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FOCUS SECTION—Catholic Education Leadership: Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference at Loyola University Chicago

Developing and Sustaining Leaders for Catholic Schools: A Summary of the Conference Proceedings of the Second Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference

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On October 1-3, 2009, Loyola University Chicago's Center for Catholic School Effectiveness (CCSE) and School of Education hosted the second in a series of six planned Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conferences (CHEC) entitled, "Developing and Sustaining Leaders for Catholic Schools: How Can Catholic Higher Education Help?" This working conference was structured around four main presentations, each addressing an aspect of the conference theme. Upon the conclusion of each session, conference participants were invited to respond and explore the themes that were presented in each session. This paper provides a summary of the presentations and the discussions of the participants. Finally, the follow-up actions, resulting from the conference, are shared.

On October 1-3, 2009, Loyola University Chicago's Center for Catholic School Effectiveness (CCSE) and School of Education hosted the second in a series of six planned Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conferences (CHEC) entitled, "Developing and Sustaining Leaders for Catholic Schools: How Can Catholic Higher Education Help?" CHEC began as a group of nine Catholic colleges and universities that came together in an informal partnership in October 2007 to explore and develop collaborative initiatives to support Catholic elementary and secondary schools, setting a schedule of conferences sponsored by the initial group of institutions, including Alverno College, Boston College, the Catholic University of America, Fordham University, Loyola Marymount University, Loyola University Chicago, Marquette University, the University of Notre Dame, and the University of San Francisco.

Each CHEC conference has a different focus related to key issues relevant to the future of Catholic schools: immigrant Church, leadership, academic

excellence, Catholic identity, governance, and accessibility/affordability. The purpose of each of these conferences is to explore ideas and to offer concrete steps for Catholic institutions of higher education to collaborate in supporting Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States.

For the Loyola University Chicago (LUC) conference, a mix of stakeholders, including representatives from institutions of higher education involved in the support of Catholic schools, pre-kindergarten to secondary education practitioners, superintendents, leaders from religious congregations, and members of the philanthropic community were invited to address the central question of the conference: How can Catholic higher education assist in developing and supporting leaders for Catholic schools? In addressing this central question, participants of the conference were asked to consider a number of ancillary questions, including the following:

- Who are Catholic schools for in 21st-century United States?
- Who should lead Catholic schools?
- How can we close gaps that exist between leadership programs and on-the-ground knowledge/skills required to lead effective Catholic schools?
- What can research contribute to “telling the story” and improving practice?
- How can Catholic institutions of higher education collaborate and assist?

Overall, there were 72 conference attendees representing 19 states and the District of Columbia. Of these, 40 participants were from higher education representing 25 different institutions, 10 participants were superintendents or associate superintendents, 6 participants were representatives from religious congregations/networks, 9 participants were practitioners in pre-K-12 schools, 2 participants were sponsored funders, and 3 participants were from the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA).

The anticipated result of this conference was to identify explicit actions to foster collaboration among Catholic institutions of higher education, diocesan offices of education, the NCEA, pre-K-12 practitioners, networks and religious congregations, sponsors and funders, and bishops. Through these collaborations, new avenues of support can be discovered and fostered with the goal of assisting Catholic elementary and secondary schools.

Conference Process

This working conference was structured around four main presentations, each addressing an aspect of the conference theme. Upon the conclusion of each session, conference participants were invited to respond and explore the themes that were presented in each session. Each “table conversation” had

an essential question, an outcome, and a product that guided the work of each group. A “table facilitator,” who was selected prior to the beginning of the conference, facilitated the table conversations. These table facilitators were selected from various institutions of higher education. Prior to the opening of the conference, an orientation session was provided for the table facilitators to ensure clarity of the tasks and responsibilities. The role of the facilitator was created to ensure that all conference participants would have the chance to have their ideas and opinions shared at the table conversations. In order to capture the essence of the conversations, table facilitators were responsible for summarizing the responses and submitting them to the conference staff after the conclusion of the conference. Working from the detailed notes, the LUC team distilled the participants’ ideas into a series of proposed initiatives or areas of work, which are now posted on the CCSE (2010) website.

