DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 453 309 UD 034 175

AUTHOR	Domanico, Raymond
TITLE	Catholic Schools in New York City.
PUB DATE	2001-03-00
NOTE	51p.; Prepared for New York University, Program on Education and Civil Society.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; *Catholic Schools; Elementary Education; Minority Groups; Poverty; Private Schools; Public Schools; Scores; Standardized Tests; State Standards; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS	New York City Board of Education; *New York (New York)

ABSTRACT

This report examines the academic performance of New York City's Catholic elementary schools compared with the city's public schools. Catholic elementary schools enroll 98,000 children in New York City, approximately 14 percent of public school enrollment. The report uses data from the State of New York's fourth and eighth grade tests in English language arts and mathematics. All public schools administer these exams, and private schools do so on a voluntary basis. Data analysis indicates that Catholic schools in New York City are bringing their students to higher levels of achievement than are public schools, regardless of the number of poor and minority students. The higher achievement of Catholic schools is much more pronounced in grade 8 than in grade 4. In English language arts, there is a 17-point difference between Catholic school and public school eighth graders and a 20 point difference in mathematics. Catholic schools come closer to breaking the link between race, family income, and student achievement than do public schools. Catholic schools are more successful at maintaining a basic level of achievement than are public schools. The performance of poor and minority students in the Catholic schools demonstrates the educability of the city's youngsters. The most significant difference between public and Catholic schools in New York City is evidenced in the percentage of students who fall into the lowest performing category. Despite the performance advantage of Catholic schools, compared with public schools, the pass rate on state tests are not high enough in the Catholic system, with math scores in eighth grade particularly low. (SM)

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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK CITY

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for the

New York University Program on Education and Civil Society

March, 2001

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Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the cooperation of a number of individuals. I want to thank Dr. Catherine Hickey, Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of New York, Monsignor Pugliese, Superintendent of Schools and Pat Kelly Stiles and Sister Sheila, Associate Superintendents of Schools for the Diocese of Brooklyn. All of these individuals made information and data available to me in a timely and cheerful fashion.

Thanks also to the unnamed professionals at the New York City Board of Education who maintain the Division of Assessment and Accountability's web pages. This well organized site provides timely and extensive information on the performance of the public schools in New York City.

Catholic Schools in New York City

Summary of the Report

This is a report about the academic performance of New York City's Catholic elementary schools, compared with the city's public schools. It tells a story through numbers, using data from the State of New York's fourth and eight grade tests in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Though the report describes and interprets a lot of numbers, there are stories behind the numbers. The numbers reflect children and the real consequences of the tests that they are passing and failing.

The findings of this report:

The Catholic school system in New York City enrolls over 98,000 students, just less than 14 percent of public school K-8 enrollment.

Individual Catholic schools are, on average, much smaller than public schools in the city, 345 students compared with 790.

Some Catholic schools serve populations that mirror the racial and ethnic mix of the public schools that immediately surround them, while others have populations very different from their local public schools.

Funding differences result in the Catholic schools having one teacher per 21 students, compared with one teacher per 16.7 students in the public system and one non-teaching staff person for every 96.2 students, compared with one per 58.6 students in the public system.

Catholic schools had higher average scores in both English Language Arts and Math in both grade 4 and grade 8.

The difference between the two sectors changes from grade 4 to grade 8. In English Language Arts, there is a 9.8 point advantage for the Catholic schools in grade 4. This gap almost doubles to 17 points in grade 8. In math, the trend is even more dramatic. A 6.9 point advantage for Catholic schools in grade 4 grows to 20 points in grade 8.

The students in the Catholic schools pass these tests at a higher rate than their public school counterparts. That achievement gap grows in the eighth grade. The pass rates in the Catholic schools are around 50 percent on the grade 4 ELA , grade 8 ELA and grade 4 Math tests. Public school pass rates are lower; 42 percent on the grade 4 ELA, 32.9 percent in grade 8 ELA and 46.3 percent in grade 4 Math. Both sectors are having extreme difficulty with the grade 8 Math test; only 35 percent of the Catholic school students and 23 percent of the public school students passed this test.

The biggest difference between the two sectors is evidenced in the percentage of students who fall into the lowest scoring category. In grade 8, 23 percent of the public students fall into this category in ELA and 43 percent do so in math. Catholic schools have a much lower percentage of students falling into this danger category in grade 8; 6 percent in ELA and 18.6 percent in Math.

There are proportionately more low performing schools in the public sector. On the grade 4 ELA, 31 percent of the pubic schools have average scores below 625, compared with only 10 percent of the Catholic schools. At the eighth grade level, the problem of failing public schools becomes even more pronounced. Fully 69 percent of the public schools have average ELA and Math scores below 695. Only 28 percent of Catholic schools have average Math scores that are so low and only 32 percent have average ELA scores that low.

If Catholic and public schools were placed in a combined ranking based upon test scores, the Catholic schools would occupy a disproportionate share of the top spots. Catholic schools account for 28 percent of the total number of schools with grade 4 ELA test data, yet they would occupy 38 percent of the spots in the top third of the ranking. At the eighth grade level, Catholic schools are 49% of the total, yet they would occupy 74% of the top 65 spots in a ranking of ELA scores.

A set of analyses was conducted after splitting the schools into two groups based upon the racial makeup of their student body.

In both sectors, the schools that serve a student population that has more White and Asian students show higher achievement levels than do the schools with more Black and Hispanic students. In the Catholic schools, however, the gap between the two groups of schools is smaller than in the public school system. This is true on every test. The "race" gap in public schools varies between 17 and 20 points. That is, the group of schools with Black and Hispanic enrollment of over 90 percent percent have average scores that are 17 to 20 points below that of the group of public schools that are 43 percent White or Asian. The race gap in Catholic schools ranges between 11 and 14 points.

In the eighth grade the group of Catholic schools that is 90 percent Black or Hispanic has an achievement level that is slightly higher than that of a group of public schools that are 43 percent White or Asian.

Only seven of New York City's 32 public community school districts have an average eighth grade ELA score that is higher than that of the group of Black and Hispanic Catholic schools. Those districts have enrollments that are between 27 and 63 percent White, compared with 4 percent White in the group of Catholic schools. No single public school district that is at least 90 percent Black or Hispanic scores within 10 points of the Black and Hispanic Catholic schools.

In the Black and Hispanic districts, the public schools have between 24 and 55 percent of their students falling into the lowest achievement category. The neighboring Catholic schools have between 9 and 27 percent of their youngsters scoring at this level.

A second set of analyses was conducted after splitting the schools into two groups based upon the income levels of their families. Due to data limitations, these analyses were only conducted for schools in Manhattan, Staten Island and the Bronx.

As with the earlier analysis based upon student racial background, the achievement gap between the Catholic and public schools is greater in the very poor districts than it is in the less poor districts. On the grade 8 ELA test , the gap between the very poor and the less poor public schools is 18.3 points, almost twice the 9.6 point gap in the Catholic schools.

The most dramatic difference is seen on the grade 8 ELA. On this test, the Catholic schools in the less poor districts have 6.5 percent of their students in the lowest level; this is almost the same as the 8.9 percent in the very poor districts. The public schools have 19.9 percent of their students in the lowest level in the less poor districts and 35 percent in the very poor districts. In fact, in the very poor districts, the percentage of public school students in the lowest score category is equivalent to the pass rate of the Catholic school students.

A number of conclusions and implications seem clear from the analyses presented in this report.

First, Catholic schools in New York City are bringing their students to higher levels of achievement than are public schools.

Secondly, the higher achievement of Catholic schools is much more pronounced in grade 8 than it is in grade 4.

Third, Catholic schools come much closer to breaking the link between race or family income and student achievement than do public schools. In fact, on some indicators, the performance of the Catholic schools with poor and minority youngsters equals and surpasses that of public schools with populations that are less poor and more white or Asian.

Fourth, Catholic schools are more successful at maintaining a basic level of achievement than are public schools. The concentration of student failure is much more pronounced within public schools than it is in Catholic schools.

Fifth, the performance of poor and minority youngsters in the Catholic schools once again demonstrates the educability of the city's youngsters. The most important contribution of the Catholic school system, beyond the direct benefits enjoyed by those students who participate in it, is this demonstration of the dignity and ability of these youngsters.

