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Higher Education in Support of Effective Governance Structures in P-12 Catholic Schools: 2012 Catholic Higher Education Consortium Conference

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In early October 2012, a group of over 160 committed and passionate Catholic educators and stakeholders convened at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to discuss Catholic school K-12 governance. The summit gathered (arch)diocesan superintendents, Catholic school principals and presidents, higher education faculty with expertise in Catholic education, as well as clergy from across the country to discuss the question, “How can institutions of higher education support dynamic and effective governance structures in P-12 Catholic schools?” This meeting was the latest in a series of gatherings held at Catholic colleges and universities as part of the Catholic Higher Education Consortium (CHEC), an initiative established during a 2007 summit convened at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (See Table 1)

The purpose of these CHEC meetings is to find ways to support Catholic education by strengthening the relationships and collaboration between P-12 schools and higher education. In this introductory essay we will: (a) discuss the broad context of how these CHEC meetings contribute to the field of Catholic Education; (b) provide an overview of the presentations included in this focus section that emerged from the 2012 CHEC conference; and (c) discuss potential implications from the conference for the future of Catholic school governance.

CHEC Summits and the Field of Catholic Education

At the inaugural CHEC Summit in 2007, Shulman (2008) set the stage by describing fields of scholarship in general: “A field engages in knowledge building, institution building, and the education of individuals. It is organized into communities of scholarship and practice. It has developed ways of

Table 1

Catholic Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) Conference Themes and Host Universities

Year	Conference Theme	Host Institutions
2007	Inaugural CHEC Summit	Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
2008	Catholic Schools and the Immigrant Church: Lessons from the Past and a Bridge to the Future	Loyola Marymount University and the University of San Francisco
2009	Developing and Sustaining Leaders for Catholic Schools: How Can Catholic Higher Education Help?	Loyola University Chicago
2010	Catholic Schools as Schools of Academic Excellence: How Can Catholic Higher Education Help?	Boston College and Fordham University
2011	Conference on the Catholic Identity of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools	The Catholic University of America and St. John's University
2012	How Can Institutions of Higher Education Support Dynamic Governance Structures in P-12 Catholic Schools	Marquette University
2013	Financing Catholic Schools in the Current Environment	University of Notre Dame

organizing knowledge, criticizing knowledge claims and ‘growing’ its knowledge base” (p. 12). Shulman proceeded to assert that Catholic education must “become a robust field of scholarship—including scholarship of teaching and learning, of discovery and invention, of integration, connectedness, and meaning, and of application and translations” (p. 13).

Lapsley (2008) built on Shulman’s challenge, fleshing out the process of cultivating this field:

A field of study requires more than an animating idea. Hard questions, strong theory, a motivating purpose, these are the first steps... [Next,] the field of Catholic education requires professional structures to provide opportunities for researchers to share their work, to collaborate and develop a communal sense of shared mission and common cause. (p. 45)

Through an iterative process, the field of Catholic education, Lapsley argued, would gain legitimacy with both internal and external audiences.

The series of ensuing CHEC conferences have built upon this initial vision. (See Table 1). The themes of these meetings reflect efforts to balance the universal and the parochial, addressing broad educational issues (e.g., immigrant students, leadership development, academic excellence, and school mission and vision) within the narrower context of Catholic schools. The conferences provided boundary-spanning space for practitioners and academics from institutes of higher education to engage in meaningful dialogue, fostering much-needed opportunities for collaboration (Whipp & Scanlan, 2009).

Perhaps the most tangible and valuable early fruit of such collaboration is the emergence of the [Catholic School Standards Project](#), which grew out of the 2009 conference on developing and sustaining leaders for Catholic schools. The publication of the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) is a major achievement from this effort. Other outcomes, although not directly evolving out of particular conferences, have nevertheless been influenced by ideas that germinated during the meetings. For instance, the recent launching of a collaborative network of bilingual Catholic elementary schools—the Two Way Immersion Network of Catholic Education, or TWIN-CS (Innovation Institute, 2012)—can be traced from the 2008 summit on the immigrant Church and through the 2010 summit on academic excellence. Finally, special focus sections of *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* published over the last few years have provided a means of disseminating selected proceedings from the conferences.

