

# New Jersey Catholic Conference

149 North Warren Street · Trenton, New Jersey 08608  
(609) 989-1120 · Fax (609) 989-1152  
E-mail: [info@njcathconf.com](mailto:info@njcathconf.com)  
Web: [www.njcathconf.com](http://www.njcathconf.com)

Patrick R. Brannigan  
Executive Director

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To: Members Senate Economic Growth Committee

From: George V. Corwell, Ed.D.  
Director: Office of Education

Re: S-1872

## STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF S-1872

The New Jersey Catholic Conference, representing the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey, asks you to support S-1872, which would provide the opportunity for students in designated districts which have chronically failing public schools to have an opportunity to attend a participating nonpublic school or another public school of their choice.

Most educators would agree with the statement that “not every school is right for every child.” In fact, New Jersey does offer minimum forms of school choice to students who are not succeeding in their current public school setting. However, the vast majority of that choice is limited by income because many parents are unable to move to a better public school system located in another geographic region. Although the creation of charter schools in New Jersey has resulted in some enhanced school choice opportunities, charter schools alone are not the solution because many have been forced to close for a variety of economic and educational reasons. The opportunity for children to attend another public school is dictated by the availability of seats and the willingness of the school district to accept these students. Parents need to move in order to place their children in more appropriate schools. Additionally, nonpublic schools in urban areas are besieged by students who are not achieving in their current educational setting. I emphasize that these are not the brightest and the best of students, but those who are experiencing a variety of difficulties in their current educational setting. We normally expend resources on the most achieving students and the least achieving students, but those in the middle slip between the cracks.

To suggest that a program such as the pilot program proposed in S-1872 would drain the public schools of their best students is insulting to those schools. Certainly students who are happy in their current educational setting would be absolutely reluctant to leave that school where they are achieving.

To determine the value of a program of corporate tax credit scholarships, one need look no farther than our neighboring state of Pennsylvania. As a result of legislation passed in 2001, 38,000 children across Pennsylvania have benefitted, and are benefitting, from these scholarships. If we are truly attempting to improve the success of children who are doing poorly in certain public school districts, we need to look at studies that have been conducted examining the relationship between faith-based schools and the academic and behavioral outcomes among

students of low socio-economic background. A statistical procedure called meta-analysis helps to answer the question about the overall body of research on this topic. The procedure was conducted by Dr. William Jeynes, Professor of Education at California State University at Long Beach. The meta-analysis indicates that, even when the results are controlled for various factors, low socio-economic youth score over 5% better than their counterparts in public schools on both standardized and nonstandardized measures combined. The advantage was greatest at the high school level which may reflect the fact that most students attending faith-based schools have done so for, on average, a longer period of time than youth in elementary and middle schools. That study is attached for your review.

Nonpublic schools in general, and Catholic schools in particular, wish to continue to be part of the solution for helping those children and parents who knock on our doors asking for assistance. We continue to find ways to provide scholarship assistance, but both their needs and the ongoing pressures from other ministries in the Catholic Church have caused a widening gap between those that can be helped and those requesting the help. Catholic schools wish to continue the mission of doing the state's work and doing it as well or better at a lower cost. However, we are also doing the state's work in other areas, such as running homeless shelters, hospitals, drug addiction centers, and food pantries. Thus, education is not our only outreach.

Critics of this legislation will also argue that it only affects a small percentage of students at risk. However, the actual number of students affected is determined by the legislators in crafting the final version of this bill. The argument of the opponents suggests that unless the remedy can help all students, then none should be given assistance. Such a position would not be tolerated in any other models of urban aid. For example, if a developer committed to building 1,000 units of state-subsidized, low-income housing, but was able to build only 400, the state would not suggest that those 400 should not be built.

The criteria for families to qualify for this program should be unassailable; poverty and residence in a district with a chronically failing school. I have included a Q and A document with this testimony in order to permit you to review the answers to some of the most frequently raised objections. However, it is important to remember that no solution to the problems of urban public education exists from those who work in the field other than "give us more time and/or more money." We cannot afford to lose any additional students in this generation, and the local taxpayers are upset with the cost. In other words, the taxpayers are out of money and the students are out of time.

