

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE HEARING – OCTOBER 13, 2006 – UNIV. OF HOUSTON

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of School Choice, a system that would be beneficial to all school children of Texas.

My name is Brother Stanley Culotta, and I am President of Holy Cross of San Antonio. Originally entitled Holy Cross High School, it was founded in 1957, located in the Edgewood Independent School District, to bring value centered, quality, college preparatory education to the West Side of San Antonio. Courses generally considered college preparatory classes at that time were not offered in the local public high school. Holy Cross continues offering that value centered, quality, college preparatory education.

I have been employed at or associated with Holy Cross since 1958. During that time I have served in many roles, as teacher, as administrator, as Principal and now as President.

The enrollment at Holy Cross is 516 students in grades 6 through 12. A placement test is administered to all incoming students to determine the level of instruction best suited to their ability. There is no entrance exam. Therefore, students entering Holy Cross are at various levels of achievement, below as well as even with or above their grade equivalent.

Even in situations where students are extremely deficient academically, generally many of these parents still request acceptance for their children. These parents reply that they want a safe atmosphere without police patrolling the school. For their children, they want the values taught and the quality education available at Holy Cross.

Of the 516 students enrolled, 150 or 29% receive funding from the CEO Foundation. The choice of their parents and not their academic ability or potential was a condition of their acceptance. If not at Holy Cross, most (136 of 150 = 90%) would be forced to attend public schools rated unacceptable in a district that is also rated unacceptable. Of the 516 students, approximately 95% are Hispanic and over 75% of the families qualify as low income families. The financial sacrifices and the dedication of the parents definitely give evidence to their belief that education, a choice in education, is the answer to poverty and to a brighter future.

Unfortunately, due to finances, some students must withdraw from Holy Cross and enroll in a local public school. They do this very reluctantly, with disappointment to themselves and to their parents.

Each year all students take the Stanford Achievement Test, a test with national norms. Teachers do not teach for the test. Accountability at Holy Cross is to the parents who are paying tuition, to the Texas Catholic Conference Education Department and to the Brothers of Holy Cross with a tradition and philosophy of education begun in the 1840's.

All graduates of Holy Cross have completed the courses necessary for college admission. Most graduates take advantage of this preparation and do enter college. Among the many professional alumni I can identify 16 physicians, 5 dentists and many attorneys, including one Federal Judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

Assigning children to attend a school that is not safe or rated unacceptable is not education in the best interest of the student. It is questionable that members of this committee would so assign their children. Having a choice in the education of their children should be the privilege of all parents and not dependent on their zip code or family income.

Educational choice can promote academic excellence in all schools by fostering basic reforms and creating a competitive climate, responsive to parental concerns and leading to improved student performance; parental choice will exact more accountability from educators and increase their local autonomy and flexibility.

Thank you for your attention. And I present you with a copy for the record.

Sincerely,
Bro. Stanley Culotta, CSC, MD
President
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