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# School Boards and Effective Catholic School Governance: Selected Presentations from the 2012 Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference

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## School Boards and Effective Catholic School Governance: Selected Presentations from the 2012 Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference

*The following article contains essays derived from presentations delivered to the Catholic Higher Education Collaborative (CHEC) Conference held at Marquette University in October 2012. The three essays included in this collection focus on new approaches to school board development and functioning that are changing Catholic school governance. The first essay, "Sustaining Catholic Schools: Ten Essentials for Startup Boards," is written by Gregory J. Geruson and Christine L. Healey of the Healey Education Foundation. The authors discuss the work of the Foundation to improve the effectiveness of Catholic school boards through the establishment of boards of limited jurisdiction with actual authority over school policy, finances, and governance. The essay includes 10 essential "must haves" for boards based on the Foundation's experiences working with nearly 60 Catholic schools in the Northeastern the United States.*

*Next, Anthony Sabatino of Loyola Marymount University, Dan Ryan of the Diocese of Sioux City, Iowa, and Regina Haney of the National Catholic Educational Association discuss the establishment of committee-driven boards in their essay, "Strategic Restructuring of School Boards in the Diocese of Sioux City: A Model for Developing a Community of Committee-Driven Catholic School Boards." This essay discusses how the diocese utilized regional teams, representing principals, administrators, and individual school board members, to develop a long-term strategic plan for the diocese through a committee-based, data-driven process. According to the authors, the process has improved how individual school boards use data, address issues and create long term plans for their individual schools.*

*Finally, David Faber, Superintendent of Schools in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, Michigan, discusses "virtual consolidation through satellite schools"—a new approach the Diocese has implemented with regard to school governance. Faber reviews the consolidation of three schools, which maintained the three school sites under the management of one administrator and shared services. An integral part of this change was moving toward more personalized educational options for students, including one-to-one computing and blended learning. Central to this transition was disbanding the individual consultative boards for each of the schools and creating a new board of limited jurisdiction to govern the three satel-*

*lite schools. To ensure that local concerns are addressed, the new board structure includes three committees, representing the interests of each of the individual sites. These changes have led to increased enrollment at the three sites and the reduction of total expenses by nearly 20%.*

*These three essays reinforce the role that school boards play in the effective management and governance of Catholic schools. Carefully considering the needs of individual schools—and ensuring that boards have the right mix of skills and competencies to address those needs—is imperative for the long-term sustainability of Catholic K-12 schools.*

## Sustaining Catholic Schools: Ten Essentials for Startup Boards

Gregory J. Geruson and Christine L. Healey  
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*Boards play a pivotal role in a Catholic elementary or high school's ability to take charge of its own future. Of the more than 55 schools served by the Healey Education Foundation's Catholic School Development Program since 2004, those that have achieved measurable results through boards of limited jurisdiction have had in common some essential attitudes and approaches. The overarching goal is the long-term sustainability of their schools. This essay outlines 10 essential practices for startup boards—including mission focus, serving as doers and donors, making data-informed decisions, thinking strategically, and acting with urgency—that can be especially helpful to new boards in schools ready to change.*

The need for local, regional, and diocesan boards has become a common theme in conversations about new and promising models of Catholic school governance. A new board can mark a critical crossroads for a school ready to take ownership of its own future, yet its formation alone offers no guarantee that the path toward sustainability is certain. Much of the *right* work remains to be done.

Of the more than 55 schools served by the Healey Education Foundation's Catholic School Development Program (CSDP) since 2004, nearly all have implemented new boards of limited jurisdiction as an essential part of a broader strategy employing other best practices: strong leadership, sound fundraising, strategic enrollment marketing, and a mission-driven, data-informed culture. Unlike advisory boards that have no official authority but function to make recommendations, advise on policy, and foster participation and engagement, boards of limited jurisdiction have official authority over school governance. In our experience, boards of limited jurisdiction that are accountable for the governance and financial health of schools foster greater engagement and long-term sustainability. These boards offer a stark contrast to the days when members listened and discussed but stopped short of implementing real change.