In summary, let me echo the words spoken recently by Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York regarding the work of Catholic schools with children of all religious affiliations: "We don't educate students because they are Catholic; we educate students because we are Catholic."

Thus we ask you to release S-1872 from the committee with a favorable vote.

GVC:ac

## The Academic Contributions of Faith-Based Schools<sup>1</sup>

**Dr. William Jeynes**

*Professor of Education, California State University, Long Beach*

*Non-resident Scholar, Baylor University*

### Overview of Research

Over the last forty years, there has been a considerable amount of debate on the effects of religious schools on the academic achievement of children (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). These studies have tended to show a consistent advantage for youth attending private religious schools over their public school counterparts. Social scientists differ about the reasons why students from faith-based schools may outperform students from public schools. The most notable of these works was research that was undertaken by James Coleman and his colleagues and reported in *Public and Private High Schools*. In this book, Coleman and his colleagues asserted that religious schools by nature of their culture, scholastic standards, and other factors produced superior academic outcomes to public schools.

Gaziel (1997) asserts that the achievement gap can specifically be attributed to differences in school culture. Some social scientists argue that to the extent this is true, faith-based schools do a better job of helping disadvantaged students (Coleman, 1988; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Gaziel, 1997). An alternative or supplemental view given by some is that religious schools promote parental involvement more than public schools do (Coleman, 1988; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Riley, 1996).

Although many researchers now acknowledge that Catholic schools, specifically, and religious schools, generally, are associated with higher academic achievement, some researchers question the extent to which this advantage is due to certain positive qualities in the way the schools are run. Some researchers believe that students from faith-based schools outperform students in public schools simply because public schools have a high percentage of low-socioeconomic (SES) and racial minority children (Baker, 1998, 1999; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). They assert that religious schools have a distinct advantage in that they are able to choose which students they want to attend their schools, and this translates into having families with a higher level of SES (The American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1992). Moynihan (1989), however, presents evidence that suggests that the racial distribution of students in Catholic schools is similar to that found in public schools. In addition, some research suggests that Catholic schools may benefit minority students (Hall, 1986; Lee, 1987; Neal, 1997). Nevertheless, many social scientists question whether religious schools really help children from low-SES and racial minority backgrounds more than the public schools do (Brunsma, 1998; Inniss, 1993).

### Research Results of the Religious School Advantage

There have been myriad studies examining the relationship between faith-based schools and academic and behavioral outcomes among students of low-SES background. However, the question arises, what does the overall body of research indicate? Fortunately, there is a statistical procedure called a meta-analysis that enables one to answer this question. Jeynes (2002, 2003) conducted the only meta-analysis that has been undertaken examining the effect of religious schools on the academic outcomes of students. A meta-analysis statistically combines all the relevant existing studies on a given subject in order to determine the aggregated results of said research. Table 1 below summarizes the results of the meta-analysis of the academic advantage that accrues to students who attend faith-based private schools versus their counterparts in public schools. Virtually every study included in the meta-analysis controlled for important variables such as race,

<sup>1</sup>References for this paper can be found in Appendix A.

den. Some of the programs, such as the one in the Netherlands, have been around for decades. However, Sweden's program and those of other European nations are considerably more recent. Sweden's voucher program tries to guarantee as much as possible that the funding per student will be about the same whether the student attends a private religious school or a public one. The results of the analyses undertaken in Sweden indicate the same general pattern as one finds in studies of the localized American voucher initiatives. That is, students show some improvement in achievement and the parents demonstrate increased satisfaction with the schools (Hepburn & Merrifield, 2006; Sandstrom & Bergstrom, 2005).

#### Learning from Religious Schools

The achievement gap that exists between students from Catholic versus public schools is substantial enough so that even public school leaders are examining what makes Catholic schools so successful (Hudolin, 1994). The Chicago public school system, for example, is attempting to model several aspects of the Catholic school system (Hudolin, 1994). Although some factors that contribute to the success of Catholic schools may be difficult to imitate, many social scientists believe that Catholic schools serve as a useful model for the public schools (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; McEwen, Knipe, & Gallagher, 1997). For those people who are concerned about what kinds of morals are taught in the public schools, the fact that public educators are seeking to learn from Catholic schools may give them some solace (Halstead & Lewicka, 1998). Social scientists note that there are some qualities evident among religious school educators that can also be applied in the public schools. Some of these qualities include maintaining high expectations of students, providing loving and caring teachers, teaching moral education, and encouraging higher levels of parental involvement (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Hudolin, 1994).