The data presented in this report offer some clear implications for the public school system itself, over and above any that are drawn from the comparison with the Catholic schools. First, failure in the public school system is concentrated in particular schools in particular districts. Second, the public school system has a major problem in its middle and junior high schools. Achievement on the eighth grade tests is appalling. Third, the data in this report offer one more piece of evidence that the large size of some public schools is dysfunctional.

The data can also offer some guidance to the Catholic school system, over and above the results of the comparison with public schools. First, despite the performance advantage of Catholic schools, compared with public schools, the pass rates on the state tests are not high enough in the Catholic school system. The Catholic schools are going to have to continue to strive for higher achievement and pass rates for their students. Second, there are some low performing Catholic schools in both the Diocese of Brooklyn and the Archdiocese of New York. These schools bear attention. Third, the math scores in the eight grade are low, as they are in many public and private schools across the state. Catholic schools need to address the challenge of the new state standards in mathematics.

Finally, the academic performance of inner city students in Catholic schools in New York City continues to have important implications for public policy.

At least 30,000 New York City students attend Catholic schools in neighborhoods that are almost entirely non-White and poor. In the eighth grade, the percentage of these students who pass the state tests is about twice that of neighboring public schools. There can be no doubt that some

public school students who are now trapped in failing public schools would benefit from a publicly subsidized transfer to the local Catholic school. What is in doubt is the number of those students that the Catholic schools could absorb. Data are sketchy, and Catholic school officials are noncommittal on this point. It is likely the case that the number of students that could be absorbed by the Catholic schools would neither bankrupt the public school system nor completely solve the city's achievement problem. The benefits to the individuals involved would be enormous, however. Those who wish to hold the line against tuition vouchers or tax credits need to own up to the very real human cost of that opposition.

There is a further implication in the performance of Catholic schools in poor and minority neighborhoods. The 30,000 or so students who are now attending Catholic schools in these neighborhoods represent a true public benefit. These students are achieving at higher levels than they could in the already overcrowded public schools that exist in many of their neighborhoods. Catholic schools face ongoing financial and operational crises. A reasonable case can be made for taxpayer support of the poor families that are already enrolling youngsters in the Catholic schools.

The public interest in these schools goes beyond the schools' ability to absorb even more students from failing public schools. The public interest would be harmed by a retrenchment in the Catholic school system in the city. As the Catholic schools begin to face a new set of challenges that will likely raise their costs while the ability of parents to pay tuition remains low, it will be appropriate for the public sector to weigh the public benefits that these schools provide. The data presented in this report strongly suggest that those benefits are quite high and that these schools and these parents are deserving of public support. The City of New York and its poor and working class families cannot afford to lose these Catholic schools.

Catholic Schools in New York City

I. Background and Introduction

The Relevance of Catholic School Performance

The achievement of students in urban Catholic schools has been the subject of intense interest and study. In many cities across the country, including New York, the Catholic school system serves as the largest alternative to the public school system. As in many cities, there are a variety of options available to New Yorkers who do not wish to send their children to public schools. A robust independent school system serves largely affluent families but also some middle class children and poorer children on scholarships. A wide variety of religious denominations run schools in the city including Jewish day schools, Greek Orthodox schools, Muslim schools, as well as many different Protestant schools. New York City is also home to a group of historically Black independent schools. But the Roman Catholic school system, with close to 100,000 students in 286 elementary schools, is the largest of these alternative school systems in the city. (High schools are not addressed in this study or report.) Slightly more than half of the city's private school enrollment is found in the Catholic schools.

In a history that is well documented, Catholic schools in New York City saw a large block of their constituents leave the city's five boroughs for the suburbs in the years between World War II and the 1970s. Many Catholic schools in Brooklyn and Queens closed in the 1970s, but many remained in operation in those boroughs as well as in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island. There are still many city neighborhoods with significant Catholic populations, and the Catholic schools in those neighborhoods continue to serve their traditional constituency. Those Catholic schools have a traditional purpose and that is to teach the elements, traditions and practices of the Catholic faith to Catholic children.

The Catholic schools in neighborhoods that have few Catholic residents have adapted to another purpose. These schools became havens for non-Catholic parents who found the local public schools not to their liking. Some parents have likely made the choice to put their non-

Catholic children into Catholic schools in hope of finding the traditional culture and discipline that many associate with Catholic schools. It seems clear, however, that many of these parents turned to Catholic schools because the local public schools were simply not functional, by the public system's own reckoning.

Since 1989, the New York State Education Department has identified what it refers to as "Schools Under Registration Review." These are public schools that for many years have failed to attain certain minimum levels of academic achievement on a variety of indicators. The state considers any school with more than 40 percent of its students in the lowest of the four achievement levels on the state tests to be a candidate for inclusion of the SURR list. (The standard is 66 percent on the eighth grade math exam.) In 2000, 105 schools were on this list, 97 of them in New York City. These schools are clustered in certain geographic areas within the city. They are joined by other public schools that have achievement profiles similar to those of the SURR schools, but that are not considered SURR schools for technical reasons. (They have made a modest improvement in the most recent year, for example.) This concentration of about 250 failing public schools in particular neighborhoods of New York City has created what the Industrial Areas Foundation - Metro New York has termed the "educational dead zone." There are some very fine public schools in New York City, but they are not to be found inside the dead zone. Parents who live in these communities have few options for their children. Some work the rules of the public school system to their advantage to find public schools outside of their community that will take their children. Others place their children within the local public school and either work for or hope for improvement. But, for some, the local Catholic school becomes the school of choice.

The academic performance of these children, as well as others in Catholic schools, has become the subject of great interest. Many people, both inside and outside of government, have drawn conclusions from the actions of low income and working class parents who have chosen to take on financial sacrifice to place their children in Catholic schools as opposed to the local, tuition-free, public school. Some would support these parents by instituting a publicly financed voucher system through which the state and city would pay for the tuition of some class of children in Catholic and other private schools. Some individuals have applied their own generosity either to

direct financial support of Catholic schools or to scholarship programs that allow children from low income families to attend Catholic school at little or no cost. In New York City in recent years, private individuals have funded private scholarship programs that were designed as experimental measures of the proposition that voucher programs could reap benefit to children in poor communities.

All of the actions -- either to support Catholic schools and their students or to advocate for public support of those schools -- are based somewhat on the premise that children, particularly those from low income families, are getting a better education in Catholic schools than they could in public schools. Many studies have tried to determine if that proposition is true, and there is a lively debate about their findings. This current study has been undertaken in that tradition. This is not an experimental study; children have not been randomly assigned to one type of school or another, as they have been in the evaluations of the private scholarship programs. Rather, this is a naturalistic study. By making use of new data that are regularly available on both public and Catholic schools, we can offer some powerful observations on the relative performance of the two school systems. Because this study is not derived from a controlled experiment, it does not seek to prove which system is better; rather, it seeks to describe the performance of the two school systems under imperfect, real world, conditions.

While learning more about the academic performance of the public and Catholic school systems in New York City is an important and relevant venture, it is not the only motivation for this study. A larger question underlies much of the debate about the performance of the public schools and the relative performance of the Catholic schools. That question has to do with educability of the children that attend these schools. The unstated question that underlies much of the current debates is whether low test scores are an indicator of bad schooling or of the innate ability of the youngsters in the school. By observing the performance of different groups of students in two different school systems, this study aims to add to our understanding of the educability of the city's young people. Such understanding can only enhance all school improvement efforts in both the public and private sectors.

Data Sources

In 1999, the New York State Education Department introduced new English language arts and mathematics examinations for students in grades 4 and 8. These exams are tied to the state's public school high school graduation requirements and are used to project an individual student's progress toward mastery of the skills necessary for high school graduation. All students in public schools take these exams. Private schools do so on a voluntary basis. While most independent schools do not, all schools of the Archdiocese of New York and the Diocese of Brooklyn participate in the testing program in grades 4 and 8. Like all other private schools in the state, Catholic schools are not subject to the high school graduation exams that the state has put in force for public schools.

Description of the Test Data Used in This Study

New York State adopted a new testing program in 1999, reflecting its efforts to raise academic standards for all schools in the state. This study makes use of the English Language Arts (ELA) and Math tests that are administered in grades 4 and 8. Each student is assigned two types of scores on these tests. The first is the scale score, which ranges from 455 to 830 in ELA and from 448 to 882 in Math. Depending upon that score, the child is also classified into one of four scoring categories:

Level 4 - "The student demonstrates superior knowledge and skills for each standard."