CSDP has guided schools through the transformative process of establishing and maintaining boards that have official authority and that entrust the laity with decision making, policy making, and financial accountability. What these schools have learned and practiced can be helpful to others just beginning. In this essay, we outline 10 essential practices for startup boards drawn from our experiences working with schools. Our recommendations fall into three categories: purpose, people, and execution. Together, these recommendations provide a comprehensive guide to creating and maintaining a successful board and fostering effective relationships between the board and the rest of the school community.

A successful startup makes it possible from the outset for the board to act in the best interest of the school. With the right goals, strategies, and tactics, an empowered board at any stage of its development is equipped to do today's job well while anticipating tomorrow's needs.

### The Purpose

The first two essential practices highlighted in this article relate to understanding the purpose of the board and its role in supporting the mission of the school. The role of a board of limited jurisdiction can be enhanced through a clear focus on sustainability, a mindset open to innovation, and a commitment to mission-driven leadership and decision making.

#### Essential Practice #1: Be Change Agents for Sustainability

In an environment in which Catholic schools continue to close at an alarming rate—due in part to an obsolete business model—the board is entrusted with establishing clear priorities around the overarching goal of sustainability. The leadership team creating the board understands that the school's ability to thrive long-term starts with this goal and requires an accompanying disposition: the willingness to change.

The old ways of governance no longer work. Successful boards are open to new and expansive ways of achieving the goal of sustainability in order to continue serving children. Boards initiated without this focus and open mindset are operating at a disadvantage and can become easily sidetracked. Too often, startup boards get caught up in the details of certain special issues (e.g., changing the uniform or improving the athletic policy), instead of tack-

ling pressing issues directly related to sustainability, such as managing the budget, improving marketing, and ensuring strong leadership.

### **Essential Practice #2: Embrace the School's Mission**

A mission-driven board stays on course. Each school's identity and competitive advantage begin with its mission. Some schools have an incomplete, wordy, or confusing mission statement that exists somewhere in writing, possibly even hanging in a frame, but is seldom consulted or shared. Ideally, the school's mission is owned by members of the school community (parents, students, faculty, alumni, parishioners, principals, and pastors) who have established responses to the following questions:

- Who are we?
- What do we do?
- Who do we aspire to be?
- What makes us unique?

In the best of circumstances, a school has a mission in place before the board is formed so that the member selection process can be informed by the mission. If not, the board must quickly work with the school leadership to establish a clear and compelling mission around which the school can rally. Decisions for the school are then made in the context of advancing the mission.

In a CSDP website post entitled "Principals Discuss Today's Requirements," Sr. Jerilyn Einstein, FMIJ, principal of Guardian Angels Regional School, Gibbstown and Paulsboro, N.J., has explained:

Always return to the school's mission. The pedagogy of our foundress, Barbara Micarelli, in the Catholic Franciscan tradition, centers on love, concern, respect, and hospitality. When parents call, when they and their children walk in the door, they can hear, see, and experience that. We attempt to live those values consistently through a family atmosphere and respectful dialogue. ("Principals Discuss," 2012, para. 5)

## The People

Essential practices three through six are related to the constitution of the board. Choosing the right board members is a delicate balance requiring consideration of the school's needs and the prospective members' strengths, weaknesses, and interests. Once in place, supporting relationships between the board and school leadership is important to achieving successful collaborative work.