#### Conclusion

Faith-based schools offer some profound advantages to American children and society at large. As a result, it is in the best interests of the nation to facilitate rather than hinder the existence of these schools, particularly in the inner city. Faith-based schools represent one of the nation's best chances of bridging the SES and racial achievement gaps. They also help reduce the use of drugs and gang activity in the schools. Faith-based schools are also more likely to provide a racially harmonious atmosphere in which there are fewer racial fights; their students also perceive the schools as being more racially friendly than public schools. In addition to providing a great educational service in their own right, religious schools can help public schools become more efficacious as well. To the extent that public school educators are seeking to learn from religious school rubrics, this is being accomplished today. Further progress can be made in this regard if the United States makes a concerted effort to encourage school voucher programs. In all, faith-based schools are an essential part of the American educational landscape and it is vital that Americans realize their contribution and do whatever possible to encourage their growth and success.

gender, and school characteristics. The meta-analysis indicates that even when the results are controlled for various factors, low-SES youth score over 5 percent better than their counterparts in public schools on both standardized and non-standardized measures combined. The advantage was greatest at the high school level, which may reflect the fact that most students attending faith-based schools have done so for, on average, a longer period of time than youth in middle and elementary schools.

**Table 1: Meta-Analysis Advantage for Low-SES Children Attending Religious Schools versus Their Counterparts in Public Schools by Level of Schooling**

	Combined Standardized and Nonstandardized Results	Standardized Test Results	Nonstandardized Results
All Levels of Schooling Combined	5.1%	5.3%	4.8%
High School Level	5.4%	5.7%	5.0%
Middle School Level	5.2%	5.2%	5.2%
Elementary School Level	3.1%	3.1%	N.A.*

\*N.A. = Not applicable.

**Results Using a Nationwide Data Set**

If one examines the most well known data set addressing education, the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), one sees a confirmation of the results that emerge from the meta-analysis. The advantage of examining a nationwide data set is that one can examine the issue in even greater detail than if one used a meta-analysis. In an analysis undertaken by Jeynes (2007) what one sees in the results is that youth of low-SES background benefit more than students of any other SES quartile by attending faith-based schools (see Table 2). The results of the NELS dataset analysis indicate that (1) children in the lowest SES quartile who attend religious schools achieve at higher levels than do children in the lowest SES quartile who attend public schools and (2) children in the lowest SES quartile benefit from attending religious schools more than students in the other SES quartiles. Low-SES students attending religious schools outperformed their counterparts in public schools on both standardized and non-standardized measures. Among the standardized tests, the religious school students' scores varied from 7.8 percent higher for the Test Composite to 5.4 percent higher for the Science test. The faith-based school advantage was even greater for the non-standardized Basic Core measure, at 8.2 percent higher.

**Table 2: Effects (in Percentage Score Increases) on the Academic Achievement of Twelfth-Grade Children by SES Quartile (NELS Dataset: N = 20,706)**

	Lowest SES Quartile	2nd Lowest SES Quartile	2nd Highest SES Quartile	Highest SES Quartile
Reading Achievement	7.6%	6.8%	5.8%	5.2%
Math Achievement	7.0%	6.2%	5.6%	5.0%
Social Studies Achievement	6.8%	5.8%	5.2%	4.6%
Science Achievement	5.4%	4.0%	3.4%	3.2%
Test Composite	7.8%	6.6%	5.4%	4.8%
Left Back	5.8%	5.0%	4.4%	3.8%
Basic Core	8.2%	6.6%	5.8%	5.2%

The results listed in Table 2 show how the religious school advantage differs by SES quartile in the student sample. For all the academic achievement measures examined, students from the lowest SES quartile showed the greatest academic benefit, as measured by percentage gain from attending religious schools

compared to their counterparts in public schools. This advantage was greater than that experienced by students in the other three socioeconomic quartiles. The increase for students in the lowest quartile was 3.0 percent higher than the increase for students in the highest quartile for the Test Composite and Basic Core classes and was at least 2.0 percent higher in every academic category. The religious school advantage was inversely related to the student's socioeconomic quartile. For all measures, students from the lowest SES quartile benefited the most from attending religious schools, followed by the second lowest quartile, and so on.

