

Partners In Excellence



Study says poor students do better at Catholic schools

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LOS ANGELES – New research shows that poor and marginalized students attending Catholic schools have significantly higher retention and graduation rates than their peers in public schools.

Conducted by Loyola Marymount University's School of Education in Los Angeles, the study focused on a group of Catholic school students in Los Angeles. All of the students received tuition funding from the Catholic Education Foundation of the Los Angeles Archdiocese between 2001 and 2005. According to the researchers, this study was the first time the foundation opened its records to a university and provided Catholic school data in such detail.

Information on the study was released by the Catholic university May 19.

The study followed 603 students from eighth to ninth grade and 205 students from ninth grade to high school graduation at about 30 schools in Southern California.

In the eighth grade group, 100 percent of the students continued to ninth grade, and 98 percent of the ninth graders continued into high school. The graduation rate for both groups was almost 35 percent higher than graduation rates for public schools in the same California counties during the same time period.

"This research indicates how essential Catholic schools are to the future of Los Angeles," said Shane Martin, dean for Loyola Marymount's School of Education and co-author of the study.

He said the Catholic schools provide "a model for effectively educating marginalized students and improving graduation rates, two critical issues for our Los Angeles school-age children." The Catholic Education Foundation supports families living in poverty or at the threshold of poverty.

The group of high school students selected for the study represent the most underserved students in the Catholic school system in the region and more closely resemble the economic, ethnic and personal backgrounds of their peers in the public schools they would have attended.

"This study tells us Catholic high schools are very successful in educating the poor and underserved in our Los Angeles area communities," said Nancy Coonis, superintendent for secondary schools for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

"Through the process of participating in this study, our high schools are now capturing more student achievement data, which helps in recruiting students and in raising tuition funding to help those most in need," she said in a statement.

All the students selected for the study were considered at risk because of their family's low socioeconomic status. Their zip codes, ethnic backgrounds and income levels were similar to students in local public schools within the Los Angeles area.

"The results show that Los Angeles archdiocesan Catholic schools give children born into poverty a 98 percent chance of graduating from high school and a 98 percent chance of going on to college," said Kathy Anderson, the Catholic Education Foundation's executive director.

"After seeing these results firsthand, you begin to understand what sort of investment we're actually making," she added.

The foundation was founded in 1987 by Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles and a group of business leaders to provide Catholic school tuition assistance to low-income students.

In 10 years the group has provided about \$ 80 million in tuition assistance to 88,000 students. The group primarily supports students in schools that receive a subsidy from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.