Level 3 - "The student demonstrates knowledge and skills for all standards."

Level 2 - "The student demonstrates some knowledge and skills for each standard or full proficiency in some of the standards."

Level 1 - "The student demonstrates no evidence of proficiency in one or more of the standards."

The standards in these definitions are particular aspects of Math or English Language Arts that students are expected to master at various grade levels. Although the State Education Department does not use the terms, Levels 1 and 2 are considered failing scores and Levels 3 and 4 are considered passing scores.

The score - category ranges:

	Gr. 4 ELA	Gr. 4 Math	Gr. 8 ELA	Gr. 8 Math
Level 4	692 - 800	678 - 810	739 - 830	760 - 882
Level 3	645 - 691	637 - 677	701 - 738	716 - 759
Level 2	603 - 644	602 - 636	662 - 700	681 - 715
Level 1	455 - 602	448 - 601	527 - 661	517 - 680

Much has been made of the presumed difference between the population served by the Catholic and public school systems. While there are many complexities to this issue, the vast differences in the "special education" population in the two systems garners the most attention. Over 10 percent of the public school population is classified as "special education." Eight percent of the public school students are in full-time special education classes; the remainder receives special services part time.

Catholic schools enroll only a few special education students and only those with mild learning disabilities or handicapping conditions. On the other hand, parents and Catholic school educators offer anecdotal evidence that the Catholic schools enroll some students that the public schools would classify as "special education." Catholic school educators are clear, however, that there are some students who have special needs that cannot be served in the Catholic schools under current financial constraints. They are also clear that they choose not to admit students who have the extreme special needs for which their schools cannot provide.

There is no easy analytic solution to the issues raised by the presence of significant numbers of special education system in the public school test results. Test reporting practices within the public school system have changed in the last two years. In the past, the public school system published two sets of results. One included the special education students; the other excluded them. As of 2000, the system is only reporting the combined results. This change was made in response to mandates adopted by the federal and state governments that require the system to report the combined results of general and special education students to the public.

This report will present the results as the public system reports them. For Catholic school and public schools alike, the results of all students in the school have been included in the analyses presented herein. Throughout this report, the unit of analysis is the school. One set of public schools has been excluded from the analyses, the so-called "District 75" or self-contained special education schools. These are schools in which every student is a special education student. The students in these schools have severe handicapping conditions and could not be served by the Catholic schools. Their test results are not included in this study.

There are also some students in the remaining public schools who have conditions that could not be addressed in Catholic schools. Unfortunately, there is no consensus on the percentage of students in the public school population who fit that description. To exclude the test results of all special needs youngsters from the public school results, even if it were possible, would neither be fair nor consistent with the public policy of the state. Some unknown proportion of the public school system's special needs students would not be classified as such in the Catholic system. Further, the state is now requiring the public schools to report test results, and accept accountability, for all enrolled students. It should also be noted that the public schools receive a very high level of funding to provide the services that special needs students require.

This paper will attempt to offer a fair, if imperfect, comparison of the two systems, while being mindful of the impact that special needs youngsters have on school test scores. This issue will be revisited in the concluding sections of this paper, where interpretation is given to the test results of the two systems and where estimates of the effect of the special population on the test results will be offered.

Data on the Impact of Special Education Students on Public School Test Scores

The Board of Education report on the 2000 administration of the grade 4 ELA exam indicates that 10,846 of the 77,456 students tested were students with disabilities (14 percent). The included "students in general education with supplemental aids and services (e.g., resource room, related services, consultant teacher services, integrated programs, etc.) and students in self-contained classes, with testing modifications as required by their Individual Education Plans." Overall, the public schools assessed 92 percent of their students on this test. The remainder are mostly students who are exempt from testing because they are "English language learners" and have been in ELL classes for less than 5 years. Catholic school generally employ either ESL or immersion programs for non-English speaking students and move students into full English instruction much quicker than the public schools. Catholic schools therefore do not have significant numbers of students exempted from testing in this category.

The data available for the 1999 administration of the state tests presented two sets of figures for public schools, one including special education students and one excluding those students. Those data were examined in the preparation of this report. They indicated fairly consistently that the impact of the special education students was to lower both pass rates and mean scores by about 5 points. The percentage of students in the lowest achievement category was raised by about 5 points when the special education students were included.

Analytic Questions

The current study will be guided by the following analytic questions:

1. Do the two sectors serve similar student populations? Do any differences vary from neighborhood to neighborhood?

2. How do the average test scores compare for the two sectors?

3. Are similar percentages of students passing the tests in the two sectors?

4. What is the prevalence of very low performing schools in each sector?

5. Does the difference in student achievement between Catholic and public schools vary across the city's neighborhoods?

6. Does the achievement difference between the two sectors vary in schools and communities of different racial make-up? What about the pass rates on these tests and the percentage of students in the lowest achievement?

7. Does the achievement difference between the two sectors vary in schools and communities of different family income levels? What about the pass rates on these tests and the percentage of students in the lowest achievement category?

II. Data Analysis

Description of the Two School Systems

The Catholic school system in New York City enrolls over 98,000 students in 286 elementary schools. Catholic schools in the city are part of two separate organizations, the Diocese of Brooklyn (the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens) and the Archdiocese of New York (the Boroughs of Manhattan, Staten Island and the Bronx.) The Archdiocese also includes upstate counties, which are not included in this study. The two organizations each have their own education departments and are governed separately.

Table 1 offers descriptive data on the two systems. Enrollment in Catholic schools in the city is less than 14 percent of public school enrollment. New York City's public school system enrolls over 1.1 million students, including 739,000 in grades kindergarten through 8.

Individual Catholic schools are, on average, much smaller than public schools in the city. The typical Catholic elementary school in the city enrolls 345 students, about enough to organize slightly more than one class for each grade. Catholic schools will often have classes of up to 35 students, particularly in the upper grades. There is wide variation in school size in the public sector. Where almost all Catholic schools are organized to include grades kindergarten through eight, public schools have a variety of organizations. Public elementary schools (K through 5 or 6) are typically smaller than public middle or junior high schools, which typically enroll well over 1,000 students in 3 or 4 grades. Public elementary schools may include 4, 5 or 6 classes per grade. Public middle and junior high schools may have 9, 10 or more classes per grade level. On the other hand, some public school districts have adopted a small schools approach, with school sizes closer to the typical Catholic school.

Racial and Ethnic Mix

Across the city as a whole, Catholic schools serve a population with a different racial and ethnic mix than the public school system. Catholic schools serve relatively fewer Black students,

Table 1

Comparison of Public School and Catholic School Enrollment, School Size and Staffing Elementary, Middle and Junior High Schools Only

	Catholic *	Public	Difference Catholic - Public
Enrollment	98,791	739,373	(640,582)
Number of Schools	286	936	(650)
Avg. School Size	345	790	(445)
Students:			
% Black	25.3%	36.2%	(10.9%)
% Hispanic	31.3%	37.2%	(5.9%)
% White	35.8%	15.6%	20.2%
% Asian/Other	7.6%	11.0%	(3.4%)
Staffing:			
Students per Teacher	21.0	16.7	4.3
Students per Other Staff	96.2	58.6	37.6

25 percent compared with 36 percent, and more White students, 35 percent compared with 16 percent, than the public schools. The two systems serve similar proportions of Hispanic and Asian students. The racial and ethnic mix in both systems varies greatly from neighborhood to neighborhood. As a result, some Catholic schools serve populations that mirror the racial and ethnic mix of the public schools that immediately surround them, while others have populations very different from their local public schools.

Financial Resources and Staffing

Catholic school tuition ranges from $1,800 to $2,800 per child. Some Catholic schools receive subsidies from their supporting parish, the diocese or private benefactors. Some Catholic school students also receive services such as transportation, lunch and remedial services that are funded by the public sector. Public schools are, of course, entirely supported by tax dollars and are currently spending over $10, 000 per pupil. Again, the spending in individual public schools varies greatly. Special education students, for example have a much higher level of resources directed toward them than do other students. The Board of Education reports that it spends $7,683 per child in general education as opposed to $15,574 per child in part time special education and $26,589 per child in full time special education! (All budget figures for the public system taken from School Based Budget Report, FY 1999-2000, Systemwide Summary, NYC City Board of Education, June 2000.)