There is also evidence both from meta-analyses and examination of nationwide data sets that when students attend faith-based schools the achievement gap narrows. When we examine the racial achievement gap, the effects of religious schools are similar to the pattern found for SES. Table 3 indicates that the standardized test scores of African American and Latino students varied from 8.3 percent higher than those of their public school counterparts for Math, Social Studies, and Test Composite to 6.0 percent higher for Science. When SES and gender were controlled for, the standardized test scores of African American and Latino students varied from 5.2 percent higher than their public school counterparts for the Social Studies test to 2.0 percent higher for the Science test.

For all the academic measures, whether SES was controlled for or not, African American and Latino students benefited more than Whites did from attending religious schools. For the standardized tests, African American and Latino students gained 2.5 percent more than white students for the Social Studies test and 1.8 percent more for the Science test. When SES was controlled for, African American and Latino students gained 1.8 percent more than white students for the Social Studies test and 0.8 percent more for the Science test.

**Table 3: Effects (in Percentage Score Increases) on the Academic Achievement of Twelfth-Grade Children by Race (NELS Dataset: N = 20,706)**

	Considering SES and Gender		Not Considering SES and Gender	
	African American and Latino	White	African American and Latino	White
Reading Achievement	8.2%	6.0%	4.6%	3.4%
Math Achievement	8.3%	6.0%	4.2%	3.0%
Social Studies Achievement	8.3%	5.8%	5.2%	3.4%
Science Achievement	6.0%	4.2%	2.0%	1.2%
Test Composite	8.3%	6.0%	4.8%	3.8%
Left Back	5.1%	3.7%	3.0%	2.0%
Basic Core	8.3%	6.5%	3.4%	3.0%

Meta-analytic analysis (Jeynes, 2003) confirms these results and indicates that the achievement gap in faith-based schools is 25 percent less than in public schools and evaporates totally if the students of color are religious themselves and from intact families (Jeynes, 2003, 2007).

### Why Attending Religious Schools Reduces the Achievement Gap

Based on research findings, it is apparent that faith-based schools reduce socioeconomic and racial achievement gaps. But what qualities of faith-based schools explain this advantage? Theorists commonly propound three explanations.

First, they believe that the culture of the faith-based schools contributes to the bridging of the gap (Gaziel 1997). In terms of the outward manifestations of this culture, social scientists point out several differences that can be objectively measured by using the NELS dataset. Some researchers believe that the faith-based school advantage is due to the school atmosphere (Lee & Bryk 1986; Morris 1994). Another possibility is that these schools require students to do more homework (Mentzer 1988). Other theorists believe that faith-based schools are less likely to have violence or threats of violence, which can often serve as major distractions for students trying to learn (Hudolin 1994; Irvine & Foster 1996). Still other researchers believe that a higher level of racial harmony exists at religious schools because of the common thread of faith and Christian brotherhood (Irvine & Foster 1996). In addition, some social scientists believe that religious schools are likely to have modes of discipline that make them more prone to success (Morris 1994; Sander 1996).

A second reason, family factors or a broader sense of what Coleman described as “social capital,” results from both family-based and community-based sources (Coleman 1988; Coleman & Hoffer 1987). Sociologists, educators, and psychologists have been quick to point out that religious people are more likely to remain in intact families, become engaged in their children’s education, and provide an upbringing and community that encourage an atmosphere of morality and self-discipline (Jeynes 2002, 2003).

Finally, a third possible reason is the fact that religious schools promote Christian, Jewish, or other forms of devotion (Irvine & Foster 1996). This, in turn, produces positive effects. Each of these three factors is explained further in the following sections.

### Some Evidence for a Difference in School Culture

The first factor to which social scientists point is school culture. This study sought to statistically examine many aspects of school culture. First, the study focused on five aspects of school culture: (1) school atmosphere, (2) racial harmony, (3) level of school discipline, (4) school violence, and (5) amount of homework done.