The following is a synopsis of each of the four main sessions and a summary of the table discussions (see Figure 1). Listed in the Follow-Up Actions section is the list of proposed initiatives or areas of work. As with any summary, this paper can only try to capture, in very broad strokes, the basic elements of the many rich and complex conversations that occurred during this conference.

Session 1: Framing the Conference

After a brief introduction about the CHEC group, Dr. Lorraine Ozar from the CCSE at the School of Education at LUC shared the conference objectives. They were as follows:

- Identify the most compelling problems/needs related to preparation and on-going support of leaders for pre-K-12 Catholic schools.
- Describe innovative initiatives and collaborative partnerships in which Catholic higher education can assist.
- Articulate critical research questions.
- Generate strategies for disseminating databases and establishing a network of scholars to deepen research on Catholic school leadership.
- Speak in a prophetic voice about roles, responsibilities, and needed paradigm shifts related to developing and sustaining Catholic elementary and secondary school leaders.
- Develop and sustain pre-K-12 leaders for Catholic schools.

In order to facilitate the conference process, Ozar offered a distinction between true collaboration and congenial harmony; congenial harmony is characterized by an informal sharing of ideas with little accountability for change

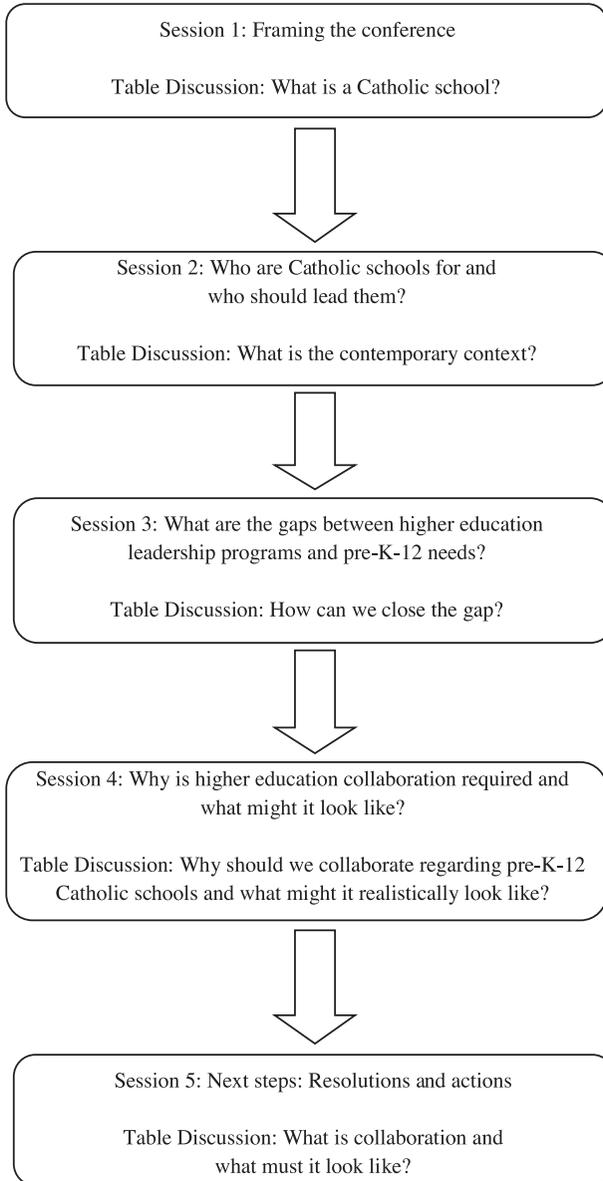


Figure 1. Conference sessions and table discussion topics.

and the goal is maintenance. A working definition of collaboration was shared as follows: “True collaboration is a systematic process in which we work together interdependently to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results.”