As a result of these funding differences, Catholic schools have one teacher per 21 students, compared with one teacher per 16.7 students in the public system. Catholic schools have one non-teaching staff person for every 96.2 students, compared with one per 58.6 students in the public system. (See Table 1.)

Differences in the Racial/Ethnic Student Mix Across the Boroughs

The racial and ethnic mix of students varies in the Catholic schools. In Brooklyn and Queens, the Catholic schools serve a population that is different from the public school population, with more White students and fewer Black students. These data are presented in Table 2. The

Table 2
Public and Catholic School
Enrollment, School Size and Student Ethnicity
By Borough

		Manhattan	Bronx	Brooklyn	Queens	Staten Island
Enrollment	Catholic	14,488	24,885	20,344	27,544	11,530
	Public	101,889	156,791	241,425	191,935	40,131
	Difference	(87,401)	(131,906)	(221,081)	(164,391)	(28,601)
School Size	Catholic	308.3	414.8	274.9	362.4	397.6
	Public	533.0	881.0	802.0	941.0	803
	Difference	(224.7)	(466.2)	(527.1)	(578.6)	(405.4)
% Black Students	Catholic	32.2%	30.6%	35.1%	17.1%	7.6%
	Public	27.4%	33.1%	48.1%	32.4%	15.8%
	Difference	4.8%	(2.5%)	(13.0%)	(15.3%)	(8.2%)
% Hispanic Students	Catholic	48.6%	46.1%	23.1%	25.3%	6.1%
	Public	52.3%	59.1%	26.2%	29.2%	15.1%
	Difference	(3.7%)	(13.0%)	(3.1%)	(3.9%)	(9.0%)
% White Students	Catholic	11.8%	19.5%	36.7%	43.0%	82.5%
	Public	10.5%	4.7%	15.7%	17.7%	62.6%
	Difference	1.3%	14.8%	21.0%	25.3%	19.9%
% Free Lunch Eligible Students	Catholic	71.8%	59.4%	na	na	7.7%
	Public	77.9%	87.2%			38.8%
	Difference	(6.1%)	(27.8%)			(31.1%)

similarity and difference of the populations served by the Catholic and public schools actually varies from neighborhood to neighborhood. This will be explored later in this report.

Important policy and funding decisions within the public school system are also revealed in the data in Table 2. Manhattan public schools have been the heart of the "small schools" movement, and this is reflected in the average school size in Manhattan, which is the smallest among the five boroughs. Queens, on the other hand, has been experiencing tremendous enrollment growth that has outstripped new school construction. As a result, Queens public schools have the largest average enrollment of the five boroughs. Catholic schools are biggest in the Bronx and smallest in Brooklyn, though, in all five boroughs, Catholic schools are much smaller than their public school counterparts.

Catholic Schools Have Higher Average Test Scores Than Public Schools

Table 3 presents the overall findings for all Catholic and public schools in the City of New York. Catholic schools had higher average scores in both English Language Arts and Math in both grade 4 and grade 8. The two sectors had similar improvement, or decline in some cases, from 1999 to 2000 on the grade 4 ELA and the grade 8 Math tests. On the grade 8 ELA and the grade 4 Math tests, the Catholic schools improved by less than one point while the public schools declined.

The most dramatic finding in the data in Table 3 is the increased difference between the two sectors from grade 4 to grade 8. In English Language Arts, there is a 9.8 point advantage for the Catholic schools in grade 4. This gap almost doubles to 17 points in grade 8. In math, the trend is even more dramatic. A 6.9 point advantage for Catholic schools in grade 4 grows to 20 points in grade 8.

A number of observations are warranted. First, the difference in fourth grade performance between the two sectors, though real, is not dramatic. If the children in Catholic schools were somehow coming to school better prepared or more motivated than their public school counterparts, one would expect to see a larger gap in achievement in the fourth grade and a

Table 3

Comparison of Public School and Catholic School Performance on the 1999 and 2000 NY State English Language Arts and Mathematics Exams
Grades 4 and 8
Schools in New York City

Test	Year	Catholic	Public *	Difference Catholic - Public
Grade 4 ELA**	1999	637.1	627.0	10.1
Grade 4 ELA**	2000	646.6	636.8	9.8
Difference	'99 - '00	9.5	9.8	
Grade 8 ELA	1999	702.2	689.9	12.3
Grade 8 ELA	2000	703.0	686.0	17.0
Difference	'99 - '00	0.8	(3.9)	
Grade 4 Math	1999	638.6	634.7	3.9
Grade 4 Math	2000	639.5	632.6	6.9
Difference	'99 - '00	0.9	(2.1)	
Grade 8 Math	1999	702.0	683.2	18.8
Grade 8 Math	2000	705.9	685.9	20.0
Difference	'99 - '00	3.9	2.7	

* Public school data include all students except those in "Special Education Schools." All public school data were obtained from the "District Summary Report" on the State Education Department website.

** All Catholic school data were compiled from the individual school reports provided by the State's test scoring service to the Diocese of Brooklyn and Archdiocese of New York.

narrowing of the gap in the higher grade. The data show exactly the opposite; it is not until the higher grade that the Catholic schools begin to pull away from the public ones.

Of course another factor beyond school effectiveness might explain the growing achievement gap. That factor would be related to student attrition in the two systems. It is often claimed that Catholic schools are able to shed themselves of lower achieving or disruptive students. If in fact the Catholic schools winnowed their enrollment down as students aged, this process could explain the higher achievement gap in the eighth grade. Perhaps, the thinking goes, the Catholic schools are serving a more select population in the eighth grade than they are in the fourth grade. Before presenting the very limited data that are available to shed light on this issue, it must be noted that Catholic school officials have always stated that their schools do not dismiss or expel more than a handful of students across the city in any given year. At the same time, it must also be noted that the public schools are not without the ability to move students out of the testing stream. Students transferred into special education schools would not be included in the data presented in Table 3, though we don't believe that there would be many of these students. More importantly, the public schools have a dramatic drop-out problem. Above the ninth grade it is clear that the public schools are serving less than the full complement of any particular age cohort. It is conceivable that some number of public school students of eighth grade age have simply stopped coming to school and are therefore not being tested.

Data on Attrition from Grade 4 to 8 in Both Sectors

At this time, there is only limited data available to test the extent of attrition in this study's data. What is known is that in 2000, 1,300 fewer children were tested in the Catholic schools in grade 8 than in grade 4 in mathematics (1,700 fewer in ELA). The tested population in grade 8 was 87 percent of that in grade 4 (82 percent in ELA). This does not mean that the Catholic schools got rid of 1,700 students along the way. The eighth graders are a completely different group of children, having been born four years before the fourth graders. The lower size of the eighth grade could be explained by simple enrollment growth in recent years. (Perhaps more students entered school around 1996 than did around 1990.) In fact enrollment has been increasing in the years in question. In the public schools in this study, the size of the tested population in the eighth grade is also smaller than the tested population in the fourth grade. In fact, it is 83.3 percent of the fourth grade group. This is actually a lower percentage than that found in the Catholic schools. These measures are inexact, but they do not suggest a large attrition pattern in the Catholic schools that could be used to explain away the achievement differences in the two systems.

Catholic school administrators also report that they serve a mobile student population. This is true of most urban schools and is a well-documented phenomenon in the public school system. Families move around a lot in New York City. Immigrant parents, in particular, are often on an upwardly mobile quest for a better home and better schools for their children. It would be a mistake to assume that either the Catholic or public schools retain a large percentage of their students for their whole school careers. One Catholic school principal reported that his student population has a 30 percent turnover rate each year. Of 58 students who graduated this school in 2000, only 11 had been there since the first grade.

With some caveats related to special education and perhaps some small attrition of low performing students, it is clear that Catholic schools in New York City demonstrate a small achievement advantage over public schools in grade 4 and that this gap widens significantly by grade 8. In all cases, the achievement gap between the Catholic and public schools is greater than could be explained by the most generous estimate of the impact of special education students on the public school scores. On the grade 8 tests, the gap is three or four times greater than the estimated impact of the special education students' scores.

These findings are consistent with the assertion that, in terms of these tests, the Catholic schools are, on average, more effective than the public schools and that their effectiveness grows as students remain enrolled in them.

