According to my understanding of the IRB Guidelines, this application qualifies for the following review:

Exempt ______  Expedited ______  Full Review __X__

(16 copies enclosed)  (16 copies enclosed)  (16 copies enclosed)

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3. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT: Diocese of Fall River

4. POSITION OR JOB TITLE: Superintendent of Schools
   WORK PHONE: 508-678-2828

5. TITLE OF STUDY: The Relationship Between Parental Involvement, Parental Religious Background, Parental Knowledge of the Catholic Faith and Student Religion Academic Achievement in the Diocese of Fall River.

6. Study is: (a) Thesis ____ (b) Dissertation __X__ (c) Class Project __ (d) Other ______

7. Name of advisor, thesis or dissertation, class professor: Dr. Elaine Walker
   Dept: Education and Human Services  Phone: 973-275-2307

8. Anticipated starting and completion dates:  June 2004 to December 2004

9. What is the purpose of the study? Research suggests that there is a positive relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. This study will include parental religious background and parental knowledge of the Catholic faith and how these elements affect the religious academic achievement of their children.
Many Catholic schools and parishes are faced with the reality that many parents place their children in Catholic schools and religious education programs without any commitment on their part to practice their own faith. If the main purpose of Catholic schools and religious education programs is to teach the Catholic faith, then this goal may be best accomplished with increased parental involvement.

Therefore, this study could lead to investigating ways to include Catholic school parents in the religious training of their children. New programs in adult education could be implemented from the results of this study. Since this issue is a nationwide issue, the study could be used by dioceses throughout the country.

Although there is major research indicating that increased parental involvement in religious activities positively affects the religious involvement of their children, there is little research which measures religious academic achievement of the child. Therefore, this study could result in a major contribution to Catholic education in Catholic schools.

10. What is the Hypothesis or Research Question? The hypothesis is that parental involvement, parental religious background, and parental knowledge of the Catholic faith will have a positive and measurable impact on student academic learning outcomes in student religion classes.

Specifically, this investigation will address the following questions:

1. To what extent does parental involvement influence the academic outcomes of students in religious education?

2. Is there an association between parental religious background and religious academic outcomes of their child?
3. Is there an association between the parents’ level of religiosity and the religious academic outcomes of their child?

4. Is there a difference in a child’s religious academic outcomes if the parent(s) are non-Catholic?

5. Is there an association between parental reasons for sending their child to a Catholic school and religious academic outcomes of their child?

11. Explain your qualifications for conducting the research. I have been in the field of education since 1966 beginning as a teacher and progressing through administrative positions to my present job as Superintendent of Schools. I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University and have completed coursework in research and statistics. I also completed research courses in my Master’s program. I feel qualified to conduct this research project.

12. Explain the rationale and significance of the study. The rationale for the study is to describe and analyze the effectiveness of school-based education programs. The study will investigate the effect of parental involvement on student achievement. The study will provide information to foster a working relationship between the school and parents in the religious education of the students. There has been a significant amount of research conducted concerning parental involvement and student achievement in particular subject areas such as Math. However, little research has been conducted for the specific subject of Catholic Religion.
The significance of the study is to augment research on knowledge based achievement in religious education and its relationship to parental involvement and religious knowledge. The results should influence a change in the coordination of religious education programs on a diocesan level. Parental involvement issues could be coordinated between school and parish programs. Further study could include adult religious education programs, which may well incorporate that ministry into an inclusive diocesan program. This study should be significant for dioceses throughout the country.

13. Describe the subjects: The subjects are 3rd, 5th and 7th grade students in fourteen city Catholic schools along with their parents or guardians. These cities are in the Diocese of Fall River.

   Ages of Subjects: 8-9, 10-11 and 12-13 + adults of all ages

   Number of subjects: There will be approximately 300 student test scores utilized with a corresponding 300 parental surveys being issued.

14. From where and how will potential subjects be identified? The subjects will be students enrolled in fourteen parish elementary schools in the Diocese of Fall River in Massachusetts. The subjects will be 3rd, 5th and 7th grade students and their parents or guardians. The fourteen schools are located in either Fall River or New Bedford which are similar communities in both economic and cultural demographics.

   How do you have access to this population? I have permission of the Bishop of the Diocese of Fall River to use the student test scores from the diocesan-wide testing program. The test scores from the fourteen Catholic schools in the cities of Fall River
and New Bedford will be used along with the surveys of the parents of those students (Appendixes A & B).

15. Do you have a supervisory and/or professional relationship with the subjects?
Yes  _X_  No __  If yes, please explain how this relationship will not compromise the voluntariness of the subjects’ participation in the study.  

