.4
Help others in the community	31.4x	31.8
Have children	43.0	52.4
Have leisure time	66.0x	67.2
Get away from parents	18.1x	17.0

* All public/Catholic differences are statistically significant at the .05 level except where indicated.

x Differences are not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Examining student attitudes, the NELS survey shows that Catholic school students have a greater sense of control over their environment than public school students. Catholic school students also have a higher self-concept. Catholic school parents are much more likely to attend a school meeting than public school parents. Students in Catholic schools have higher educational aspirations, with 85% planning to complete at least four years of college, compared to 59% of public school students. Only 3% percent of Catholic school 10th graders expect to finish their education at or before the end of high school, compared to 10%, or three times as many public school students. Catholic school students are more likely than their public school counterparts to feel their teachers are interested in their students and to feel safe in school.

Student values also differ across school sector. Catholic school students are more likely than public school students to consider it very important to be successful in work, to find the right person to marry, to have strong friendships, and to have children. Interestingly, Catholic and public school students do not differ significantly in the importance they attach to having lots of money, helping others in the community, having leisure time, and getting away from their parents.

The results of these surveys are consistent with the findings of previous survey and ethnographic studies of school sector effects. They present a markedly different profile of students in Catholic and public schools. The typical Catholic school student attains higher achievement, has higher educational aspirations, is more involved in school activities, exhibits more pro-social behavior, and has a greater sense of responsibility than a comparable student in the public schools. These findings are consistent with the widely held belief that the academic success of Catholic schools is attributable to the strength of the curriculum; the communal organization of the faculty and

student body; and the involvement and loyalty of Catholic school students, parents, and teachers.

This comparative analysis points to academics and school climate as significant factors in accounting for the higher achievement of Catholic school students. But another aspect of Catholic school success is the fact that the public schools, in many ways, carry a greater part of the burden and responsibility of educating American students. The public schools enroll those students who do not qualify for Catholic schools and who encounter the most obstacles to learning. By relieving the Catholic schools of this burden, the public schools have facilitated the academic and social goals of Catholic schools. One might ask whether Catholic schools should do more to equalize this burden by greater service to the special needs population. On the other hand, Catholic schools have surpassed public schools in their service to the economically and socially underprivileged students and that may represent their unique contribution to serving the needy.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The critical sociological insight that lay at the foundation of the analysis presented here is that the Catholic school system, as a societal institution, develops in interdependence with other social institutions in the United States. In particular, the growth of the Catholic school system is intricately related to the evolution of the public school system. Educators and parents must keep this interdependence in mind as they plan the future direction of Catholic schools.

The historical and comparative analysis of Catholic and public schools presented here provides some guidance in planning the future of Catholic education. History shows that the establishment of the Catholic and public school systems was influenced by widely held religious and political beliefs of early Americans. If Catholics had been less threatened by the religious practices prevalent in the early public schools and if Protestants had been less resistant to Catholic education, a single school system might have emerged instead of the dual system in existence today. While separation of public and private schools is not likely to change in the near future, both school systems would benefit from some shared activities. Many opportunities exist for collaboration and sharing of resources and knowledge without violating the Constitution. If Catholic schools focus solely on improving Catholic education while ignoring the needs and resources of the public schools, they may be limiting their potential and failing to act with the spirit of community espoused by Catholic education.

Religious beliefs and practices in America have shifted in the past several decades, with direct effects on Catholic and public school enrollment. Greater tolerance and respect for diverse religious faiths have increased non-

Catholic enrollment in Catholic schools and Catholic enrollment in public schools. The increased religious diversity in Catholic schools provides a valuable opportunity for teachers to encourage the study of world religions, including religious and cultural beliefs and practices. A greater understanding of other religions should lead to greater tolerance and respect for others.

Given the magnitude and seriousness of the problems facing contemporary public schools, Catholic educators might rethink the population of students they wish to serve. If vouchers become legal, Catholic enrollments will increase and many students from schools with poor academic records will transfer into Catholic schools. Perhaps Catholic schools should recruit these students regardless of vouchers, viewing the at-risk student as a special part of their teaching mission. Catholic schools might provide more scholarship programs funded by corporate or private donations or by taxing financially viable Catholic schools. They could also establish low-cost or voluntary tutoring programs to support student learning. Since Catholic schools already have experience with inner-city students, extending this effort to other at-risk students would be a powerful response to a critical educational issue.

Catholic educators might also recognize a pressing educational need that is not being met adequately by either the public or Catholic school system. A significant number of students manifest some form of learning disability. Many of these students can function well in an ordinary classroom with assistance and structure. In general, neither public nor Catholic school teachers have the training, time, or resources to help these students. As a result, students' learning disabilities often remain unrecognized and their academic performance suffers accordingly. Catholic educators might give serious attention to training teachers in techniques to assist students with learning disabilities and to setting up programs that the public schools could then model in an effort to help these students learn.

At a moment in history when science and technology thrive, high schools and colleges are adapting their curriculum to accommodate the growing need for graduates in computer science, technology, science, and business. At the same time, cultural pressures, such as multiculturalism and the women's movement, have led to changes in the curriculum. For example, scholars point to the replacement of many traditionally respected pieces of literature by works of greater contemporary appeal (Yamane, 2001). While this trend has value, a danger exists that a liberal arts education will be depreciated in the process. Catholic schools are in a unique position to promote the importance of the liberal arts and can make a significant contribution to American intellectual life by doing so.

In the final analysis, the future of Catholic education depends on how the Catholic Church itself evolves and the way it engages with secular society. The Catholic hierarchy may continue to view educating Catholic children in

Catholic schools as its preeminent teaching mission and strive to serve all Catholic children within that structure. If the Church adopts this position, financial limitations may lead to the collapse of the school system. On the other hand, the Catholic Church may acknowledge its financial limitations and recognize the need to restructure existing Catholic schools. In making decisions governing the future of each individual Catholic school and Catholic education in general, it is hoped that Catholic educators will remain aware of the role of Catholic education as a societal institution and its interdependence with other social institutions, especially the public school system. If they do, they will have the courage to redefine or modify Catholic education in a way that responds to critical contemporary needs and that exhibits a commitment to social justice and community.

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Maureen Hallinan is the William P. and Hazel B. White Professor of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Maureen T. Hallinan, Director, Center for Research on Educational Opportunity, Institute for Educational Initiatives, University of Notre Dame, 1017 Flanner Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556-5611.

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