More Students Are Passing These Tests in Catholic Schools Than in Public Schools but Both Sectors Need to Improve

The tests administered by the New York State Education Department in grades 4 and 8 are linked to the Regents exams that public school students will have to pass in order to be awarded a high school diploma. In addition to getting a score, each student is put into one of four scoring categories. Levels 3 and 4 are "passing" scores, meaning that the student is on track for high school graduation. Levels 1 and 2 are "failing" scores, meaning that the student's achievement is below where it should be to graduate from high school down the road. Level 1 indicates that the student is severely behind where he or she needs to be. Table 4 displays the percentage of

Table 4

Comparison of Public School and Catholic School Pass Rates on the 2000 NY State English Language Arts and Mathematics Exams Grades 4 and 8 Schools in New York City

Test	Level	Catholic	Public *	Difference Catholic - Public
Grade 4 ELA**	Lowest Level	9.1%	18.5%	(9.4%)
Grade 4 ELA**	Passing	50.0%	42.0%	8.0%
Grade 8 ELA	Lowest Level	6.0%	23.2%	(17.2%)
Grade 8 ELA	Passing	51.8%	32.9%	18.9%
Grade 4 Math	Lowest Level	8.9%	17.8%	(8.9%)
Grade 4 Math	Passing	53.6%	46.3%	7.3%
Grade 8 Math	Lowest Level	18.6%	43.6%	(25.0%)
Grade 8 Math	Passing	35.5%	22.9%	12.6%

* Public school data include all students except those in "Special Education Schools." All public school data were obtained from the "District Summary Report" on the State Education Department website.

** All Catholic school data were compiled from the individual school reports provided by the State's test scoring service to the Diocese of Brooklyn and Archdiocese of New York.

students in the Catholic and public sectors who passed the exams as well as those who fell into the lowest category.

Consistent with the average scores discussed earlier, the students in the Catholic schools pass these tests at a higher rate than their public school counterparts. That achievement gap grows in the eighth grade. Once again, the differences are greater than could possibly be explained by the presence of larger numbers of special education students in the public sector.

The biggest difference between the two sectors is evidenced in the percentage of students who fall into the lowest scoring category. In grade 8, 23 percent of the public students fall into this category in ELA and 43 percent do so in math. These students are seriously disadvantaged as they enter high school, and they are likely to end up among the more than 40 percent of public school students who never earn an academic high school diploma. Catholic schools have a much lower percentage of students falling into this danger category in grade 8: 6 percent in ELA and 18.6 percent in math.

These findings reflect real human consequences for the youngsters involved, and they are consistent with the assertion that fewer students get "lost" in the Catholic schools than do in the public schools.

At the same time, both sectors have a way to go in terms of the percentage of students passing these tests. The public schools have a longer way to go. In the Catholic schools, pass rates are around 50 percent on the grade 4 ELA , grade 8 ELA (51.8 percent) and grade 4 Math (53.6 percent) tests. Public school pass rates are lower; 42 percent in grade 4 ELA, 32.9 percent in grade 8 ELA and 46.3 percent in grade 4 Math. Both sectors are having extreme difficulty with the grade 8 Math test; only 35 percent of the Catholic school students and 23 percent of the public school students passed this test. (This test is proving extremely challenging to all but the most affluent public school districts in the state. Districts of average wealth have a 51 percent pass rate on this test and the state-wide public school pass rate is only 40 percent.)

Catholic Schools Have Few Very Low Performing Schools -- Public Schools Have Many Low Performers

Table 5 and 6 display the distribution of schools across various performance categories. The public school system has a much greater percentage of its schools in the lowest categories than does the Catholic school system. On the grade 4 ELA, 31 percent of the public schools have average scores below 625, compared with only 10 percent of the Catholic schools.

At the eighth grade level, the problem of failing public schools becomes even more pronounced. Fully 69 percent of the public schools have average ELA and Math scores below 695. Only 28 percent of Catholic schools have average math scores that are so low and only 32 percent have average ELA scores that low.

If Catholic and public schools were placed in a combined ranking based upon test scores, the Catholic schools would occupy a disproportionate share of the top spots. Catholic schools account for 28 percent of the total number of schools with grade 4 ELA test data, yet they would occupy 38 percent of the spots in the top third of the ranking. At the eighth grade level, Catholic schools are 49% of the total, yet they would occupy 74% of the top 65 spots in a ranking of ELA scores.

This disparity between the two sectors is not occurring because the low performing Catholic schools have closed down. The bulk of Catholic school closings occurred two decades ago. Rather, it is evident that most Catholic schools are maintaining some basic level of performance for their children. Unfortunately, too many public schools are falling far below acceptable performance levels.

The Achievement Differences Between the Two Sectors Vary Across the City

Table 7 presents the average test scores of schools in the two sectors for each of the city's five boroughs. It is presented merely for informational purposes, and it shows that performance varies in different parts of the city. Not much can be inferred from the data in Table 7. Catholic

Table 5

Distribution of Schools
Mean Scale Scores -

Grade 4 ELA 2000

	Catholic Schools			Public Schools		
	#	%		#	%	
665 +	25	9.5%		67	10.1%	
655-664.9	45	17.2%	26.7%	58	8.7%	18.8%
645-654.9	63	24.0%		85	12.8%	
635-644.9	65	24.8%		107	16.1%	
625-634.9	37	14.1%	63.0%	143	21.5%	50.3%
615-624.9	22	8.4%		118	17.7%	
below 615	5	1.9%	10.3%	88	13.2%	30.9%
total	262	100.0%	100.0%	666	100.0%	100.0%

Grade 8 ELA 2000

	Catholic Schools			Public Schools		
	#	%		#	%	
735+	2	0.7%		3	1.0%	
725-734.9	14	5.1%	5.8%	4	1.4%	2.4%
715-724.9	32	11.6%		10	3.4%	
705-714.9	67	24.2%		30	10.3%	
695-704.9	73	26.4%	62.1%	43	14.8%	28.5%
685-694.9	65	23.5%		58	19.9%	
below 685	24	8.7%	32.1%	143	49.1%	69.1%
total	277	100.0%	100.0%	291	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6

Distribution of Schools
Mean Scale Scores -

Grade 4 Math 2000

	Catholic Schools			Public Schools		
	#	%		#	%	
665 +	12	4.4%		43	6.4%	
655-664.9	35	12.9%	17.3%	56	8.3%	14.8%
645-654.9	53	19.6%		76	11.3%	
635-644.9	69	25.5%		114	17.0%	
625-634.9	49	18.1%	63.1%	131	19.5%	47.8%
615-624.9	33	12.2%		148	22.1%	
below 615	20	7.4%	19.6%	103	15.4%	37.4%
total	271	100.0%	100.0%	671	100.0%	100.0%

Grade 8 Math 2000

	Catholic Schools			Public Schools		
	#	%		#	%	
735+	15	5.5%		5	1.7%	
725-734.9	19	6.9%	12.4%	11	3.8%	5.5%
715-724.9	40	14.5%		15	5.2%	
705-714.9	67	24.4%		22	7.6%	
695-704.9	57	20.7%	59.6%	40	13.7%	26.5%
685-694.9	49	17.8%		47	16.2%	
below 685	28	10.2%	28.0%	151	51.9%	68.0%
total	275	100.0%	100.0%	291	100.0%	100.0%

Table 7

Comparison of Public School and Catholic School Performance on the 2000 NY State ELA and Mathematics Exams, Grades 4 and 8 by Borough

Test		Manhattan	Bronx	Brooklyn	Queens	Staten Island
Grade 4 ELA 2000	Catholic	641.5	640.1	645.8	650.5	658.4
	Public	636.3	622.7	638.2	644.7	647.6
	Difference	5.2	17.4	7.6	5.8	10.8
Grade 8 ELA 2000	Catholic	696.9	697.0	703.8	708.2	707.7
	Public	685.5	675.8	685.4	691.0	701.5
	Difference	11.4	21.2	18.4	17.2	6.2
Grade 4 Math 2000	Catholic	633.5	632.7	638.5	644.9	650.2
	Public	631.7	621.8	632.4	640.6	643.4
	Difference	1.8	10.9	6.1	4.3	6.8
Grade 8 Math 2000	Catholic	699.0	697.6	707.0	713.7	709.9
	Public	686.7	674.3	685.4	691.8	699.5
	Difference	12.3	23.3	21.6	21.9	10.4

schools have a higher achievement advantage in the Bronx than in the other four boroughs, but we already have seen that the Catholic schools serve a different mix of students than the public schools in the Bronx. Public schools come closest to the level of Catholic school performance in Manhattan, and this is of mild interest. In Table 2, we saw that student characteristics were similar for the two sectors in Manhattan. We also saw the average enrollment of public schools in Manhattan was smaller than that in the other four boroughs and therefore closer to the size of typical Catholic schools. It is also known that the Manhattan public school districts have been more involved in various reform and improvement efforts than have been public schools in the other boroughs.