### Essential Practice # 3: Select Members Based on the School's Needs

Selecting members has especially far-reaching consequences when starting a new board because *every* seat is open. A commonly used tool is a board composition matrix, which lists skills, competencies, and demographic categories that should be filled by potential members. We believe that this tool is best applied in a broader context. In the article "Ditch Your Board Composition Matrix," Masaoka (2012) offered an alternative for the nonprofit board: define the top three goals for the board by identifying the institution's most pressing needs. Selecting board members then becomes a matter of inviting people with the skills, knowledge, and resources to help achieve those goals. By shifting focus from who people *are* to what the school needs them to *do*, schools may achieve the following:

- Expand the "field of sight" in recruiting for the board. As Masaoka has written, "Rather than just looking for someone in marketing, we [school leaders] think more widely and include bloggers, writers, community organizers."
- Select members based on skills, rather than background or demographics. According to Masaoka, this criteria can prevent "recruiting someone with the right demographics or professional background or financial means but who can't or won't do what we [school leaders] have mistakenly assumed they could or would..."
- Direct attention and resources to the immediate needs of the organization. (Masaoka, 2012, para. 15)

This approach can help schools avoid two other potential traps: one, believing that the board is strictly the domain of parents; the other, thinking of board members as elected or representative advocates of particular constituencies.



For example, one regional school with which CSDP consulted incorrectly assumed that the board seats should be evenly divided among three supporting parishes. While it was important for prospects to be considered from all areas served, the school adjusted its thinking to choose members for their expertise related to the specific needs of the school rather than for their representation.

#### **Essential Practice #4: Engage the Pastor as a Board Member and Advocate**

Unlike the traditional model for managing Catholic schools, in the board of limited jurisdiction model, the pastor no longer has the final say in school policies and operations; however he still plays a significant role. The pastor maintains specific canonical authority as designated by the bishop. As a board member, the pastor attends meetings, expresses views, and casts one vote. As a leader of the parish, he manages key connections between the parish and school communities and remains fully engaged in promoting the school.

In two major shifts, the board drives the processes of hiring a new principal and developing the school budget. In selecting the principal, a committee of the board conducts the search; the pastor plays a vital role on this committee, but final approval of the board is required before hiring. For the budget, the pastor serves as a key manager between the parish council and the board and determines what percentage of parish support the school receives.

While it may be challenging for some pastors, relinquishing this control frees their time to attend to other parish priorities and enables schools to benefit from the talents and business acumen of others. The changing role of the pastor sometimes presents more challenges to board members—who are inclined to ask for permission—than to the pastor himself. Anecdotally, some pastors are thrilled and even relieved by the professional contributions made to the strategic planning, financial management, and development of the school, a living and visible mission of the Church and parish.

For Rev. Paul M. Kennedy, pastor of St. Katherine of Siena School, Philadelphia, the most rewarding personal experience during a year of major transition for the school was in the building of the board of limited jurisdiction. As he described in a CSDP website post: “Having been here eight years, I really enjoyed asking people to step forward and take on leadership roles. Saint Katherine’s isn’t any one person; it is all of us” (“Philadelphia Yields Enrollment,” 2012, para. 16).

### **Essential Practice #5: Recruit a Balance of Doers and Donors**

Most schools need a combination of doers and donors on the board; people with influence and affluence who, ideally, can both offer the time and talent to get things done and commit financially to the school.

Engaged board members get involved quickly by sharing their intelligence and experience. New board members should listen well, learn about the school as a whole—rather than solely through their own world view, ask the right questions around the mission and needs of students, and “never settle for answers like ‘We have always done it this way’” (DeKuyper, 2007, p. 20). As long as they are board members, they should make the school a priority in their charitable giving (Ingram, 2009).

By being deliberate about choosing board members, especially at startup, schools can involve people who will help achieve the mission. How the school asks a potential board member to join sets the tone for the relationship and role moving forward. This is not about asking a favor of someone; rather, it requires a series of conversations about why the candidate is a choice and how he or she can contribute.

### **Essential Practice #6: Empower Leaders to Lead**

Boards of limited jurisdiction are entrusted with the authority to make decisions. They must be able to rely on strong leadership at every level: pastor, principal, advancement director, board members, and board chair.

As the inspirational leader and chief marketing officer of the school, the principal articulates the school’s needs as priorities and opportunities to shape the future. The advancement director owns and leads enrollment management, fundraising, communications, and constituent relations.