I have a quasi/professional relationship with students and parents of the school population. Although I am Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Fall River, the relationship with the selected parish schools is limited to enforcing diocesan school policies. There are two types of schools in our diocesan system. There are diocesan schools and parish schools. In a diocesan school I am the supervisor and person in charge of all aspects of the school. I hire personnel and I am in charge of the budget and all other facets of the school. In a parish school the pastor of the parish is the supervisor and person in charge. He is responsible for the finances and personnel in his school. The relationship that I have is professional to the point that I oversee Diocesan school policy for the schools. There is also an appeal process to my office for parents whose child may be asked to leave the school for disciplinary reasons. However, the pastor and principal are in charge of the day by day operation of the school. Beyond monitoring diocesan policy we provide professional development and advice to all schools and we are a service organization for them. Therefore, for the schools I have chosen, I do not have a supervisory role and have limited professional contact with the students and parents that will be part of the research. This is one of the reasons for choosing all parish schools for the study and not diocesan schools.
16. Will data be collected from or about any of the following protected populations:

  ___ minorities (under 18 years of age; specify age) ages 8,9,10,11,12,13
  ___ prisoners
  ___ pregnant women
  ___ fetuses
  ___ cognitively impaired persons

For additional requirements regarding these categories of protected subjects, consult and follow the IRB Guidelines.

17. What are your criteria for subject selection? Selection of subjects must be equitable and, in the case of protected populations [see #13 above], should reflect their special needs. IRB Guidelines also require researchers to be sensitive to the use of educationally and economically disadvantaged persons as subjects. If you are excluding women or minorities from your subject pool, you must include a scientific justification for such exclusion. All students in grades 3, 5 and 7 will be tested as part of a diocesan-wide testing program with anonymous results publicly available. The test scores used for the research will only include the scores from the fourteen parish schools located in the cities of Fall River and New Bedford. All parents from the selected students will be used in the research if they return the survey.

18. How will subjects be recruited once they are identified (e.g., mail, phone, classroom presentation)? Include copies of recruitment letters, flyers, or advertisements, or copy of script of oral request at time of recruitment.

Since the students will be taking the Diocesan wide testing program in Religion class, these students will not be recruited. The students will take home the parent information
letters and surveys. The parents who complete the survey will seal them in a plain white envelope to be brought back to the teacher (Appendixes C & D).

19. Where will research be conducted? (Be specific). The testing will be done in the school classrooms. The parent surveys will be completed in the home.

20. Will deception be used? YES __ NO __X__ If YES, provide the rationale for the deception:

21. Please explain debriefing procedures, if any, to be used in this study: There is no anticipated need for debriefing in this research project.

22. What methodology will be taken to insure the anonymity of the subjects and the confidentiality of the data (i.e., coding system, how and where data will be stored and secured, how data will be analyzed, who will have access to data, what will happen to data after the study is completed)? Note that researchers should retain all data collected for at least 3 years after project completion.

Each of the students will be given a manila envelope to take home. The envelope will contain a letter to the parents with a brief explanation of the research project (Appendix C). The parent will also receive in the manila envelope the parent survey (Appendix D) and a plain white return envelope. The parents will be instructed to place their completed survey in the plain white envelope and seal the envelope. If the parent completes the survey, the child will return the envelope to the school. There will be no attempt to contact parents who do not send surveys back to the school. Therefore, there will be no need to have any names attached to the white envelopes assuring anonymity.

If the child returns the survey envelope, it will be collected by an independent researcher. The independent researcher will match the parent survey with the appropriate
student test score. The independent researcher will then remove the names of the parents
and students once they are correlated. The tests and surveys of the fourteen schools will
be intermixed in order to ensure anonymity before they are given to the primary
researcher, myself, for this dissertation.

The data will be stored and secured in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s home.
The data will be analyzed through statistical procedures and the data will only be
available to the researcher and a statistics mentor. The researcher will keep the stored
data in the locked file cabinet for at least three years.

23. Is a subject follow-up anticipated? YES ___ NO ____ If Yes, for what reason?

24. Describe the design and methodology IN DETAIL (what exactly will be done to the
subjects? What measures will be taken?)

Describe any equipment that will come in contact with the subject. Brand name and
model, as well as description of its function. If electrical equipment is connected directly
to the subjects, as with GSR and EFF measures, assurances concerning the safety of the
equipment (technician should certify that equipment was checked within the last month)
should be included.

ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEETS IF NECESSARY.

Include the necessary copies of any test instruments, questionnaires, etc.

DO NOT ATTACH COPIES OF SECTIONS OF GRANT PROPOSALS,

DISSERTATIONS OR CLASS PROJECTS TO ANSWER THIS ITEM.

This research document will be an association study using the knowledge-based test
measuring the curriculum guidelines established by the Diocese of Fall River for
religious studies. Variables examined will be determined by the parental responses to the questionnaire. An assessment will be administered to the students in all twenty-three k-8 elementary and two 5-8 middle schools in the Diocese. The assessment of the curriculum guidelines is a mandate from the Bishop of the Diocese of Fall River. Since the Bishop approved the curriculum guidelines, it is important for these documents to be implemented and assessed by the Diocesan Catholic School Department. This assessment instrument will measure the core curriculum guidelines taught to the students.