The variability of school performance within each sector raises an obvious question. Are there particular neighborhoods or particular types of students for whom either the Catholic or public schools are doing a better job? Attempting to answer this question might also shed some light on the causes of the achievement differences between the Catholic and public school. If the difference has to do with differences in the populations served by the two sectors, we might expect to see that Catholic schools demonstrate a greater advantage in middle class communities. Or perhaps the opposite is true. It may be the case that the typical public school does fairly well with middle class students but falls far short of the mark with low income and minority students. We know that in both sectors middle class children perform at higher levels than do low income youngsters and that there are also clear racial disparities in test scores. These problems have vexed school reformers for generations. Our concern here is to find out if the relationship between race, income and achievement in New York City's Catholic schools is different from in the public schools.

In order to answer the questions at hand, the data on school performance were combined with data on student race and family income levels. The schools were then divided into two groups. One group was composed of both the Catholic and public schools in the public school districts that had the highest percentage of White students in either sector. The second group was comprised of the Catholic and public schools within those public school districts that had the lowest percentage of White students in either sector. A second set of analyses was performed for schools in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island only. In those three boroughs, the

Catholic schools collect the same data as the public schools on family income -- eligibility for free lunch programs. This allowed the use of family income as the distinguishing factor and two groups were created. The first included the less poor districts and the second included the poorer districts.

Description of the Analytic Grouping Created for This Study

In an attempt to describe the performance of both Catholic and public schools with different types of socioeconomic populations, two sets of grouping were created. The entire city was divided into two groups, labeled one and two, based upon the racial make-up of the districts in which the schools were located. All statistics were then aggregated from *school-level data.* Different combinations were tried in an attempt to isolate a set of districts in which the Catholic schools and the public schools were serving a similarly non-White student population. The best analytic grouping came from using the percentage of White students, as opposed to the percentage of Black or Hispanic students, as the distinguishing factor. Generally, Asian students were found in the same districts as White students.

Group One includes the schools in the 16 public school districts with the highest percentage of White students in either public or Catholic schools (Districts 2, 3, 8, 11, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22,24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30 and 31). Schools in this group are referred to as the **"mixed" schools** in this report.

Group Two includes the 15 school districts with the lowest percentage of White students (1, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 1, 29, 32.) For analytic purposes, public schools that are governed outside of the community school district system, those in the Chancellor's District for example, have been assigned back to their geographic community. Catholic schools were assigned to the groups based upon their geographic location as well. Schools in this group are referred to as the **"Black-Hispanic" schools** in this report. One school district, 23, has been left out of these analyses because there are no Catholic schools within its borders.

Had the data been available, all the city's schools would have been classified by the family income level of the students. However, only the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese (Manhattan, Staten Island and the Bronx) collect the same family income data as the public schools. Therefore, a second set of analyses was conducted for those boroughs alone, using the family income data.

Group Three includes the schools in those seven school districts in Manhattan, Staten Island and the Bronx that had the lowest level of eligibility for the federal free lunch program among the 13 school districts in these three boroughs. These districts cannot be accurately described as affluent, however, and are referred to as the **"less poor" schools** in this report.

Group Four is comprised of the other six districts in these three boroughs; those with the highest level of free lunch eligibility. They are referred to as the **"very poor" schools** in this report.

Table 8 includes schools in all five boroughs and it displays the demographic and school size data for Catholic and public schools in each grouping. Within those districts identified as "group 2," the two sectors are serving similar populations. In both cases, Black and Hispanic students make up more than 90 percent of the student population. The Catholic school population is 4.6 percent White compared with 2.1 percent White in the public school system. The Catholic schools serve a slightly larger Hispanic population and a slightly smaller Black population than do the public schools in group two.

Within group one, the "mixed" districts, the sectors diverge. In these communities, the Catholic schools are serving a population that is more White, 43%, than neighboring public schools, 26%. The two sectors serve similar numbers of Hispanic students in this group. Catholic schools serve fewer Black students, 19%, than do public schools, 26 %, in this group. Public schools serve a population that is 17 % Asian in this grouping, compared with 10 % in the Catholic schools.

One might assume that, if the higher level of performance of Catholic schools was due to their having a selective population, in terms of student racial background, then the gap between Catholic and public school achievement would be greater in group one than in group two. It is in group one that the Catholic schools serve a population of students that is racially different from that served by the public schools. In group two, the two sectors serve similar populations in terms of racial background.

Table 9 presents the mean average scores for the two sectors in each group. In both sectors, the schools that serve a student population that has fewer Black or Hispanic students show higher achievement levels than do the more Black and Hispanic schools. In the Catholic schools, however, the gap between mixed and the Black/Hispanic schools is smaller than in the public school system. This is true on every test. The "race" gap in public schools varies between 17 and 20 points. That is, the group of schools with White enrollment of only 2 percent have average scores that are 17 to 20 points below that of the group of public schools that are 26 percent White. The race gap in Catholic schools ranges between 11 and 14 points. Bear in mind,

Table 8

Comparison of Public and Catholic School Performance in Districts of Similar Racial Composition Description of the Two Groups

	Sector	Group 1 Districts	Group 2 Districts
Enrollment	Catholic	67,919	30,872
	Public	411,938	307,709
	Difference	(344,019)	(276,837)
Number of Schools	Catholic	199	87
	Public	514	393
	Difference	(315)	(306)
School Size	Catholic	341.3	354.9
	Public	801.4	783.0
	Difference	(460.1)	(428.1)
% Black Students	Catholic	16.8%	44.1%
	Public	25.8%	48.0%
	Difference	(9.0%)	(3.9%)
% Hispanic Students	Catholic	23.8%	47.6%
	Public	30.7%	46.5%
	Difference	(6.9%)	1.1%
% White Students	Catholic	50.0%	4.6%
	Public	26.3%	2.1%
	Difference	23.7%	2.5%

Table 9

Comparison of Public and Catholic School Performance in Districts of Similar Racial Composition

Comparison of Average Scores

	Sector	**Group 1** "Mixed"	**Group 2** "Black-Hispanic"
Grade 4 ELA Mean	Catholic	650.6	638.0
	Public	645.2	626.0
	Difference	5.4	12.0
Grade 8 ELA Mean	Catholic	706.2	695.2
	Public	693.3	675.9
	Difference	12.9	19.3
Grade 4 Math Mean	Catholic	643.9	630.8
	Public	641.4	622.0
	Difference	2.5	8.8
Grade 8 Math Mean	Catholic	710.0	696.3
	Public	694.5	674.3
	Difference	15.5	22.0

the Catholic schools in group one have a student mix that is 43 percent White, compared with 26 percent in the public schools.

To the extent that achievement is linked to the racial background of the students, as it unfortunately is, the race gap should be higher in the Catholic schools than in the public schools. The more mixed Catholic schools have a greater percentage of White students than the more mixed public schools. The Black and Hispanic schools have a similar racial make up in the two sectors. If the schools were having little or no effect on student achievement over and above the effect of race, there would be a greater achievement advantage for the Catholic schools in group one than in group two. The smaller gap between mixed and Black/Hispanic schools in the Catholic schools is our first piece of evidence of a Catholic school performance advantage over and above any that can be explained solely by student background characteristics.

Maybe this finding simply indicates that the Catholic schools that serve a more mixed population are just not that good! Maybe those schools should have higher scores given their population. That's not likely. On all four tests, the Catholic schools in group one are outperforming their neighboring public schools.

The second piece of evidence that there is a real performance advantage for the Catholic schools is the fact that the performance advantage for Catholic schools is greater in the group of schools that is more Black and Hispanic than in the schools that are more mixed. Catholic schools have higher achievement levels than do public schools on average and that gap is higher in Black and Hispanic communities than it is in more mixed communities. If student racial background was a determinant of achievement, the opposite would be true.