Table 4: Effects (in Standard Deviation Units) of Religious Schools Versus Nonreligious Schools on the Five School Variables for the Twelfth Grade (1992) (N = 18,726)

	Results Controlling for Gender and Race	Results Controlling for SES, Urban Setting, Gender and Race
<b>School Atmosphere Variables:</b>		
<i>School Spirit</i>	.26****	.30****
<i>Teachers Interested</i>	.30****	.18****
<b>Racial Harmony Variables:</b>		
<i>Friendly</i>	.20****	.13****
<i>Racial Fights</i>	.56****	.57****
<b>Discipline Variables:</b>		
<i>Disruptions</i>	.17****	.11***
<i>Ignore Cheating</i>	-.05	.01
<i>Offered Drugs</i>	.13****	.20****

<b>Violence Variables:</b>		
<i>Many Gangs</i>	.54****	.66****
<i>Threaten to Hurt</i>	.10***	.11**
<i>Fights</i>	.06*	.03
<b>Homework</b>	.14****	.05**

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\*\*\* $p < .0001$

The results demonstrate that religious schools outperform nonreligious schools in all of the five school trait categories and in nearly all of the individual questions that make up those categories. Table 4 shows the effects of attending a religious school for all the individual questions under each school trait category. In the first column, data are adjusted for SES, race, gender, and whether or not the school was in an urban setting; in the second column, data are adjusted only for race and gender. All of the differences are listed in standard deviation units, a procedure that is important for effectively comparing different measures because different assessments have different grading units and the scores vary to different degrees. Presenting the results in a standardized form makes it possible to compare the results of different tests more fairly and accurately. The effects for racial harmony and school atmosphere, on average, showed the largest advantage for the religious schools.

#### Research on the Influence of School Choice

Over the past number of years a number of cities have launched school choice programs that involve giving parents a voucher so that their children can attend private schools. The most well-recognized synopsis of the influence of vouchers is Howell and Peterson's (2002) book, *The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools*. They examine results from three privately funded voucher initiatives in New York City, Washington, DC, and Dayton, Ohio. Howell and Peterson examined the students who received a voucher as part of a privately funded program versus a group of students who applied for a voucher and did not receive them. By comparing similar groups of students in this way, the potential influence of differing levels of parental motivation was removed.

Howell and Peterson found that when the results from the three cities are combined, African American children gained in their math and reading scores at a statistically significant level. However, Howell and Peterson report that such gains did not emerge among Latino or white students. Perhaps the most outstanding finding is that parents who sent their children to these schools reported being much more satisfied with the voucher school rather than the public one that their children previously attended. All of these effects held even for three years into the program.

The most well-known school choice program is in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, initiated in 1990. Although it is the most prominent choice program, data used for evaluating the program's success are only available for secular private schools. In this sense data from this study are incomplete, particularly because religious schools provide most of the private school schooling in metropolitan Milwaukee. Rouse (1998) has supplied the most complete analysis of the Milwaukee voucher program, which involved primarily disadvantaged African American students. She reported that students enrolled in the voucher program demonstrated consistent gains over their counterparts in public schools even though the vouchers are small and permit private schools to spend only about half the amount per student as public schools.

The most developed school choice programs that include private religious schools are in Europe (Glenn, 1989). These include a number of programs, the most mature of which may be in the Netherlands and Swe-

## Q & A on S-1872

1. *Q. Is this a voucher bill?*

- A. The legislation involves corporate tax credits and not vouchers. With corporate tax credits, no payments are made from the government, at any level, either to nonpublic schools or directly to parents. Corporations decide how to use their tax liability and may choose to fund scholarships for students to attend either nonpublic or public schools.

Because businesses bear a huge burden of having to train unprepared workers who are the products of failed educational experiences, it is only logical that these businesses should have the opportunity to direct their tax liabilities to a source which they feel will improve the educational quality of graduating students (potential employees). If they are satisfied with the caliber of their employees, then they can continue to pay their tax liabilities without participating in this program. If, however, they feel the need to provide better educational opportunities for low-income children in the eligible districts, they can contribute to the appropriate scholarship organization. Note that the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey, the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, and other business groups have endorsed the bill.

2. *Q. Isn't the bill an attempt to destroy public education?*

- A. Nothing could be further from the truth. The difference in state aid to the district and the amount of the scholarship can be used for an Education Innovation Fund to spur reform in public education.

