'Authentic'

Continued from page 1

zine pointed out that almost every state in the union has mandated at least one form of "nontraditional" assessment in its grading system, and some states, such as California, primarily use performance-based assessments when evaluating students.

Six states, including New York, have incorporated several performance-based assessments such as writing portfolios and skill demonstrations into their grading process, the magazine article stated.

This fall, as part of its effort to implement authentic assessment, the Diocese of Rochester is asking its schools to establish student writing portfolios as a regular part of each child's learning. Schools that have already been using such portfolios are encouraged to develop them in other subject areas as well, Sister Mancuso said.

She added that the diocese has created two teams of teachers from various schools who will work on developing forms of assessment for diocesan schools.

Sandra E. Lund, a junior high teacher, spent three of the past 10 years at Spencerport's St. John the Evangelist School requiring her students to create writing portfolios.

To illustrate how she used this approach, Lund said she would ask students to save all of their written work for one month during each quarter of the school year. Then, in a one-on-one conference held quarterly with the student, Lund would explore with them the strengths and weaknesses of that month's work. Such conferences are particularly effective with students who might otherwise be reluctant to make an effort to improve their work, she added.

Lund also included the students' parents in the process, asking them to look at their children's goals each quarter and make written comments in a section seeking parental input on the students' evaluation forms.

In addition to giving students a greater sense of pride and ownership in their work, Lund said charging them to create writing portfolios helps the students become better organized. It also allows them to monitor their progress over the course of a year, she explained, adding that students should see their gradual development unfold before their eyes.

She said many students who have trouble with spelling or grammar are more inclined to improve in such areas when they closely monitor their body of work. Prior to implementing portfolios, Lund noted that poor spellers, for example, were only aware of their weakness when they did poorly on a spelling test.

"They have tended to work on words they missed a lot (in essays)," she said.

Lund concluded by noting that her students' final grades were based on a three-part measurement — their body of work, their speaking assignments and their test performance.

She agreed with Sisters Mancuso and Weaver that authentic assessment would eventually become a component of each school's grading process, but would never completely replace standardized test performance as a measure of a student's academic ability.

Sister Weaver noted, however, that the days when a student could get into a college based on his grades or her Scholastic Aptitude Test scores are numbered. Some colleges are requiring prospective students to bring in portfolios of various types. And other colleges, while not requiring portfolios from potential students, are nonetheless encouraging students to provide them, she said.

Sister Weaver pointed out that colleges are catching on to authentic assessment's greatest strengths by acknowledging its practical benefits.

"You learn a lot more about how students think when you see how they demonstrate something," she said.

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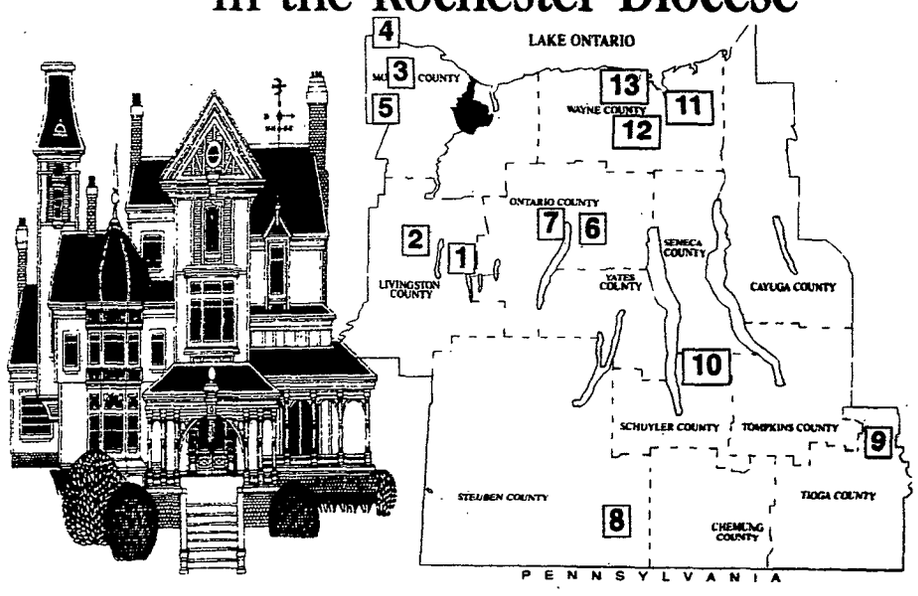

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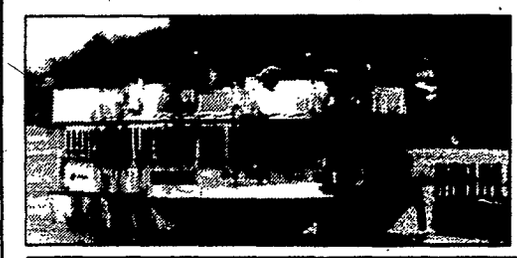

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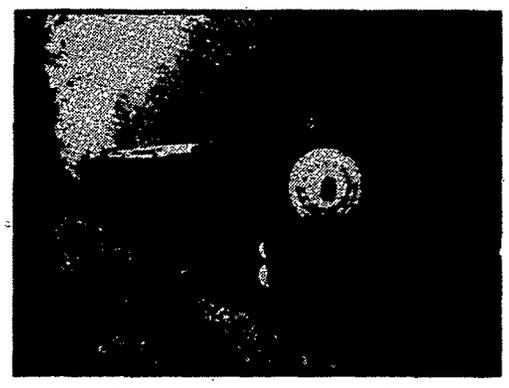

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