During table conversation, conference participants were invited to work in groups to develop a list of nonnegotiable characteristics of a Catholic school. From each group, a list of characteristics was elicited. As a group, the ideas that were shared among the various table discussions were distilled into one list:

- Academic excellence/academic standards
- Worship and sacramental life
- Principal is academic and spiritual leader
- Integration of faith and learning
- Curriculum infused with Gospel values
- Part of the universal and global Church
- Inclusive—open to all
- Accountability/verified results
- Catholic faith taught and lived (doctrine, sacrament, culture)
- Focus on whole person—cognitive, affective, spiritual
- Service to others—social justice
- Promote relationship with Jesus Christ within a community
- Motivated by incarnational worldview
- Recognized by bishop

Session 2: Who Are Catholic Schools For and Who Should Lead Them?

Dr. Patricia Weitzel-O’Neill, superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., presented some of the challenges that face Catholic schools today. In her remarks, she outlined the concern related to “mission confusion.” In the beginning of the American Catholic school, the mission seemed clear and there was a general consensus of the aims of Catholic education and what populations were served. Catholic schools served the immigrant poor, providing a Catholic education when public schools were hostile toward the Church (O’Toole, 2008; Walch, 1996). Today, however, there is less agreement as to the nature of “who” the American Catholic school serves. This ranges from schools in areas where a majority of students are Catholic to schools where families are choosing Catholic education for reasons other

than faith formation (McCloskey, 2010; O’Keefe et al., 2004), leading to a sense of a lack of focus in the mission of Catholic schools.

As a result of this mission confusion, Catholic institutions are in more conflict and competition as opposed to communion with each other. Weitzel-O’Neill offered that this creates a “system of schools” as opposed to a “school system,” creating three distinct “islands”—pre-K-8 schools, high schools, and Catholic colleges and universities—with little systemic collaboration between and among these groups. This lack of systemic collaboration impacts four areas: Catholic identity, finance, enrollment, and academic quality.

Implications for research were offered. These included examining the perceptions of various stakeholders, including pastors, school administrators, and families. The need for clarity of mission and the development of collaborative structures between the “three islands” were also offered.

In table discussion, participants responded to the question: What strikes us as really important to carry forward as we address the central question of the conference? In reviewing the discussions, there were three needs that emerged: clarity of mission, leadership, and the need for developing collaborative structures.

Clarity of mission. An issue raised by many participants was that Catholic schools have become market driven as opposed to mission driven. Steps must be taken to guarantee that all schools are mission driven and market sensitive. Weitzel-O’Neill suggested that many times Catholic schools are “trying to be all things to all people.” As a result, many of the participants articulated and agreed that there is confusion about the mission of the school. Several participants noted that there was an “identifiable ethos” and consensus on the mission that was present in schools run by orders and congregations that may not be present in some Catholic schools today. As a result of a lack of clear mission, there is a lack of public support of Catholic schools (i.e., fewer Catholics who send their children to Catholic schools). If the school is effective and evidences excellent leadership, people will send their children to Catholic schools. The formational system that was present in the congregation schools helped to reinforce this mission clarity. The current system of formation does not appear to accomplish this task. Participants also raised the concern about how well priests and bishops understand the critical value Catholic schools add to involvement in the activities of the parent and church. This can lead to confusion related to the mission of Catholic schools.

Leadership. Another need that was identified was the role of leadership development and how Catholic institutions of higher education (CIHE) can

support this. It was suggested that the definition of leadership must be broadened beyond the “one-size-fits-all” approach to developing leaders (i.e., focusing only on developing principals). Other leadership positions must be addressed through these programs (i.e., president, assistant principal, pastor, school board, teacher-leader, superintendent). It was suggested that CIHE could provide consistency in formation programs. There has to be a greater emphasis on perceiving Catholic school teaching and principalship as valid and valued career paths. CIHE can take a lead in this area and help to promote teaching in Catholic schools as a viable career option.