A strong relationship among the board, its membership, and the chair, and the principal ensures that all act together upon the school’s best interest. Steve Hogan, principal of Saint Mary’s School, Vineland, N.J., explained:

We need a group of people who are passionate about the mission and vision of the school. It’s very important to remain positive and to realize that everyone is a part of advancement – not just the person in the advancement director’s office. We all work together and need to take ownership of the school’s advancement goals. Schools need to have a protocol for reaching out to people. This certainly means having

procedures for enrollment management. But it can also mean being intentional about reaching out to a broader audience in the community. (“Principals Discuss,” 2012, para. 10–11)

Having strong leaders in place at all levels of management and governance is important to a school’s ongoing success and sustainability.

### The Execution

Our last four recommended practices have to do with the work of the board and the structures put in place for them to carry out their work. Creating and sustaining an efficient and effective board requires forethought into practices as well as ongoing assessment and reflection on the board’s achievements and shortcomings.

#### Essential Practice #7: Remember that Structure Matters

In considering configurations and governance models that may be effective, CSPD and others engaged in the work of Catholic school sustainability have researched best practices and trends. These have included the changing roles and reach of school boards, including: “shifts in authority, purpose, and responsibilities, in membership composition, and in the increased use of committees” (Haney, 2010, p. 198).

Structure matters, not only as the governance model is established, but also as the board begins its work and learns to operate efficiently and effectively. Bylaws or operating principles govern what is and is not within the board’s jurisdiction. By clearly delineating the scope and level of the board’s authority and control, bylaws or operating principles provide a structure for empowered decisionmaking in the school’s best interests. Furthermore, this structure ensures that authority is invested in the board as a whole, and not in any individual member.

Boards decide, committees do the work, and agendas rule. With such discipline, board members focus on identifying priorities, determining a sequence of actions, and creating and documenting processes for accomplishing the desired work goals:

- *Priorities:* A straightforward yet determined course of action is to affirm the mission, identify the priority needs of the school around sustain-

ability, set goals, and assign committees to do the work. Goals should be measurable, attainable, but also a “stretch” to encourage ongoing advancement.

- *Sequencing*: The order for getting things done varies by school. A startup board should neither be in search of something to do nor take on everything at once. Many schools with which CSDP has worked have formed a finance committee first to provide desperately needed help with budgeting, establishing financial controls, and reporting. An enrollment marketing committee often follows.
- *Process*: Hiring a new principal, collecting tuition, governing meetings, selecting board members, budgeting; all such activities benefit from a documented process. Some processes are established in advance; others are determined by the board.

#### **Essential Practice #8: Clarify Roles and Work as Partners**

A startup board has a golden opportunity to create its own culture while advancing the mission of the school. An initial temptation is to take on the role of administrative advisors who tell the principal everything he or she should do. However, board members must understand what is *not* within their job description (for example, administrative issues, operational policies, personnel issues concerning faculty and staff, and student discipline).

The preferred and productive approach is one of partnership and collaboration. An effective board member always supports the board’s decision outside the boardroom. Debates and discussions are confidential, direct dealing, open, and honest.

In a typical scenario for CSDP schools, the board consists of 15 to 21 voting members with board-elected officers: chair, vice chair, secretary, and treasurer. The board identifies issues for the committees and allows work to be done in committee and brought back to the board. This enables the most effective and efficient use of members’ time and talents. Board committees have a clear and concise charge (executive and board membership, finance, development, enrollment, facilities) and work with the school leadership to set and achieve goals. Each has a chairperson, who reports progress and next steps to the board.

Board members can learn how to clarify their roles to maintain a higher level of engagement and influence. In a website post on board training, Beth Alfonsi, CSDP Assistant Director, explained: “If approached by a disgruntled

parent on a specific grievance, for instance, a board member should direct that person to the principal or other appropriate channel” to avoid “getting mired down in issues that should be resolved elsewhere” (“Board Training Informs,” 2011, para. 4).

