

# Wisconsin judge allows tax support of schools

MADISON, Wis. (CNS) — A circuit judge in Madison Aug. 6 upheld as constitutional a new Wisconsin law that would enable about 1,000 low-income Milwaukee children to attend private schools at taxpayers' expense.

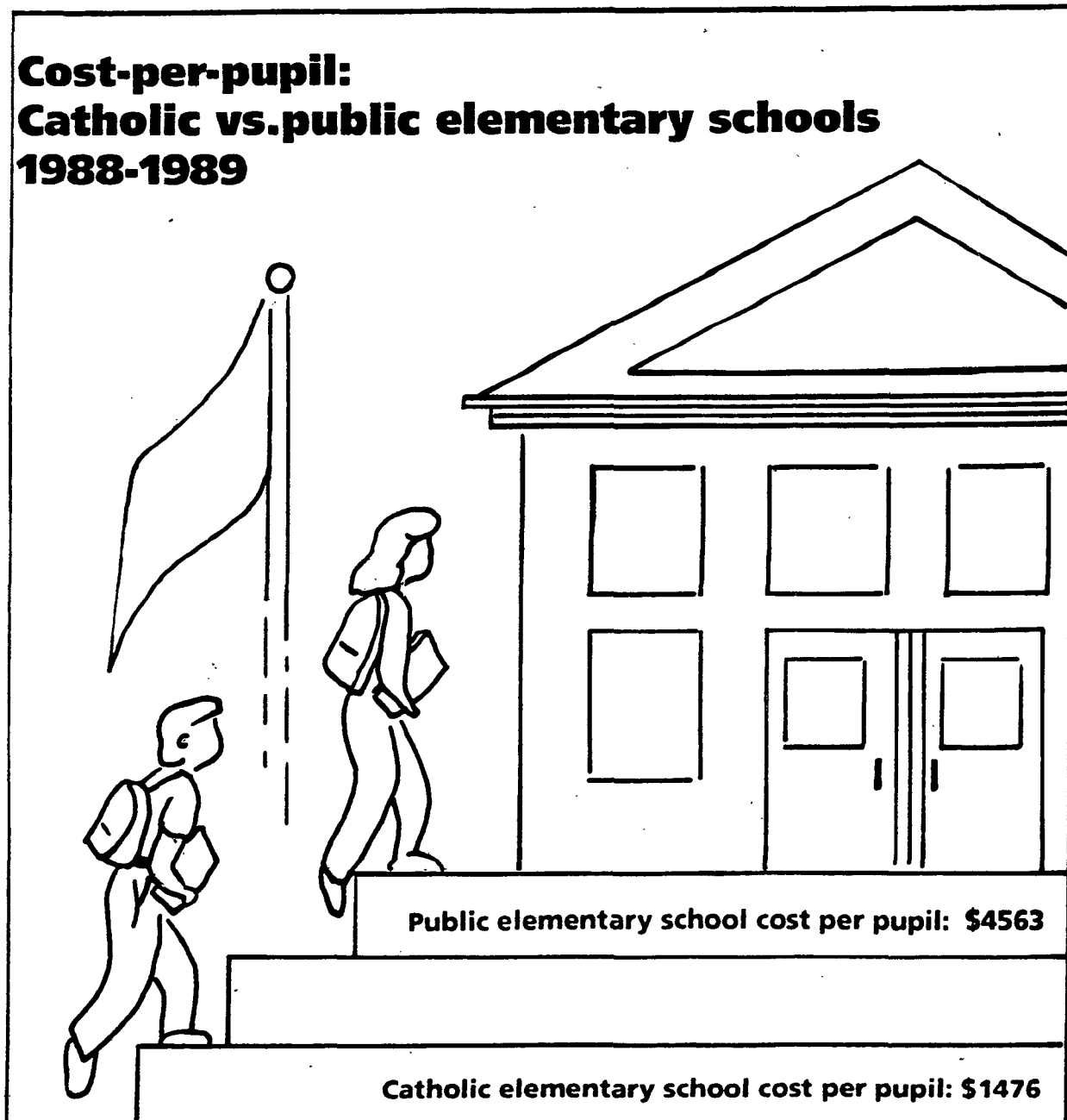
Sister Catherine T. McNamee, president of the National Catholic Educational Association, said in Washington that if the Wisconsin law "had gone down in court" there would have been less chance in the future of religiously affiliated schools getting such help.

An appeal of the ruling by Dane County Circuit Judge Susan Steingass was promised by the Wisconsin Education Association Council, a teacher union, which had joined in arguing that public spending on private schools was unconstitutional.

The judge held that because the law is intended to improve education "to the benefit of the entire state" it would fulfill the "public purpose" required by the state constitution. The law applies only to Milwaukee, although some foresee it being expanded to the rest of the state.

Three of the 10 private schools that have applied for eligibility under the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, created by the state Legislature in March, have Catholic roots, having been taken over by parents when the Archdiocese of Milwaukee closed several schools more than 20

## Cost-per-pupil: Catholic vs. public elementary schools 1988-1989



Source: National Catholic Educational Association and U.S. Department of Education

years ago.

State School Superintendent Herbert J. Grover had challenged the law because he said it would siphon money away from public schools. He also said the aided private schools would be unaccountable to public authority.

In implementing the law, Grover's department would have required the private schools to provide services to handicapped pupils equal to those given by public schools. But the judge ruled that would have exceeded his authority.

Sister McNamee, a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet, called the Wisconsin program a first step "in providing education vouchers for children to go to private schools."

"If aid goes directly to parents there should not be a constitutional question," she said.

The author of the legislation, state Rep. Annette Williams, had introduced the bill because she said Milwaukee public schools were "not doing their job." She said she was particularly concerned about black students, whose grade-point average lagged behind that of whites.

Groups opposed to the new law were teachers' unions, the Wisconsin Parent-Teachers' Association, the state associations of principals and school administrators, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

# Mercy

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## Leader argues for parental choice

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Parental choice in education is the key education issue for the 1990s, according to the leader of the largest educational association in the United States.

Sister Catherine T. McNamee, CSJ, president of the National

Catholic Education Association, which represents 200,000 Catholic educators nationwide, said that giving parents an opportunity to choose schools for their children should be a priority of the Bush administration and of every governor in the country.

"As we look to a new century — and the beginning of a new school year — education reform must be foremost on the national agenda," said the NCEA president. "It follows that providing parents a vote in school selection is essential. Choice will produce excellence and initiative in the educational system."

According to NCEA, the Brookings publication makes clear the authors' preference for a system which allows parents to take government "scholarship" money to the school of their choice, including private and religiously affiliated schools.

The NCEA recently praised a new report on school choice published by the Brookings Institution as an important and insightful analysis of the current status of American education. The book, *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, underscores the importance of parental choice as the fundamental value in restructuring education in America today.

Sister McNamee said that NCEA will continue to play a major role in advancing the issue of parental choice in education.

"Catholic educators have considerable experience in operating successful 'schools of choice,'" she said. "We are in a position to make an important contribution to the dialogue."



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