Catholic Schools That Are 95 Percent Non-White Outperform a Group of More White Public Schools in Grade 8

There is a third piece of evidence presented in Table 9, and it should loom large in this discussion. The racial divide in student achievement has been the fault line of all school reform efforts to date. There is a racial divide in the performance of both public and Catholic schools in

New York City, but there is a difference. As Table 9 indicates, in the eighth grade the Catholic schools that are 90 percent Black or Hispanic (group 2) have achievement levels that are slightly higher than the public schools that are 43 percent White or Hispanic.

In both sectors, individual schools have successfully broken the link between race or income and achievement, but this finding goes beyond that. These are not a group of schools that have been selected because they are participating in some special program or receiving special funding. We do not know if they are particularly innovative or not. They are simply neighborhood Catholic schools serving the families that show up at their doors. Those families are 90 percent Black or Hispanic and their children are performing at higher levels than the public school students in more integrated and conceivably more middle class neighborhoods. Only seven of New York City's 32 community school districts have an average eighth grade ELA score that is higher than that of the Catholic schools in group two. These districts have enrollments that are between 27 and 63 percent White, compared with 4 percent White in the group two Catholic schools. No single public school district that is at least 90 percent Black or Hispanic scores within 10 points of the Black/Hispanic Catholic schools.

Both Sectors Have to Improve the Pass Rates in Minority Neighborhoods, but the Catholic Schools Have Higher Pass Rates

In both sectors, the schools in more mixed neighborhoods have higher pass rates than those in completely Black and Hispanic neighborhoods. These data are presented in Table 10. On three of the four tests, the gap between the schools with the higher representation of White and Asian students and the almost totally Black and Hispanic schools is smaller in the Catholic schools than in the public schools. Also on three of the four tests, the gap between Catholic and public schools is higher in the group of schools that are 90 percent Black and Hispanic. Only the results of the eighth grade math test do not follow this overall pattern.

On the grade 4 ELA and Math tests and on the grade 8 ELA test, the pass rate for Catholic schools in group two, the Black and Hispanic schools, is around 40 percent compared with a range of 22 to 33 percent for the public schools. The pass rates for the grade 8 Math test are

Table 10
Comparison of Public and Catholic School Performance in Districts of Similar Racial Composition
Comparison of Pass Rates

	Sector	Group 1 "Mixed"	Group 2 "Black-Hispanic"
Grade 4 ELA Lvl 3 or 4	Catholic	54.7%	39.9%
	Public	49.9%	31.8%
	Difference	4.8%	8.1%
Grade 8 ELA Lvl 3 or 4	Catholic	56.5%	40.0%
	Public	40.8%	21.7%
	Difference	15.7%	18.3%
Grade 4 Math Lvl 3 or 4	Catholic	60.1%	40.5%
	Public	57.0%	33.3%
	Difference	3.1%	7.2%
Grade 8 Math Lvl 3 or 4	Catholic	41.3%	21.8%
	Public	30.4%	12.7%
	Difference	10.9%	9.1%

abysmal in both sectors, 22 percent in the Catholic schools and 13 percent in the public schools. The pass rate for Catholic schools in the city's more mixed neighborhoods is similar to the rate for all public schools in the state, 41%. Public schools in these neighborhoods only have a 30 percent pass rate in grade 8 Math.

Catholic Schools Are Much More Successful at Keeping Black and Hispanic Students Out of the Lowest Achievement Level

Table 11 presents data on the percentage of students scoring at the lowest level of the test in both of the analytic groupings. In the Black and Hispanic districts, the public schools have between 24 and 55 percent of their students falling into this category. The neighboring Catholic schools have between 9 and 27 percent of their youngsters scoring at this level. In the Black and Hispanic schools, the percentage of public school students falling into the lowest category is about double that for the Catholic schools on each test. For example, on the grade 8 math test, 55 percent of the public school students in the Black and Hispanic districts score at the lowest level, compared with 26 percent of the Catholic school students.

These Trends Are Also Present When Comparing Communities of Similar Income Levels

The Catholic schools in Manhattan, Staten Island and the Bronx collect the same data on family income as do the public schools. The data are collected to determine eligibility for federal free lunch programs. Students eligible for this lunch program have family incomes in proximity to the official poverty level. The availability of these data allow us to replicate the previous analyses using family income as the distinguishing factor. Table 12 describes the two analytic groupings that were constructed for the boroughs of Manhattan, Staten Island and the Bronx.

As Table 12 indicates, the two sectors are very similar in group four, the very poor districts. Eighty-nine percent of the Catholic school students in these areas are eligible for free lunch, compared with 92% of the public school districts. These are communities where poverty is almost universal. In group three, the less poor communities, the two sectors serve different

Table 11
Comparison of Public and Catholic School Performance
in Districts of Similar Racial Composition
Comparison of Students in the Lowest Score Level

	Sector	**Group 1** "Mixed"	**Group 2** "Black-Hispanic"
Grade 4 ELA Lvl 1	Catholic	7.6%	12.3%
	Public	13.7%	24.6%
	Difference	(6.1%)	(12.3%)
Grade 8 ELA Lvl 1	Catholic	4.9%	8.7%
	Public	17.2%	31.4%
	Difference	(12.3%)	(22.7%)
Grade 4 Math Lvl 1	Catholic	6.6%	13.4%
	Public	12.8%	24.0%
	Difference	(6.2%)	(10.6%)
Grade 8 Math Lvl 1	Catholic	15.2%	26.6%
	Public	35.2%	55.1%
	Difference	(20.0%)	(28.5%)

Table 12
Comparison of Public and Catholic School Performance
in Districts of Similar Economic Composition
Description of the Two Groups
Manhattan, Bronx and Staten Island Only

	Sector	Group 3 Districts	Group 4 Districts
Enrollment	Catholic	36,765	14,138
	Public	178,684	120,127
	Difference	(141,919)	(105,989)
Number of Schools	Catholic	100	36
	Public	252	167
	Difference	(152)	(131)
School Size	Catholic	367.6	392.7
	Public	709.1	719.3
	Difference	(341.4)	(326.6)
% Free Lunch Eligible Students	Catholic	31.7%	89.2%
	Public	67.9%	91.9%
	Difference	(36.2%)	(2.7%)
% Black Students	Catholic	21.5%	37.1%
	Public	27.0%	31.9%
	Difference	(5.5%)	5.2%
% Hispanic Students	Catholic	29.4%	59.4%
	Public	41.0%	65.8%
	Difference	(11.6%)	(6.4%)
% White Students	Catholic	42.8%	2.3%
	Public	23.0%	1.0%
	Difference	19.8%	1.3%

populations. Thirty-two percent of the Catholic school students in the schools in this group are eligible for free lunch, compared with 68 percent of the public school students.

Again, if the higher achievement of Catholic schools was attributable to the family income level of the students, we would expect to find that the difference between the two sectors was greater in group one than in group two districts. This is not the case, however.

Table 13 displays the average test scores for the Catholic and public schools in each of the two groups. Within each sector, the schools in the less poor neighborhoods have higher average test scores than the schools in the very poor districts. These internal differences are greater within the public system, however, than within the Catholic system. On the grade 8 ELA test, the gap between the very poor and the less poor public schools is 18.3 points, almost twice the 9.6 point gap in the Catholic schools. If the schools were having no impact upon student achievement over and above the effect of family income, the trend would be the opposite of what it is. Since there is a much greater income gap between the two groups of Catholic schools than between the two groups of public schools, the achievement gap between the two groups should be greater in the Catholic schools. The fact that the opposite is true indicates that either Catholic schools are effective at modifying the connection between family income and achievement or that public schools exacerbate it. This is a significant finding.

As with the earlier analysis based upon student racial background, the achievement gap between the Catholic and public schools is greater in the very poor districts than it is in the less poor districts.

There is a divergence from this trend in the analysis of the pass rates on these tests, presented in Table 14. The general trend holds for the ELA. The gap between the two sectors is greater in the very poor districts than in the less poor districts. On this test the Catholic schools in the very poor districts have a 35 percent pass rate in both grades 4 and 8. The public schools in these districts have pass rates of 26 percent in grade 4 and only 17 percent in grade 8.

