Research exercise: Research on Private p - 12 Schools in the United States

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What are the contributing factors to the decline in enrollment in Catholic Schools?

- Educators in religious orders make up only 3.2% of teachers in Catholic schools. More lay teachers cause higher tuition due to higher pay. Fewer people of religious orders creates a diffusion of religious identity which is a turn off to many parents toward Catholic schools.
- More than 1,600 Catholic schools, mostly in urban neighborhoods, have closed during the last two decades.
- Dioceses struggle to support demands for Catholic schools in suburbs, due to suburbanization, as well as with keeping their urban schools open.
- Some families are turning toward other religions, and therefore schools, that are not based in Catholicism.
- Tuition rates are a struggle for many families to pay.

What are the advantages of private school education?

- Smaller class sizes create more individual attention and higher test scores.
- Private schools have fewer constraints and more freedom than public schools because they are not relying on the state for money.
- Private schools have smaller achievement gaps because they are not required by law to accept any student like public schools.
- Teachers in private schools are less affected by student misbehavior.
- Private schools are admired for the high standards they set.
- The high expectations and academic rigor help account for above-average levels of student success, including higher college-going rates.

What key factors contribute to the success of Catholic elementary and secondary schools?

Leadership:
Changing demographics surrounding Catholic schools demand effective responses from leadership. This is carried out on three levels: at the school itself, on the school board, and at the national level.

Academic Excellence:
Effective Catholic schools are known for their strong academics in order to capitalize on this major selling point, Catholic schools must come up with ways to make this resource available to students, regardless of demographics. Further, demographics cannot be an excuse for lowered standards.

Identity:
Commitment to the message of the Gospel plays one of the biggest roles in Catholic school efficacy. This is manifested through adherence to doctrine, dedication to unity, and commitment to social justice.

In conclusion...
Despite the overall decline in private school enrollment, some schools are finding creative means to achieve success, making the demonstrated benefits of a private education available to their surrounding communities.