### **Essential Practice #9: Make Data-Informed Decisions**

Effective boards base their decisions on information and data, not stories and anecdotes. Often, the school brings data to the board, and the board applies knowledge and expertise to address the challenges. The board evaluates what has already happened in order to determine what needs to happen next.

For example, a new board at one school working with CSDP recently signed off on a revamped finance process that involved a transition to accrual basis accounting and separating the school’s budget from the parish’s numbers. This more transparent reporting enabled the school to announce and explain the need for a tuition increase and to move forward with financial planning based on the true cost of operations.

### **Essential Practice #10: Think Strategically and Act with Urgency**

A focused board thinks strategically in managing its immediate priorities. It remains invested in the school’s mission and future, even when the strategic plan itself takes a back seat.

One school working with CSDP recently sidestepped the common but ill-timed tendency to launch an involved strategic planning process when it became clear that its new board had to act *now*. The school needed immediate decisions and approaches to create a budget, manage enrollment, and introduce annual giving. In the course of addressing these pressing concerns, the board learned more about the school’s history and current situation and was then in a better position to plan strategically for the future than it would have been at the outset.

Effective boards have a bias for action. They set goals, decide how to achieve them, and carefully manage time and resources to execute on their priorities.

### Conclusion

Catholic school board members can benefit from advice shared with all non-profit boards: “Avoid dysfunctional politeness . . . Know what your organization does and whom it serves . . . Never miss an opportunity to say something good about your organization . . . Go beyond compliance. Do the right thing at all times” (Ingram, 2009, p. 68).

In the current environment, in which needs are many and resources are few, the board plays a crucial role in affirming and advancing the mission of the school, providing leadership, and offering new perspectives and insights. On the path to sustainability, the board’s success takes many forms: increased levels of engagement, broader bases of support, sound business practices, transparency, and accountability. By establishing a board that lives the 10 essential practices outlined in this essay, the school sets a solid foundation on which to build its own future.

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*The Catholic School Development Program (<http://www.healeyeducationfoundation.org>) was founded by attorney and entrepreneur Robert T. Healey in 2004 to bring business principles to the challenges of revitalizing Catholic schools. CSDP is the signature program of the Healey Education Foundation. CSDP is helping schools help themselves through a dynamic business model that equips them to achieve their own longer-term success. Providing seed grants and a staff of experts delivering consulting services, CSDP works with diocesan leadership and empowers individual schools to deliver better enrollment, stronger fundraising, and more effective governance.*

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## Strategic Restructuring of School Boards in the Diocese of Sioux City: A Model for Developing a Community of Committee-Driven Catholic School Boards

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*This case study reviews the developmental process used to form a community of committee-driven school boards in the Diocese of Sioux City, Iowa. When Dan Ryan became superintendent of schools in 2009, he faced declining enrollment in the schools of the diocese fueled by a population decline in the surrounding communities. He embarked on a strategic planning process that engages individual school boards and administrations in the establishment of committee-focused planning, a process that resulted in a community of boards. The first step was to create the conditions of readiness for strategic thinking and planning, especially for the administrators who would collaborate with their board chairs. Working with Regina Haney, Executive Director of the Boards and Councils Department of the National Catholic Educational Association, to provide professional development for this readiness task enabled Ryan to establish the foundation for committee-driven planning and action through a board and administrator partnership.*

Schools in the Diocese of Sioux City, Iowa, like schools in many dioceses, face challenges of declining K-12 enrollment, aging buildings, and the need to respond to a broader range of student learning modalities than in the past. In addition, demographics reveal that the communities surrounding the schools are experiencing declines in population. The elementary and secondary schools of the diocese find that students arrive with a wide spectrum of learning needs and styles that require expanded strategies for curriculum delivery. The availability of a variety of sustainable financial resources challenges the schools' ability to retain high-quality teachers, implement state mandates, lower parish financial assessments, and provide affordable tuition.