**Population and Sample**

Although all elementary students will be tested, there are fourteen specific parish k-8 Catholic elementary schools in the Fall River Diocese that have been selected for the study. The fourteen schools are situated in the cities of Fall River and New Bedford. These specific schools have been chosen because the cities in which they are located have populations that are similar in size and economic make-up. They also have similar cultural background and ethnic composition. All fourteen schools are also parish schools which have the same administrative structure. Parish schools differ from diocesan schools in administrative structure. Students in grades 3, 5 and 7 will be administered the test. The parents of these selected students will be surveyed.

**Data Sources**

The test has been developed by an educational testing consultant, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum for the Diocese of Fall River, several elementary school principals, a group of 3rd, 5th and 7th grade teachers from Catholic schools not included in the research, and two parish religious education coordinators. Except for the consultant, all members of the committee are familiar with and using the curriculum guidelines that
will be tested. A parent questionnaire has been developed by an educational consultant, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel for the Diocese of Fall River, a group of Catholic elementary principals and parents. Two parents who have children in Catholic schools have been added to the panel. The questionnaire will be evaluated for validity by the same expert panel evaluating the test.

**Data Collection**

The Bishop of the Diocese of Fall River has granted permission to utilize the test results of the selected schools’ students (Appendixes A). He has also granted permission to survey the parents of those students (Appendix B). The test scores of the selected students will be taken from the diocesan-wide testing results.

Since individual parent questionnaires must be evaluated in relation to the parent’s own child’s test results, these questionnaires will be sent home with the students. A letter of explanation from an independent researcher will accompany the questionnaire. This letter will explain the nature and reason for the study. These parents will also be informed of the Institutional Review Board policies and the confidentiality of their responses. Participation in the study will be voluntary and will not be held against the student if the family does not wish to participate. Since the questionnaires will be matched with the parent’s own child, the parent will have to sign the questionnaire. The letter from the researcher will assure the parents that once the questionnaires are matched with the student test scores, by an independent researcher, the names will be eliminated from both the test results and the questionnaires to ensure anonymity of the participants in the study. The parents will be asked to have their child return the survey to their
teacher in a sealed plain envelope. The independent researcher will collect the returned envelopes from the teacher. The data collected from the independent researcher will then be correlated into an anonymous format by the researcher and will then be utilized for the study. Also, since the selected schools are located in two cities that have significant Portuguese populations, the parent questionnaire will be issued in both English and Portuguese (Appendixes E & F). This will not be necessary at the testing level since any Portuguese-speaking students are bi-lingual.

**Reliability and Validity**

The test has been evaluated for validity by a panel of experts comprised of two Catholic School Superintendents from other Dioceses, two college professors of education, two practicing Catholic school principals, two directors of parish religious education programs and the Bishop of the Diocese. The test has also been pilot-tested for reliability. The population for the pre-test was selected from schools with multiple sections of grades 3-5-7. One section of each grade level was designated for the pilot-test with the remaining sections being used in the research project itself.

The questionnaire has been evaluated for validity by the same expert panel evaluating the test. The questionnaire has been pilot-tested for reliability with parents of the students from schools who will not be part of the research. SPSS was used to determine the reliability of the scales on the survey. The parent questionnaire utilized Epstein’s (1997)* six types of parent involvement in education as a framework.

In the construction of the parent survey a cross-reference table was used. The table was utilized to ensure that the survey not only utilized Epstein’s six types of parental involvement, but that the research variables would also be included. This allowed for a
minimum of each survey question to be significant in at least one of the types of involvement paired with at least two of the variables of the variables. The research variables used in the table were: 1. direct involvement of parents assisting students with assignments and homework; 2. the parents’ own involvement in religious activities; 3. the religious backgrounds of the parents; and the parental attitudes towards religious education.

There is at least one question in each of Epstein’s categories that applies to a specific variable. Each of the four variables have a minimum of six questions pertaining to that category with a high of thirteen questions. The questions in each of Epstein’s categories were numbered which correspond with the numbers included in the chart below.

Survey Items Mapped Against Epstein’s Six Aspects of Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Questions from these test segments below map to these aspects to the right)</th>
<th>Direct involvement of parents assisting students with assignments and homework</th>
<th>The parents’ own involvement in religious activities</th>
<th>The religious backgrounds of the parents</th>
<th>Parental attitudes towards religious education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,5</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1, 2, 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td></td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at Home</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1, 4</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1, 2, 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with community</td>
<td></td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

Descriptive research is appropriate for the study because the primary intent is to explain the nature of the relationships in the data and not to determine cause and effect.

Different statistical analytical methods will be utilized using SPSS software. Simple regression will be used on the first research question. The first question is: “To what extent does parental involvement influence the academic outcomes of students in religious education?” The second and third questions will use correlation studies. Question two asks: “Is there an association between parental religious background and religious academic outcomes of their child?” Question three asks: “Is there an association between the parents’ level of religiosity and the religious academic outcomes of their child?”

The fourth question will use independent t tests. Question four queries: “Is there a difference in a child’s religious academic outcomes if the parent(s) are non-Catholic?” The final question will utilize a one-way Anova analysis for the question: “Is there an association between parental reasons for sending their child to a Catholic school and religious outcomes of their child?”
