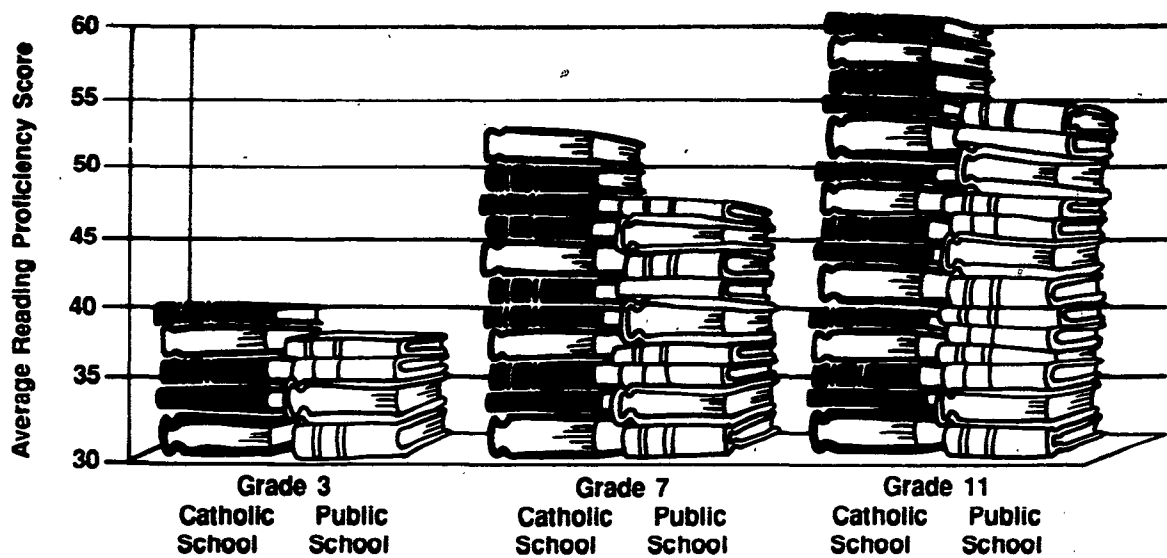


Reading Proficiency Scores: Catholic and Public Schools Compared



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress Proficiency in Reading: 1985-1986 Catholic and Public Schools Compared Final Report 1989. NCEA

Salt Lake City diocese backs state in lawsuit

By Barbara Stinson Lee
Catholic News Service

SALT LAKE CITY — The Diocese of Salt Lake City has backed a state of Utah position to allow prayer at public school functions such as graduation ceremonies, but has suggested members of minority religions be encouraged to offer prayers from their traditions so the practice may be handled more fairly.

In a statement released July 27, diocesan officials responded to the filing of a lawsuit against two state public school districts by Michele Parish-Pixler, head of the Utah chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Parish-Pixler charged that Alpine and Summit public school districts violated students' First Amendment rights when prayer was included in their graduation exercises.

The statement said the diocese does not consider prayer at public school functions a violation of the First Amendment "as long as representatives of all religious denominations are called upon, including non-Christian faiths."

Diocesan officials said it was their conviction that the First Amendment did not intend "what is a growing hostility toward religion in our public institutions and in public life, but rather the non-establishment of a specific religion."

"However, the Catholic diocese is aware of the difficulties in appropriately implementing this practice in an area where there is an overwhelming dominant religion," the statement said.

"In practice, a dominant religion all too easily 'bleeds into' the school system without anyone necessarily intending it; at least

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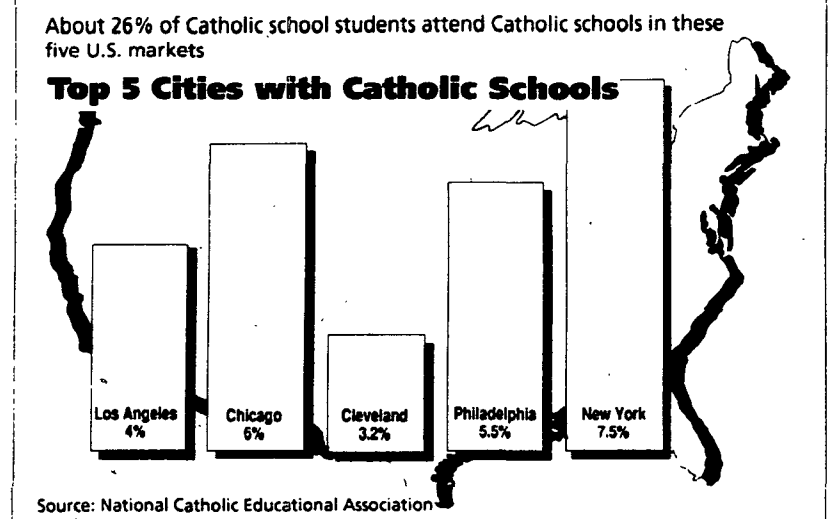
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Salt Lake City is the home of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, members of which make up nearly 65 percent of the state's population. Prayer at public functions is a common practice in Utah, and only in the last 10 years has attendance in Mormon religious education classes not been required for all public school students.

Catholics represent the next largest religious group, about 4 percent of the population.

this is often the perception of people who are not members of the dominant religion. To counteract this tendency or perception, school districts will probably have to exaggerate in the opposite direction by very frequently calling upon representatives of the non-dominant religions," the statement said.

Gov. Norman H. Bangerter has announced he would ask for private funds to fight the ACLU case.

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