

Catholic Courier

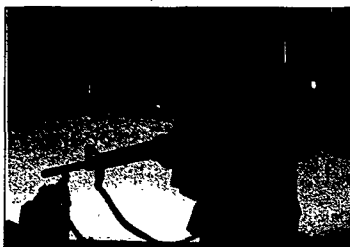
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Catholic-school pupils claim small shares of public funding

Patti Donadio's daughter, Angelina, is a June graduate of Canandaigua's St. Mary's School and plans to attend Geneva's DeSales High School in the fall. How Angelina will travel there daily has been the source of some contention.

Donadio has been lobbying the Canandaigua City School District to transport her child to DeSales on a district school bus. Under New York state law, public-school districts are only obligated to transport children to nonpublic schools of their choice within a 15-mile limit. Donadio's home in Farmington is 22 miles from DeSales, so she lobbied the district to make an exception. The district turned her down.

John Zappia, assistant superintendent of the Canandaigua district — and a DeSales graduate — said "it breaks my heart" to deny Donadio's request, but noted that the district can't afford it. He said transporting the DeSales students outside the 15-mile limit would force the district to purchase and maintain a bus, and to pay a driver.

"If we made exceptions for one, we'd be making exceptions for all," he said, noting that Canandaigua district students attend Catholic schools in Rochester, Brighton and Irondequoit. "That's not an expense we're budgeted for."

Donadio said she's upset that she will be forced to pay for public transportation so her child can attend DeSales.

"I'm a taxpayer," she said. "What are my taxes going for?"

CHURCH, STATE

Donadio's question forms



For their trip home June 18, students at St. Helen School in Gates prepare to board buses provided by the Gates-Chili Central School District.

the heart of a debate that has raged in America for decades — how much of a right, if any, do nonpublic-school students have to public monies?

Opponents of government funding for religious schools and their students argue that such funding endangers the separation of church and state. Supporters of religious schools counter that they pay taxes, too, and should be entitled to a slice of the government school-funding pie.

Many states, including New York, already supply various services — including textbooks and special-educational services — to Catholic students through their local pub-

lic-school districts. In fact, Zappia pointed out that Donadio's taxes pay for various services from the Canandaigua district to which her child is entitled, including remedial services and computer materials. However, he said, the district believes it should follow the state guidelines on transportation.

"We do transport private-school students within the 15-mile limit," he said.

Public-school districts do provide some aid to Catholic-school students — but such districts also greatly benefit from the existence of Catholic schools, according to Gary Smith, the Diocese of

Rochester's assistant superintendent for business for Catholic schools. After subtracting the amount of money Catholic schools receive in state reimbursements for various mandated services — taking classroom attendance, for example — taxpayers provide significantly less funding to Catholic-school students than to their public-school counterparts, Smith noted.

"Monroe County alone saves more than \$40 million," Smith said after calculating the estimated cost of educating children in public schools vs. diocesan schools. "That's why public-school parents, in

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Story by Rob Cullivan • Photos by Mike Crupi