Developing collaborative structures. The heightened role of competition between Catholic schools and the lack of “communion” between these institutions was another theme that emerged from the table discussion. This competitive state, which sometimes exists between Catholic schools, can promote in-fighting between these institutions, especially around attracting potential students and resources. Instead, it was suggested by participants that these schools should seek collaborative relationships with one another. By establishing collaborative structures and partnerships, resources can be shared between schools.

Session 3: What Are the Gaps Between Higher Education Leadership Programs and Pre-K-12 Needs?

Session 3 consisted of a panel discussion, representing the voices of the various constituent groups and a presentation on Catholic higher education perspectives on the gaps between CIHE and pre-K-12 needs. Dr. Margaret Curran, principal of Annunciation Academy in Altamonte Springs, Florida; Dr. Stephen Phelps, president of Bishop O’Dowd High School in Oakland, California; and Sr. M. Paul McCaughey, superintendent of the Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic schools in Illinois participated as panel members. The first part of the conversation began with a discussion of the needs of potential pre-K-12 and university collaborations, from the pre-K-12 perspective. On-going professional development support for teaching staff of Catholic schools was identified as one way that CIHE could assist. This might include Catholic college and university support for newly hired teachers as they begin their careers in Catholic education. Another aspect that was suggested during this session was the creation of a national speakers bureau that Catholic elementary and secondary schools could access to provide such services. CIHE could provide these kinds of speakers. Additionally, debt forgiveness for student loans for teachers who agree to serve in Catholic schools was identified as another way

for CIHE to support pre-K-12 Catholic schools. Other ideas included Catholic college- and university-sponsored workshops. The promotion of support for pastors and principals could be an important role for CIHE. The creation of accreditation programs to promote the certification of Catholic school staff to become principals was another idea that was generated. An important role of CIHE is producing research aimed specifically at Catholic education. By having a strong research base to illuminate the current issues in Catholic education, this could provide a better basis for advocacy.

Finally, it was suggested that a collaboration between CIHE and pre-K-12 Catholic schools should extend beyond the support of schools of education. Due to the unique nature of Catholic schools, Catholic school administrators need other kinds of support that their public school counterparts may not. Tapping the expertise of the faculties of schools of business and other such resources to handle noninstructional issues could be critical. Greater assistance could be provided to Catholic schools by having business faculty consult on financial and marketing issues and staff from schools of architecture provide advice on dealing with aging buildings.

Continuing Session 3, Rev. Joseph M. O'Keefe, S.J., dean of the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, spoke about the collaboration between CIHE and pre-K-12 Catholic schools from the higher education perspective. Some of the barriers to this level of collaboration were identified. These include skepticism toward scholarship and a suspicion of higher education from elementary and secondary Catholic schools. It was suggested by O'Keefe that pre-K-12 Catholic schools may not regard scholarship as necessarily beneficial to their institutions. Rather, these research efforts may be more focused on meeting the needs of researchers as opposed to offering viable action steps for improvement of pre-K-12 Catholic schools. As a result of this perception of a lack of viable recommendations for their schools, those in pre-K-12 Catholic schools may be hesitant to establish these partnerships. O'Keefe also suggested that there is a lack of a collaborative approach between institutions of higher education, which inhibits working together. Currently, there are very few examples of collaborative relationships that exist among Catholic college and university faculties, specifically around supporting pre-K-12 Catholic schools. Rather, CIHE tend to work in isolation in their support efforts.