On the math test, the difference in pass rates between the two sectors is less pronounced and

Table 13
Comparison of Public and Catholic School Performance
in Districts of Similar Economic Composition
Comparison of Average Scores
Manhattan, Staten Island and Bronx Only

	Sector	Group 3 " less - poor"	Group 4 "very - poor"
Grade 4 ELA Mean	Catholic	648.8	633.8
	Public	638.7	619.4
	Difference	10.1	14.4
Grade 8 ELA Mean	Catholic	701.8	692.2
	Public	690.1	671.8
	Difference	11.7	20.4
Grade 4 Math Mean	Catholic	641.3	625.8
	Public	635.2	618.1
	Difference	6.1	7.7
Grade 8 Math Mean	Catholic	704.3	691.0
	Public	688.4	672.6
	Difference	15.9	18.4

Table 14
Comparison of Public and Catholic School Performance
in Districts of Similar Economic Composition
Comparison of Pass Rates
Manhattan, Staten Island and Bronx Only

	Sector	Group 3 "less - poor"	Group 4 "very - poor"
Grade 4 ELA Lvl 3 or 4	Catholic	52.7%	34.6%
	Public	44.0%	25.8%
	Difference	8.7%	8.8%
Grade 8 ELA Lvl 3 or 4	Catholic	50.9%	34.9%
	Public	37.4%	17.2%
	Difference	13.5%	17.7%
Grade 4 Math Lvl 3 or 4	Catholic	56.5%	32.5%
	Public	49.6%	27.8%
	Difference	6.9%	4.7%
Grade 8 Math Lvl 3 or 4	Catholic	33.4%	15.7%
	Public	24.9%	11.0%
	Difference	8.5%	4.7%

the Catholic schools show a greater advantage over the public schools in the less poor neighborhoods than in the very poor neighborhoods.

Table 15 displays the percentage of students falling into the lowest scoring category in both sectors in the two groups. The general trend of the Catholic schools having a higher achievement advantage over the public schools in the very poor districts compared with the less poor districts holds here. The most dramatic difference is seen on the grade 8 ELA. On this test, the Catholic schools in the less poor districts have 6.5 percent of their students in the lowest level; this is almost the same as the 8.9 percent in the very poor districts. The public schools have 19.9 percent of their students in the lowest level in the less poor districts and 35 percent in the very poor districts. In fact, in the very poor districts, the percentage of public school students in the lowest score category is equivalent to the pass rate of the Catholic school students.

Table 15
Comparison of Public and Catholic School Performance
in Districts of Similar Economic Composition
Comparison of Students in the Lowest Score Level
Manhattan, Staten Island and Bronx Only

	Sector	**Group 3** "less - poor"	**Group 4** "very - poor"
Grade 4 ELA Lvl 1	Catholic	7.4%	14.5%
	Public	17.6%	29.1%
	Difference	(10.2%)	(14.6%)
Grade 8 ELA Lvl 1	Catholic	6.5%	8.9%
	Public	19.9%	35.2%
	Difference	(13.4%)	(26.3%)
Grade 4 Math Lvl 1	Catholic	8.0%	16.9%
	Public	16.5%	27.4%
	Difference	(8.5%)	(10.5%)
Grade 8 Math Lvl 1	Catholic	18.3%	32.3%
	Public	41.3%	56.9%
	Difference	(23.0%)	(24.6%)

III. Conclusions and Implications for Public Policy

A number of conclusions and implications seem clear from the analyses presented in this report. First, Catholic schools in New York City are bringing their students to higher levels of achievement than are public schools. The evidence presented in this report suggests that the difference in the achievement levels within the two sectors is less related to differences in the populations served in the two sectors than many public school advocates suggest. In fact, the performance advantage of the Catholic schools is greater in those communities where the two sectors are serving universally Black, Hispanic and poor children than it is in communities where the Catholic schools are serving a less poor and more mixed student body.

Secondly, the higher achievement of Catholic schools is much more pronounced in grade 8 than it is in grade 4. This fact is further evidence of a Catholic school effect that is over and above that explained by any differences in the populations served in the two sectors.

Third, Catholic schools come much closer to breaking the link between race, family income and student achievement than do public schools. In fact, on some indicators, the performance of the Catholic schools with poor and minority youngsters equals and surpasses that of public schools with populations that are less poor and more white or Asian. Overall, the achievement gap between low and mid- socioeconomic level students is less pronounced in the Catholic schools than it is in the public schools.

Fourth, Catholic schools are more successful at maintaining a basic level of achievement than are public schools. Public schools have many more students scoring in the lowest achievement level of the state tests than do Catholic schools. Further, the public system has a much greater percentage of its schools with low average achievement than does the Catholic system. The concentration of student failure is much more pronounced within public schools than it is in Catholic schools.

Fifth, the performance of poor and minority youngsters in the Catholic schools once again demonstrates the educability of the city's youngsters. The most important contribution of the Catholic school system, beyond the direct benefits enjoyed by those students who participate in it, is this demonstration of the dignity and ability of these youngsters. The very clear shortcomings of the New York City public school system cannot be explained away by the nature of the students that attend it.

The data presented in this report also offer some clear implications for the public school system itself, over and above any that are drawn from the comparison with the Catholic schools.

First, failure in the public school system is concentrated in particular schools in particular districts.

Second, the public school system has a major problem in its middle and junior high schools. Achievement on the eighth grade tests is appalling.

Third, the data in this report offer one more piece of evidence that the large size of some public schools is dysfunctional. While not at all conclusive, the data presented here suggest that smaller public schools may be performing closer to the level of Catholic schools than are larger public schools.

The data can also offer some guidance to the Catholic school system, over and above the results of the comparison with public schools.

First, despite the performance advantage of Catholic schools, compared with public schools, the pass rates on the state tests are not high enough in the Catholic school system. The Catholic schools are going to have to continue to strive for higher achievement and pass rates for their students.

Second, there are some low performing Catholic schools in both the Diocese of Brooklyn and

the Archdiocese of New York. These schools bear attention.

Third, the math scores in the eighth grade are low, as they are in many public and private schools across the state. Catholic schools need to address the challenge of the new state standards in mathematics.

Finally, the academic performance of inner city students in Catholic schools in New York City continues to have important implications for public policy. At least 30,000 New York City students attend Catholic schools in neighborhoods that are almost entirely non-White and poor. In the eighth grade, the percentage of these students who pass the state tests is about twice that of neighboring public schools. There can be no doubt that some public school students who are now trapped in failing schools would benefit from a publicly subsidized transfer to the local Catholic school. What is in doubt is the number of those students that the Catholic schools could absorb. Data are sketchy, and Catholic school officials are noncommittal on this point. It is likely the case that the number of students that could be absorbed by the Catholic schools would neither bankrupt the public school system nor completely solve the city's achievement problem. The benefits to the individuals involved would be enormous however. Those who wish to hold the line against tuition vouchers or tax credits need to own up to the very real human cost of that opposition.

There is a further implication in the performance of Catholic schools in poor and minority neighborhoods. The 30,000 or so students who are now attending Catholic schools in these neighborhoods represent a true public benefit. These students are achieving at higher levels than they could in the already overcrowded public schools that exist in many of their neighborhoods. Catholic schools face ongoing financial and operational crises. Tuition is a sacrifice for the poor families that are using these schools. Private benefactors do not last forever. Catholic schools face the same shortages of teachers and principals that the public schools face and the salary structure in Catholic schools is much lower than that in the public schools. There is some fear that charter schools will drain as many student from Catholic schools as they do from public schools. Charter schools in New York City are entirely tax supported and have spending levels that are at least twice that of Catholic schools. A reasonable case can be made for taxpayer

support of the poor families that are already enrolling youngsters in the Catholic schools.

The public interest in these schools goes beyond the schools' ability to absorb even more students from failing public schools. The public interest would be harmed by a retrenchment in the Catholic school system in the city. As the Catholic schools begin to face a new set of challenges that will likely raise their costs while the ability of parents to pay tuition remains low, it will be appropriate for the public sector to weigh the public benefits that these schools provide. The data presented in this report strongly suggest that those benefits are quite high and that these schools and these parents are deserving of public support. The City of New York and its poor and working class families cannot afford to lose these Catholic schools.

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Publication Date: March 2001

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