Overview of the 2012 CHEC Conference

The 2012 CHEC conference at Marquette University focused on governance. In the Catholic Church, governance “can be understood as a ministry...that serves the people of God by helping them maintain order to promote and protect the rights and obligations needed to carry out the mission Jesus gave to his church” (Haney, O'Brien, & Sheehan, 2009, p. 3). The conference had three goals related to this ministry:

1. Discuss new research on Catholic school governance and leadership.
2. Present different models of effective governance and how boards can be improved to make schools more effective.

3. Discuss the specific ways to enhance the relationship between higher education and K-12 education and to improve the leadership of Catholic schools

This focus section includes two full length articles and various practitioner essays that emerged from the 2012 conference. First, Erik Goldschmidt and Mary Walsh, from Boston College, present their findings from a survey of Catholic school governance models. That essay is followed by an overview of the partnership and governance approach of the University of Notre Dame ACE Academies by Christian Dallavis and Andrea Cisneros of Notre Dame.

The practitioner essays are vignettes that capture the spirit of this critical discussion of best practices in school university partnerships and Catholic school governance. This section begins with an essay by Loraine Ozar of Loyola University Chicago and Patricia Weitzel-O'Neill of Boston College that highlights the new National Standards on governance and leadership, and how all other standards build off of this foundation of intentional leadership. Next, "Supporting Catholic Education through Effective School/University Partnerships: Two Models from the 2012 Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference" includes an essay and excerpts from a panel discussion on the Greater Milwaukee Catholic Education Consortium and a description of the partnership between Loyola Marymount University and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to improve Catholic education in the city. The article "School Boards and Effective Catholic School Governance: Selected Presentations from the 2012 Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference" includes three presentations from the conference on new approaches to strengthening the role of the school board in Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey, the Diocese of Sioux City, Iowa, and the Diocese of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

A Look to the Future

Reflecting on the 2012 CHEC conference on Catholic school governance, several implications arise for the broader field of Catholic education. One implication is that creative governance structures can support the systems of distributed leadership needed to address the current educational challenges facing Catholic schools. These educational challenges—revitalizing urban school systems, raising standards for schools, harnessing information technologies to effectively deliver instruction—are best tackled collectively.

Creative governance structures can bring together diverse voices, including the school principal, teacher leaders, parents, parishioners, and community members, with the vision and authority needed to address these challenges.

A second implication is that Catholic schools need strong governance and leadership in order to contribute to promising new initiatives across educational sectors. One such example that emerged at the 2012 summit is the Philadelphia School Partnership (www.philaschoolpartnership.org). This project measures progress in reducing gaps in educational achievement across the range of school types—from traditional public to charter to private. This growth implies that Catholic schools begin to see themselves—and be seen by others—as not only providing strong educational environments to their own students, but also as integral partners to other schools within a broader educational marketplace.

A third implication connects the experiences of Catholic schools in particular to board-governed schools in general. The number of board-governed schools, particularly in the charter school sector, has grown markedly in recent decades. The long, rich history of experimenting with various structures of governance in Catholic schools provides a heretofore under-utilized source of research on effective board-governed schooling. Building a more robust corpus of scholarship exploring effective governance in Catholic schools, thus, can contribute beyond the field of Catholic education to board-governed schools across sectors.

Finally, as Goldschmit and Walsh have pointed out, various Catholic schools are spawning a wide range of innovative governance models, and effective governance is a necessary but insufficient component of financial stability. This finding suggests that the research on Catholic school governance and leadership that emerged from the 2012 conference must inform discussions at the forthcoming CHEC conference on fiscal sustainability, to be held at the University of Notre Dame in the Fall of 2013.

In conclusion, the following articles are best appreciated for their contribution to the growth of the field of Catholic education. Deep, nuanced understandings of effective governance will assist practitioners and scholars alike in cultivating this field.

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