At table conversations, participants engaged in discussion on how to close the gap between higher education leadership programs and pre-K-12 school needs. There were numerous suggestions that *all* Catholic higher education institutions need to develop a response to the needs of the nation's Catholic schools. With more than 235 Catholic higher education institutions, it was

acknowledged that this might be hard to accomplish in a coordinated and focused way. The difficulties of collaboration were identified as an obstacle in closing this gap. Competition among institutions (between pre-K-12 schools and other pre-K-12 schools and CIHE and other CIHE) is an issue that must be addressed in order for Catholic institutions to cooperate. As one participant stated, “Many [schools] would rather close *alone* than risk collaborating with those around us!” Another need that was identified in order to promote collaboration between pre-K-12 schools and CIHE was the development of respectful relationships between the two groups. The implication of several groups was that ongoing work to establish and maintain respectful relationships was needed. There was an expressed need for CIHE to be engaged in the future planning for Catholic schools. Assistance through support and planning in financial, structural, and academic areas was identified as the area CIHE may have the most impact. It was identified as a priority for CIHE to listen to what pre-K-12 schools need as well as work to maintain relationships.

More immediate steps to assist pre-K-12 schools included sustaining leadership through supporting veteran principals; veteran principals should be supported by helping them to renew their commitments, through mentorship and reducing the isolation that is common among many principals. Sustaining leadership was also identified as paying attention to other types of leaders such as pastors, board members, and superintendents. Additional ideas included conducting research and providing assistance to diocesan offices and individual schools.

Session 4: Why Is Higher Education Collaboration Required and What Might It Look Like?

Referring to the nonnegotiables mentioned in Session 1, Rev. Michael J. Garanzini, S.J., president of LUC, acknowledged that those involved in Catholic schools know what good Catholic schools look like. Given the reality that the authority and control of Catholic schools will remain diffuse and decentralized, Garanzini argued that there needs to be a concrete and common definition of Catholic schools. There is a lack of a “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval” that will help to define quality. Garanzini offered the term “Essential Catholic School” (ECS) as such a seal of approval and outlined a set of guidelines for such an approach. An ECS is defined as an academically rigorous school that builds character, teaches authentic truths of the Catholic faith, and is sustained by a community of support. It is a school that can demonstrate the following:

- Parental involvement in age-appropriate ways in the education of the child
- Promotion of individual and communal responsibility and service
- A curriculum built on Gospel values that clearly explains the truths of the faith in age-appropriate ways

This designation of ECS would be based on a set of standards that are designed from the data. The gathering of this data would constitute the “agenda” for research investment for CIHE, as well as define the content for training and certification by these institutions.

This approach would take unprecedented cooperation from a number of sources. Creation and implementation of these standards would require the support of the superintendents of Catholic schools who would drive the development of the standards. Additionally, the bishops would need to sanction and enforce the program. Finally, CIHE would need to identify the research to build the training programs necessary for the promotion of this label.

This approach offers several benefits. It would standardize the definition of quality, which could attract potential financial supporters who may be more confident in their investments. A Catholic school would be able to assess where it stands against a set of real standards, identifying areas of school improvement. Ultimately, this would increase brand clarity and be useful in helping the public understand the nature of Catholic schools.

After the presentation, participants discussed why Catholic schools should collaborate and what it might realistically look like. There was agreement among most of the participants that collaboration between pre-K-12 Catholic schools and CIHE is greatly needed. An infrastructure to support collaborative approaches between these two groups is clearly necessary. Additional comments suggested that there should be better use of existing networks and organizations to make this occur. Two themes regarding collaboration between pre-K-12 Catholic schools and CIHE seemed to emerge in this section: the development of national standards for Catholic schools and the need for research about Catholic schools.

Development of national standards for Catholic schools. There was broad agreement among many of the participants to having a common set of standards and building accountability in meeting these standards for Catholic schools. Several table members noted that standards already exist across several dioceses, and that dioceses assess using those standards. Table members suggested that national standards would transcend the existing accreditation groups and help create a universally agreed-upon definition of a Catholic school. Although there would be uniformity in the definition of a Catholic school, this

would not imply uniformity in approach (i.e., schools can look very different but still meet the standards of being Essential Catholic Schools).

