

El Ghazal, A. J. (2006). *What parents expect of urban catholic schools and how these schools address parents' expectations to make needed change?* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Abstract

Several studies have dug into the secrets of Catholic education, the mission of Catholic schools, and the relationship between parents and Catholic schools (Warren, Young & Hanifin, 2003; McLaughlin, 2002; Wojcicki, 2001; Archer, 2000; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Convey, 1992). Other studies have examined recently the disturbances of urban Catholic schools closings (O'Keefe, 2005; Coday, 2005; Greeley, 2005; Zehr, 2005; Zimmerman, 2005; O'Keefe & Evans, 2004; Cattaro, 2002b). However, very few looked at parents' expectations of and experiences with Catholic schools in urban settings. Little information was provided as well about how administrators in urban Catholic schools use parents' input to make needed change. This study used qualitative methods to explore the stories of parents in three urban elementary Catholic schools that serve children coming mostly from low-income families--Catholic and non-Catholic alike-- in the American Midwest. To understand parents' expectations, this study used field observations, school archival data, and the transcripts of structured interviews with 30 parents, 5 teachers, and 3 principals. This research attempted to answer three questions: What do parents expect of their urban Catholic schools? Are urban Catholic schools meeting parents' expectations? How are urban Catholic schools changing to address parents' expectations or concerns?

It was brought to light that parents expected urban Catholic schools to provide well-rounded education, strong discipline, sound religion classes, and a safe environment. They expected the Catholic school to reinforce the moral teaching that they provided to their children at home, and to communicate with them through conferences, calls, and notes about their children's academic, behavioral, and spiritual development. Parents also expected teachers to be patient and understanding, fair and firm, dedicated and interested in their job. Parents who said that they were involved with their children's education asserted that they were satisfied with what the schools offer and wished their children had more extracurricular activities. Parents who experience a major financial pressure to send their children to Catholic schools in urban settings firmly believe that educators listen to what they have to say and take what they expect into consideration to make needed change.