

September 2009

Dear Parents:

The Diocese of Erie will continue annual testing and evaluation of students from October 1 – 8, 2009. The Diocese will use the Stanford Achievement Test Series, Tenth Edition, and the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test, Eighth Edition. These excellent instruments provide valid and reliable data that is needed for objective measurement of achievement. This testing data leads to effective placement and instructional planning for the classrooms. The greatest value of having testing data is to assist with the instructional process of the individual student.

Below are some questions that have been raised by parents concerning the annual testing process.

1. Why do the Catholic Schools in the Diocese test in the Fall instead of the Spring when the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) is given in the public schools?

As educators backed with research, we know that the most effective way to instruct students is to know what their abilities are and where their weaknesses lie. Once a teacher has that information, then she can meet the student at a learning level, not a frustration level of understanding. That data provided to a teacher at the beginning of the following school year carries much less value than current data provided to a teacher in November with the rest of the year still ahead to plan instructional strategies. We want to use the data that testing provides to help improve our instruction. Having the testing done in the Fall provides us that opportunity.

2. Why don't Catholic Schools just use the PSSA test so that they can be compared to their public school counterparts?

Catholic schools have traditionally valued their freedom to shape their own curriculums, without government interference or entanglement. When government is allowed to test educational performance, it has an unparalleled opportunity to shape and influence educational content.

Instead, Catholic schools opt for selecting standardized achievement tests that are privately developed and, in most cases, are more rigorous than the State PSSA tests. No Catholic diocese in Pennsylvania is using the PSSA testing program. The Stanford Tests are norm-referenced. The PSSA is not norm-referenced to a fixed standard. It is scaled yearly. Whereas a norm referenced test is designed to provide a measure of performance in terms of an individual's relative standing in some known group. The Diocese chooses to implement a nationally known standardized test each year to provide diagnostic results of each student's strengths and weaknesses based on the national norms.

3. What can I do to help my child be well prepared to take the test?

During the weeks leading up to the annual tests, begin to talk with your child about the importance of giving their best effort during testing. The following thoughts will help you in preparing your child.

The night before:

- ✓ Help your child get to bed on time. Research shows that being well-rested helps students do better.
- ✓ Help children resolve immediate arguments before going to bed.
- ✓ Keep your routine as normal as possible. Upsetting natural routines may make children feel insecure.
- ✓ Mention the test to show you're interested, but don't dwell on it.
- ✓ Plan ahead to avoid conflicts on the morning of the test.

The morning of the test:

- ✓ Get up early to avoid rushing. Be sure to have your child at school on time.
- ✓ Have your child eat a good breakfast but not a heavy one. Research shows that students do better if they have breakfast before they take tests.
- ✓ Be positive about the test. Acknowledge that tests can be hard and that they're designed so that no one will know all of the answers. Explain that doing your best is what counts. The important thing is to make your child comfortable and confident about the test.

We anticipate having the testing results available around the 20th of November, 2009.

Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of Erie