Schools within the Diocese of Sioux City are located in urban, suburban, and rural communities in 24 counties that cover 14,518 square miles. Total enrollment for the diocesan elementary and secondary schools is 6,300



students. The Office of Education is housed in the diocesan offices in Sioux City, next to the Nebraska boarder. It is common to find parishes in clusters, with two, three, and four communities sharing priests. The diocese has seven school systems and eight parish-based schools. The school systems consist of multiple parishes, multiple schools, and one high school, typically with principals at each school. Each parish school and school system has a school board. Although the parish schools and school systems are self-governing and decentralized, centralized services provided by the Office of Education enable the schools and systems to obtain guidance in policy, planning, and professional development.

In order to address the issues of flat enrollment, ongoing financial strain, and growing instructional needs, leaders within the diocese embarked on a unique effort to restructure disparate school boards into a community of committee-driven boards. The data-driven development of this new form of school governance was spearheaded by Superintendent Dan Ryan in consultation with Dr. Regina Henry, Executive Director of the Department of Boards and Councils for the National Catholic Education Association. Bringing insights from higher education, Dr. Anthony Sabatino was tasked with developing and conducting action research around the support and training provided for board chairs and school administrators. In addition, Dr. Sabatino led efforts to document the process, providing guidance, direction, and formation of this manuscript.

This article tells the story of developing the committee-driven school board model in Sioux City. In the sections that follow, we first describe the design of a community of committee-driven boards, presenting details on the origin of the concept and its implementation in the Diocese of Sioux City. We then describe the two-phase process for articulating a long-range plan for the diocese that included local plans for each school site. We discuss how stakeholders were convened for collaborative meetings; how data were collected for needs assessment at the diocesan and school levels; and how the long-range plan and assessments were created.

### **Developing the Concept of a Community of Committee-Driven Boards**

A highly functioning Catholic school board utilizes the expertise of standing committees to investigate a topic, supply information, and recommend a course of action by the full board. The outstanding boards recognized annually by the NCEA demonstrate that working committees guarantee that the

board will be productive. Therefore, it was the motivation of Superintendent Dan Ryan in the Diocese of Sioux City to establish committee-driven school boards that work hard and diligently. As the formation of the committee-driven structure for all of the boards of the diocese came to fruition, the superintendent sought to strengthen the connection among the individual boards through ongoing meetings and professional development. The concept of a community of committee-driven boards was a result of this regular gathering of board members learning new concepts, sharing ideas, discussing issues, and developing a network grounded in their unified effort to ensure that the Catholic education mission thrives in their diocese.

Using the centralized function of the Office of Education, the superintendent and leadership team began to address the challenges of their decentralized schools by stating the need for a diocesan schools strategic plan. Developing a long-range plan (LRP) was imperative to the future growth and sustainability of all of the schools and school systems. Recognizing that each school and system possessed unique needs based on context, environment, and community, the superintendent and leadership team discussed questions framed through the lens of a diocesan-wide perspective. Some of the questions included: (a) How can a diocesan planning process be accomplished systematically through the conduit of the local school board structure? (b) How is support for planning provided to the board of each school and system? (c) What are the priorities of the diocese, given the individual context in which each school educates students? Because of the enormity of the task, the superintendent was eager to develop a plan that would strategically focus each school and system of schools on a planning process that would take them into the next five to seven years. The strategic plan would construct a vision for the future while providing tools to evaluate the current condition of each school and system. A change in strategic thinking by the Office of Education and local school governance became the first step in developing a community of committee-driven boards (Dentlinger & Ryan, 2012).

### **The Process for Change**

To orchestrate the development of an LRP for the diocese, the superintendent organized and facilitated a series of regional meetings for school administrators, diocesan officials, parish priests, and school board members. These meetings provided valuable input on the planning process for the LRP. Using the information derived from these meetings, a core planning team (CPT)

comprised of the superintendent and diocesan school administrators began to create a structure for the process. By encouraging multiple opportunities for constituents to provide input on this collaborative model, the CPT saw support for the process and plan become evident in the planning activities of boards and administrators. Similar questions emerged from meetings and brainstorming sessions on finance, timelines, and leadership of the planning process to address both local and diocesan logistical needs.

