



Capitol Comments: Accreditation and Accountability in Texas Catholic Schools

By Margaret McGettrick, Director of Education, Texas Catholic Conference

For the last two legislative sessions it has been my privilege to testify before the Senate and House Committees on issues pertinent to Texas children. Many of the issues fall under our Education policy area and include school choice, the expansion of pre-kindergarten and school breakfast programs.

With issues such as school choice, it has been an uphill struggle to convince legislators that many of the private schools in Texas indeed are accountable for their programs through their membership in the Texas Private School Accreditation Commission (TEPSAC). The problem often arises out of being linked with other private schools that do not have any relationship with TEPSAC or the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

For many years, the State of Texas accredited private schools as well as public schools. Limited resources, however, forced the TEA to stop performing this service for private schools. The Texas Association of Non-Public Schools (TANS), wishing to maintain the benefits of state accreditation, sought an agreement with the State Commissioner of Education to form a private accreditation commission. This commission, known as the Texas Private School Accreditation Commission or TEPSAC, began operating in 1986.

TEPSAC is a confederation of accrediting agencies whose primary purpose is to maintain standards of accreditation among its membership. These standards of accreditation are comparable to TEA standards and preserve the integrity of the member organizations and the schools they accredit. These standards include, but are not limited to, the following: compliance with applicable state and federal statutes; effective administration and governance; consideration of the school's goals and objectives; the teaching of a balanced curriculum; implementation of personnel practices which ensure hiring qualified instructional leaders with college degrees; student achievement; indicator based quality of learning as well as effective long range strategic planning.

The relationship of TEPSAC with the Commissioner of Education allows for the following activities related to accredited non-public schools: transferability of student credits earned in accredited non-public schools to Texas public schools; recognition of teacher service in accredited non-public schools for salary increment purposes in Texas public schools; TEPSAC meetings are held biannually with a TEA liaison to ensure ongoing integrity and quality of the process.

A link to the listing of all accredited elementary and secondary non-public schools can be found in the Texas School Directory: (<http://askted.tea.state.tx.us>)

Currently the Texas Catholic Conference Education Department represents the largest number of schools in the TEPSAC Commission. As the current chairperson of TEPSAC I can attest to the quality of its member organizations and how we strive, like our public school counterparts, to provide the best possible education for our students.

The Texas Catholic Conference also works with other state agencies such as the Board of Higher Education and the Department of Family and Protective Services. Our reputation is solid and our position on issues is held in high regard by those who work with us, not only because of our standards, but because of the good work done in our Catholic schools throughout Texas.

As we prepare to celebrate Catholic Schools Week at the end of January let us pray and give thanks for parents, teachers, administrators and all who support Catholic education.