Some mentioned that the larger question or challenge is acceptance and embracing the idea of standards and the accountability and assessment associated with the standards. Table members stated that the standards should be clearly defined and understandable to the public. The standards would serve as the basis of accountability. Without this level of accountability, it was reported by table members that standards would remain only on paper, and not become a “living document.” The point was made that while definitions of quality exist within schools, dioceses, and regions, there is no quality control of the outcomes. There was concern among the participants that there is great variation in how Catholic schools are currently assessed with present guidelines for accountability. It was reported that schools can be described as meeting standards, regardless of whether they do, leading to a wide range in the level of quality. Therefore, it was strongly encouraged by table members that there be uniform assessment tied directly to these standards to lead to strong accountability.

Research. The second theme of collaboration between pre-K-12 Catholic schools and CIHE involved the ongoing need for directed research on Catholic schools. Specifically, the table members identified a need to study the graduates of Catholic college and university leadership programs. Suggested topics included the exploration of the influence of the program on graduates’ abilities to assume and fulfill their roles and responsibilities. Additionally, it was presented that there be an investigation of the formation or preparation programs for those potential school leaders without previous Catholic school experience. Table members asked how a national collaborative initiative could address the need to prepare principals (building level leaders) without previous Catholic school experience to be effective leaders in fulfilling the role of stewarding the Catholic identity dimension and spiritual leadership of the school.

Session 5: Next Steps: Resolutions and Actions

This working session focused on the development of next steps among the conference members. Participants were asked to suggest ways that collaboration could take place between CIHE and pre-K-12 Catholic schools.

A number of research questions were generated throughout the conference. In analyzing the types of questions generated, several themes emerged. First, more research is needed aimed at the specific nature of leaders of Catholic education. Research that would lead to building deeper understanding of the

level of seminarians' knowledge about Catholic schools and the training that they need in order to work with Catholic schools was identified as a great need. Additionally, more research leading to effective differentiation in the preparation of leaders is needed. A second theme in the research questions was directed investigation of "who Catholic schools serve." Such topics included looking at why parents have made the decision to access Catholic education, and conversely why parents leave Catholic education. Additionally, research on longitudinal experiences of students who attended Catholic schools would be beneficial. Finally, a third theme of research questions revolved around the use of data. Research examining the effectiveness of Catholic schools, including an examination of student learning outcomes, would add greatly to the field.

Follow-up Actions

Upon completion of the conference, table facilitators turned their notes and products over to the LUC conference staff. Review of these group processing products from the conference and detailed notes provided by each of the nine table facilitators was completed by the LUC conference staff. A synthesis of these materials suggested that there were five proposed initiatives or areas of work that emerged:

1. Creation of standards for Essential Catholic Schools (ECS)
2. Redesign and expansion of higher education leadership programs to meet the needs of the contemporary context
3. Design and implementation of a "Resource Cloud" (open access web platform) to facilitate the exchange of information, data, research, and materials
4. Creation of a national agenda for expanding and disseminating research on Catholic education
5. Creation of a national think tank on Catholic education

These themes are further developed in the conference report (CCSE, 2010). This document offers an outline of what these initiatives might encompass, who should be involved, and suggested next steps. Included in this list of proposed actions is a call for participants to become involved in working in each of these areas.

Conclusion

This CHEC conference was the second of a series of conferences that convened and explored how leadership for Catholic schools can be developed and sustained. In addition to the follow-up actions of this conference, there are four remaining conferences, each focusing on a specific area related to supporting Catholic education:

- Academic excellence (sponsored by Boston College and Fordham University)
- Catholic identity (sponsored by the Catholic University of America)
- Governance (sponsored by Marquette University and Alverno College)
- Accessibility/Affordability (sponsored by the University of Notre Dame)

It was the original intent of the CHEC steering group that these conferences should be more than great conversations. Out of these conversations, collaborative actions and initiatives should be identified and action plans generated, with the ultimate goal of increasing support for pre-K-12 Catholic schools.

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