

SCHOOL FUNDING

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a way, should be promoting Catholic schools because they're saving (tax) money."

Nonetheless, opponents of public funding for nonpublic schools have repeatedly challenged any form of aid — direct or indirect — to nonpublic schools or their pupils. In recent years, however, courts have grown warmer toward nonpublic schools. Over the past decade, for example, the Supreme Court shot down a challenge to tax-funded textbook aid to nonpublic-school students; overturned its previous decision to bar public-school tutors from teaching inside religious schools; and ruled as constitutional the issuance of tax-funded vouchers parents can use to pay nonpublic-school tuition.

Some states, like New York, have

for years loaned "nonsectarian" textbooks to Catholic-school students, provided them bus transportation — within limits — and, extended them special-education services. Yet other states provide, virtually no services to nonpublic-school students, seeing such provisions as breaches in the church-state wall America has always upheld.

Indeed, Sister of St. Joseph Patricia Carroll, diocesan assistant superintendent for government services and administration, noted that in some states, parents have to pay to have their children bused to Catholic schools, which also receive no textbook aid from their states.

A little more than half of all states extend some form of services to Catholic schools and students, according to Michael J. Guerra, president of the National Catholic Educational Association, based in Washington, D.C. Guerra added that a small number of states



New York state requires public-school districts to bus children, such as these students at St. Helen School in Gates, to the nonpublic schools of their choice within a 15-mile limit.

are now offering such items as tuition tax credits for Catholic-school parents, offering that as a sign of hope that the public arena may be becoming more receptive toward school choice.

"The whole society is strengthened when kids — particularly low-income kids — get a good education," he said.

PRINCIPALS IN THE MIDDLE

A casual and nonscientific survey of Catholic-school principals in the Diocese of Rochester revealed overall agreement with an assessment by Sister Carroll that public-school districts in the diocese are generally fair in their dealings with Catholic schools. Principals from Pittsford, Chili, Elmira, Waterloo, Brighton, Webster and Greece all said they felt they were usually treated fairly — and, in some cases, very well — by public-school districts. Yet some principals noted that their relationships with public-school districts aren't always wine and roses. Joseph Holleran, principal of St. Lawrence School in Greece, may have had the most humorous take on the subject.

"We have relationships with five public-school districts," he said. "Our interactions stretch from being the distant, unsavory cousin that you must invite to the party but hope will not stay long nor impinge

on your hospitality, to a good, professional working relationship."

Whatever their dealings with public-school districts, Catholic-school principals said the relationships could be vastly improved in several areas. Elizabeth Berliner, principal of Elmira's Holy Family Junior High School, noted, for example, that it's wasteful for the state to allocate textbook funding for nonpublic-school students through the public-school districts in which they reside.

"I can only order the number of books from each district as students that I have (from that district)," she said. "I have only one student from each of four districts. So just to get my new science books ordered, I have to place seven different orders." Berliner added that it would be more efficient and cost-effective for Catholic schools to order textbooks directly from the state.

Yet for supporters of Catholic education, the bigger issue is how the nation should separate religion from government while ensuring that all its children get a good education.

Guerra said the nation needs to look at Catholic schools in a different way.

"They are not simply assets for the church," he said. "They are an asset for the larger community."

MISSION NEWS



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