

Evaluation of Four Extra Mile
Catholic Elementary Schools of
the Pittsburgh Diocese

Tony Eichelberger

Rita M. Bean

Rae Tucker

Caroline Colella

Ryan Pohlig

University of Pittsburgh

September 2007

**Evaluation of Four Catholic Elementary Schools
Supported by the
Extra Mile Education Foundation**

Executive Summary

Faculty members in the School of Education of the University of Pittsburgh evaluated the Catholic schools supported by the Extra Mile Education Foundation (EMEF) in 1989, 1995, and 2002. These evaluations have consistently identified the reasons that parents select the schools, characteristics of the schools valued by the students, the quality of education, the academic achievement of students, and the success of graduates in graduation from high school and entering post-secondary education institutions. The present evaluation continued to monitor these aspects of the schools and also looked more intensively at the contributions the schools made to later success of students in high school and college. The specific evaluation questions addressed were:

1. What is the certification and experience of teachers in the EMEF schools and to what extent do education processes represent “best education practices”?
2. What is the academic achievement of present students, and how does it differ for students at selected grade levels (5th and 8th graders in 2005-06) with different years of experience in the schools?
3. What is the present status of recent graduates in terms of high school graduation and entry into post-secondary education?
4. What are the contributions that EMEF – supported education and related experience made to students’ high school and post-secondary success?

To address the four major questions, a number of data collection activities were completed: (1) collection analysis of available school achievement data for all students at each grade level over the past five years, and complete data on 2005-06 students in grades 5 and 8 (Terra Nova results for 2002 through 2006); (2) surveys of all parents and students in grades 7 and 8; (3) classroom observations and follow-up interviews; (4) small focus groups of parents; (5) group interviews of selected 6th to 8th grade students; (6) teacher demographics surveys; (7) formal interviews of the principals; (8) climate survey of 7th and 8th grade students and all teachers, and (9) surveys and interviews of selected recent graduates of the four Extra Mile Schools (2001-2006).

Findings:

A. Quality of Teachers and Education Practices

1. Teachers in the Extra Mile Schools are highly qualified. All teachers have bachelor's degrees, almost all have PA teacher certification, and over half have certifications or degrees above the bachelors.
2. The teachers are positive about the climate in the schools. They rated the schools as having strong student-teacher relationships, good administrative leadership, and effective instructional management.
3. The schools, overall, reflect and represent best practices in education. Teachers are using highly effective instructional strategies, such as providing explanations, using modeling, coaching, and scaffolding. Students and teachers respect each other, and there is a positive tone in the classrooms that facilitates learning. Assignments are clearly explained, aligned with the lesson, and students have the resources and knowledge to accomplish the assignment.
4. The schools recognize the importance of planning, curriculum and instruction that meets the standards of both the Diocese and the State. All schools have implemented steps to keep textbooks updated. Teachers are generally involved in curriculum planning (e.g., in middle school science, teachers from most of the schools have worked closely with Carnegie Mellon University to implement a research-based science program).
5. Schools take advantage of the various partnerships that enable them to provide effective instructional experiences for their students.

B. Student Academic Achievement

1. Achievement at nearly all grade levels and subject areas has increased from 2001-02 through 2005-06, with median percentile of students at or above the 50th percentile.
2. Students who enter the schools in grades K, 1 and 2 consistently show achievement at, or well above, the norm in all subject areas.
3. Students who enter the schools in grades 3, 5, or 6 show evidence of achievement below the norm and there is little improvement in achievement of many of those students.
4. Overall, student achievement at the 8th grade is at or above the norm in all subjects.

5. Although it usually remains above the norm, student achievement tends to decline in all subjects in grades 4 through 6, but increase in grades 7 and 8.
6. Scores tend to be highest in Reading and Language and lowest in Math, Science and Social Studies.