The State needs viable public and nonpublic schools because not every school is right for every child.

3. *Q. Are such programs constitutional?*

- A. Opponents claim that if dollars for religiously affiliated schools are included in such scholarship programs, the program violates the First Amendment. Rather than a subsidy for religious schools as part of this program, the decision about the choice of school is placed in the hands of the parents. Among the educational options available are other public schools who are willing to take the amount of the scholarship as full payment for tuition.

The scholarships are available to a neutrally defined category of beneficiaries (economically disadvantaged families and those eligible to attend a school in a district with a chronically failing public school). This is hardly equivalent to a subsidy to a nonpublic school because no funds would be transmitted directly to a private religious or secular school (or another public school for that matter) except by the independent decision of parents.

With respect to the constitutionality of various school choice programs, any program which assists nonpublic school students has traditionally been required to meet the so-called three-part *Lemon* test (taken from the *Lemon v Kurtzman* Supreme Court decision of 1971). On June 29, 1983, the Supreme Court upheld the Minnesota State Education Tax Deduction in *Mueller v Allen*, ruling that the program did indeed meet the three-part constitutional test established by *Lemon*. In *Zelman v Simmons-Harris* (June 27, 2002), the Supreme Court concluded that the use of public money to underwrite tuition in private and religious schools does not violate the Establishment Clause of the US Constitution, as long as parents make the decision regarding where the scholarship is used. This decision occurred as a result of a challenge to the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program. The court concluded that the Cleveland program is neutral with regard to religion, even though the majority of program recipients chose religious schools.

On October 27, 2009, the Arizona Supreme Court refused to hear a challenge of the Arizona state law which permits businesses to reduce their tax liabilities by contributing money to organizations that distribute nonpublic school tuition payments on behalf of students. The US Supreme Court and the Arizona Supreme Court dismissed a previous challenge. Pennsylvania's Corporate Tax Scholarship Program, upon which S-1872 is modeled, has never been challenged in the courts.

4. ***Q. But won't this program simply help current nonpublic school students?***

A. 75% of the money must be used for current public school students. 25% may be used for students currently in nonpublic schools. However, they must meet the same income guidelines as the public school students and live in a district with a chronically failing public school. It is important to note that, in most cases, the nonpublic schools parents are struggling to send their child to a nonpublic school. They are, in effect, one paycheck away from becoming public school families.

5. ***Q. Isn't this simply a subsidy for private education?***

A. As previously noted, there is no direct subsidy to a nonpublic school. However, in a variety of areas that impact its residents, the State of New Jersey has indeed supported private enterprises with public money. With respect to education, parents and students currently receive the opportunity to attend private preschools and private special education schools. Students are granted scholarship money through a variety of programs (using state and federal dollars) to attend private (sectarian and nonsectarian) colleges and universities. Private hospitals receive state subsidy. Additionally, the state sets no control over the use of welfare benefits paid to recipients. Therefore, it would be entirely possible for a welfare recipient to turn the check over to a religious entity (church, synagogue, etc.) without any state controls.

6. *Q. Do nonpublic schools accept classified students?*

- A. The myth that opponents of this legislation would have the public believe is that nonpublic schools do not accept classified students. This is certainly not the case, and it is insulting to the parents whose children attend nonpublic schools.

Unfortunately, these nonpublic school students do not receive the same level of state and federal aid given to public school students. In last year's budget, special education for public school students was funded at a level of over \$700M in State aid. This is in addition to the millions of dollars in additional federal aid or local aid given to public school students.

On the other hand, nonpublic school students, when they are classified, receive an ISP (Individualized Service Plan) rather than an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). The IEP indicates all the needs that the public school student has and the services to be received using a combination of state, federal, and local dollars. The ISP is more restrictive in scope, indicating only services which will be provided to the nonpublic school student through the limited state and federal dollars, regardless of the child's needs. In other words, the IEP reflects what special education services students need, while the ISP dictates to their parents what services they will receive.

Nonpublic school parents are willing to trade limited services for their classified children in return for the greater rewards of attending a nonpublic school of their choice. Nonpublic school administrators are more than willing to accept classified children; however, with those children should come the same state and federal dollars available to public schools, especially since it would still result in a lower overall cost to the taxpayers in total education dollars expended.

