

February 18, 2011

Catholic Central and West Catholic High Schools' Current and Prospective Parents:

I am writing today on behalf of the members of the Board of Directors of the Catholic Secondary Schools to provide some historical perspective and facts underlying our newly implemented high school admissions policy.

Research shows that students with academic gaps as they enter high school are likely to fall further behind in an academically challenging environment where few remedial resources are available to assist them. Although Catholic Central and West Catholic have modest resources to assist with reading deficiencies, our high schools historically have not had programs or the necessary staff in place to adequately assist academically challenged students or those with significant learning differences.

In an effort to address these practical realities in a timely and forthright manner, the Board and administration agreed on a two-pronged approach to better serve all prospective families in the future:

1. The consistent use of minimum admissions standards to ensure all incoming freshman are adequately prepared for high school work.
2. Feasibility exploration and development of remediation programs in areas where the most need is present.

Believing it to be in the best interest of our schools and community, the Board adopted admissions standards in June 2008 that are slated for full implementation for students seeking enrollment in our high schools in the fall of 2011. Modeled after best-practice admissions criteria used by Catholic high schools throughout Michigan and nationally, these standards take into account standardized test indicators for academic potential, what we expect of incoming students in the areas of behavior and discipline and what we can realistically provide today in the way of academic support for students. You may read the admissions policy on our website [here](#).

Additionally, the Board and administration are in the early stages of conducting a needs analysis with regard to special education and remediation programs for our high schools.

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For the past five years, our high schools have required incoming students to take the High School Placement Test (HSPT). During its 50-year history, the HSPT has been administered by high schools throughout the country to measure skills deemed most critical to a new high school student. The HSPT is a skills-based test much like the ACT in that it requires students to think in a thorough, quick and strategic manner while insisting upon accuracy and the consistent use of logic and wisdom. It judges writing, verbal and mathematical ability which are so vital to a student's success at the high school level and beyond.

The HSPT scores submitted for this fall's incoming freshman class were assigned one of three status designations: unconditionally accepted, conditionally accepted and deferred. **As I write to you today, no student has been denied admission to our high schools.**

Unconditional acceptance. Students filing applications accompanied by HSPT scores above the 30th percentile were accepted unconditionally without further review.

Files of applicants with HSPT scores below the 30th percentile, but above the 20th percentile were subject to further review by the Principal, Associate Principals, Director of Guidance and the department heads of our two high schools' English, Math and Science departments. Additional factors were considered before making final determinations, including:

- Grades in core curriculum classes at the middle school level.
- Standardized test scores submitted by partner schools.
- Resources available at the high school level to assist with remediation and special education/learning difference needs.

Those with HSPT scores in this range who had proven consistency in other areas of academic achievement also were accepted unconditionally. **I am happy to report that 85% of those applying to our high schools were unconditionally accepted.**

Conditional acceptance. Students with scores below the 20th percentile were either conditionally accepted or deferred based upon the strength and consistency of their academic record in middle school and on other standardized test scores submitted by partner schools.

Those conditionally accepted (about 12% of our applicants) must successfully complete a three-week summer school program led by our staff and designed to reinforce essential reading and/or math skills necessary for achievement at the high school level. They also will be required to limit their freshman course load to six classes to ensure focused effort on core classes during the first year.

Deferred acceptance. Students with deferred acceptance based upon their academic record (about 3% of our applicants) have been offered an opportunity to retake the HSPT. They also must successfully complete the summer school program described above. Their applications will again be reviewed and final decisions made after these requirements have been met.

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The Board is singularly motivated to accurately assess the abilities of incoming students and to provide families with an objective determination that will best serve each child's educational needs. As expressed in our Vision Statement, it is our desire that all children can be served within the walls of our two great high schools – Catholic Central and West Catholic – and we will continue to strive to broaden the spectrum of services we can provide to our students.

However, in the interim, we must be good stewards of our financial resources through the fair and accurate assessment of what we have to offer in the way of assistance and accommodation to those students functioning below grade level. Further, we are obliged to provide professional, honest and compassionate feedback about your child's academic standing and our ability to serve any special needs he/she may have.

As always, please continue to pray for those involved in leading our schools, and in particular, pray for those individuals who may have hoped for a different outcome from the admissions process. It is our sincerest wish that these actions are understood to be as they are intended – the utmost expression of our desire to help *all* students reach their full potential.

If you have any questions or concerns you would like to address to the Board, please submit them to our on-line mail box at www.surveymonkey.com/s/5TDFRJJ.

Sincerely,

Mark R. Scott
Chairman
Grand Rapids Catholic Secondary Schools Board