C. High School Graduation and Entry into Post-Secondary Education

1. Nearly all 2001 and 2002 graduates of the Extra Mile schools for whom we have data graduated from high school (94 percent), and entered some form of post-secondary education (89 percent). The Crossroads Foundation seems to have made extensive contributions to these results.
2. Nearly all students who went into some form of post-secondary education institution attended a college or university. A few attended a vocational school or went into the military.
3. Most graduates attended colleges and universities in the Pittsburgh area, although a number each year attend universities such as Notre Dame, Vassar, Maryland, Georgetown, Clark, Howard, and Bucknell.

D. Contributions of Extra Mile Schools to Later Academic Success of Graduates

1. Graduates identified the following aspects of their Extra Mile School and related experiences as very important to their later academic success.
 - a. Academic curriculum
 - b. Help and support of the teachers
 - c. Being treated with respect and caring by the teachers and principals
 - d. Learning to speak and communicate effectively
 - e. Learning to complete required assignments on time
 - f. Help and support of family members
 - g. Relationship with the Crossroads Foundation
2. Current 7th and 8th grade students identified the following as very important to their academic success.
 - a. Parent or guardian expects me to study and do well
 - b. Teachers support and help me to learn
 - c. Parent or guardian helps me to do well in school
 - d. Teachers respect me and expect me to learn
 - e. Instructional materials are interesting and informative
 - f. Classroom is organized for learning

3. Students indicated one of the most important reasons for their academic success in these schools and after graduation was the help and support of teachers in the schools. Students and graduates talked about the characteristics of outstanding teachers. First, was the teacher's concern for each child as a person, and being committed to the student learning the material that was being studied. These teachers made the class and learning fun, interesting, and exciting. They respected the students and were available to work with students at times other than class time, (e.g. lunch or before or after school).

Conclusions:

The following conclusions are based on this evaluation and on the prior evaluations that we have conducted. The conclusions summarize information collected in the 2006-07 academic year we collected test data, made observations, and talked with various groups; they represent a longitudinal look at the school for the years 2001 through 2006.

1. Nearly all teachers are certified and many have masters or advanced certification.
2. The quality of education in Extra Mile schools represent "best practices," as identified by research and theory, and is greatly improved from previous evaluations.
3. Achievement in all subject areas has shown improvement from 2001 to 2006 at all grade levels, indicating both increased knowledge and skills of students and improved instruction.
4. Overall, student achievement at the 8th grade is at or above the norm in all subjects, especially for students who started in kindergarten through 3rd grade. This is much higher than in previous evaluations.
5. Nearly all EMEF school graduates for who data could be collected have gone on to graduate from high school and have entered some form of post-secondary education. The Crossroad Foundation appears to play an important role in this as all students they support have graduated from high school and then entered a college or university.
6. Nearly all Extra Mile graduates who enter post-secondary education attend college or universities, most of which are in the Pittsburgh area. The main reasons they give for attending these schools is their ability to pay the costs (scholarships have a major effect), its location, and the quality of its education program. A small number of students each year attend major schools in other parts of the U.S.A.

7. Most graduates indicate that the education they receive in the Extra Mile Schools was very important to their later academic success. The three most important factors identified by the students were: a) consistently giving students the message that they can be whatever they want to be as long as they do the necessary work; b) parents' expectations and on-going commitment to students; academic success; and c) the help and support of the teachers in the Extra Mile Schools and their commitment to each being successful academically.

8. The characteristics of the teachers who made a difference in the lives were: teacher's concern for each child as a person; their commitment to students learning the material that was being taught; being available to students; and making school and learning fun, interesting, exciting and meaningful. In sum, teachers exhibited caring and both personal respect for the students and the religious values that are an integral part of the Extra Mile Schools.

Acknowledgements

- ❖ *Many thanks to the teachers, students, parents and administration at the Extra Mile Schools – we appreciate their warm, enthusiastic responses to our visits, and their willingness to talk with us about their experiences.*

- ❖ *Many thanks to Mary Marciano for her work in organizing and typing this report.*