7. *Q. Won't this legislation help only the best students?*

- A. Students who are succeeding at the highest levels in their current schools are normally not applicants for school choice programs. Happy, high-achieving students will stay in their current schools. The students in the districts with chronically failing schools who are currently attempting to attend nonpublic schools are those who are not succeeding, and thus their parents are seeking an alternative education choice, for reasons such as academics and/or safety. The Choice and charter school movements have shown that it is the low-achieving students that access these programs. The failure of public schools to retain their own best students would indeed be a severe indictment of their ability to educate and attract students.

8. **Q.** *Why should I be interested in S-1872, if my district has no chronically failing schools?*
- A. All citizens of New Jersey need to be interested in the quality of education offered in all districts in the State. Taxes paid to the State support districts whose tax base is not sufficient to cover their needs. A large portion of these State dollars go toward support of public education in the districts with chronically failing schools. All citizens need to be aware of the implications of paying for chronically failing schools whose students graduate (or who drop out), because their future success will cost taxpayers even more money for things like retraining or government assistance to those unable to obtain employment. Offering these students an option to go to a school where they can be more successful benefits all New Jersey's citizens. Furthermore, none of the scholarship money goes to any of the districts which have chronically failing schools; rather it goes toward the education of the child in a more successful public or nonpublic school setting.
9. **Q.** *Won't schools run by extremists be founded as a result of such legislation?*
- A. Existing federal and state laws prohibit all institutions from discrimination and illegal activities. Existing nonpublic schools (over 90% nationally) are accredited or evaluated by agencies such as national, regional, or state private school organizations. For example, the Catholic schools in New Jersey receive accreditation through the Middle Atlantic States Accrediting Association.
10. **Q.** *Aren't nonpublic schools largely unregulated and, therefore, not accountable to the public?*
- A. The Opportunity Scholarship Act also requires testing of scholarship students. Nonpublic schools annually administer national tests aligned with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. However, nonpublic schools are already accountable to the parents of the students they serve, and their graduation rates far exceed those of the public schools in the target districts. If nonpublic schools fail their students, parents will leave. Conversely, parents of children in public schools have no recourse for the lack of accountability of these schools under current federal and state standards. Their children must remain trapped in schools to which their children are assigned.

Under *NJSA18A:6-4*, nonpublic schools are required to register with the New Jersey Department of Education on an annual basis. Nonpublic schools are also subject to a variety of local, state, and federal health and safety regulations including those for fire safety, OSHA, immunizations, and pest management, just to name a few.

The argument is sometimes made that nonpublic schools do not have to fulfill the requirements listed in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) which the public schools must fulfill. However, only a certain percentage of nonpublic school students (those who qualify under both the low-income and low-performing requirements) are eligible for services under Title I. The federal government does not impose requirements on nonpublic schools for receiving aid under NCLB because, unlike the public schools, there is no massive influx of federal dollars spent to improve education in nonpublic schools. Aid is given to nonpublic students NOT nonpublic schools (an important distinction).

**11. Q. *What about the issue of certification and nonpublic school teachers?***

A. Although over 95% of Catholic school teachers are certified, not all nonpublic school groups agree that certification alone makes a quality teacher. Because certification courses only deal with issues such as classroom management and educational psychology, the content area in which the teacher is employed is not included in course work. If current parents in nonpublic schools were to question the quality of teachers in those schools, they could “vote with their feet.” As an example, a recent Nonpublic School Teacher of the Year for New Jersey has a doctorate in molecular biology but would be deemed “unqualified” to teach in a public school because she is not certified.

**12. Q. *But won't this bill only help a “lucky few?”***

A. This bill is a pilot program. An increase in the number of students eligible under the current legislation could certainly be provided by the future amendments. But the argument upon which this objection is based (“If we can't help all, we can't help any”) would undermine any currently existing social program, educational or otherwise. For example, in attempts to provide low-income housing and other benefits to the poor in social programs, we do not criticize developers who can only provide 500 units of low-income housing when 2,000 are needed. Using the logic of opponents, we would not provide any of these low-income units unless all 2,000 were possible.