As the collaborative meetings continued, the CPT determined that a diocesan LRP should include individual plans for each school and school system. The CPT divided plan development into two phases, one for developing the diocesan plan and a second for developing local plans. At this point, the constituents identified data as an important foundation for decision-making in continuing the planning process. Recognizing a need for outside expertise, the CPT contracted with a professional consulting firm specializing in Catholic school planning to assist in data gathering and analysis for phase one.

### **Phase One**

In August 2010, the consulting firm began the data-collection process by traveling to all of the schools and systems to interview local constituents. Over the next nine months, the firm conducted extensive internal data collection in the areas of finance, enrollment, and fundraising. The consultants spoke with individuals representing all facets of the schools and diocese. From the work of the consulting firm, five key focus areas for planning emerged: (a) Catholic identity; (b) academic excellence; (c) marketing and enrollment; (d) leadership and governance; and (e) finance. These areas became the framework for planning at both the diocesan and local levels. The CPT recommended that the Boards and Councils Department of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) lead the local board planning process, given its history of successful board development and affordability. In the next section, we describe phase two, conducted during the 2011–2012 school year. This phase of plan development was designed through the collaborative work of the CPT and the NCEA consultant.

### **Phase Two**

To start phase two, the CPT organized three regional sites in the diocese to provide training sessions for presidents, principals, and school board mem-

bers on developing an LRP. The diocesan superintendent, assistant superintendent, and NCEA school board consultant attended all of the regional training sessions to emphasize the connection between the diocesan plan and the local planning process. Together, administrators and board members addressed the key focus areas identified in the diocesan LRP. This bond formed the foundation for planning readiness, a bond that was sustained throughout the planning process and, it is hoped, will continue into the future. The regional training sessions exposed boards and administrators to a set of systematic and concrete steps for planning, and established an environment of collaboration.

From August through March of the 2011–2012 school year, three training sessions occurred at each regional site. In the first session, discussions focused on the diocesan LRP, the visions of the CPT, setting a calendar for local plan development, data analysis from phase one, and the creation of a vision for the future. In the next two meetings, participants shared and critiqued vision statements, established critical issue statements based on the data of phase one, identified goals to respond to the issues, and learned to use the action plan template designed for the local planning process. As boards began to construct their LRPs, technology played an important role. Virtual meetings were held to encourage formative discussion among local board planning teams, diocesan officials, and the NCEA consultant. These virtual meetings provided ongoing feedback opportunities regarding the development of local plans. The final regional training session was held in April 2012. Each school and system shared its completed plan, including the categories and action plans of the LRP. The collaborative environment of the training sessions was a critical basal component in establishing the community of committee-driven boards concept.

### **Measuring the Formation Process for Planning**

As a logical next step, an assessment instrument was created to measure the effectiveness of administrator and board partnership in implementing the planning process using a collaborative model designed to develop a community of committee-driven boards. The instrument, a formative self-assessment in survey format, was intended to help school board chairs and school administrators evaluate the progress of the committee-driven boards and administrators in developing and implementing their local LRPs. The

self-assessment instrument incorporated Haney and Goldschmidt's (2012) 10 seeds of insight for school leaders, which are:

1. Accept that you have much to learn.
2. Adjust your attitude and behavior accordingly to empower your board.
3. Communicate clearly, efficiently and effectively.
4. Cultivate the relationship with the chairperson.
5. Influence board membership selection.
6. Create an environment of continual learning and development.
7. Help your board see the big picture now and beyond.
8. Continually assess the members, committees and the board as a whole.
9. Utilize assessment results to inform a continual improvement process.
10. Set the example. (pp. 9–12)

The performance benchmarks of the governance and leadership domain (Standard 5) from *The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) were added to broaden the view of the assessment. The rationale for using the performance benchmarks and the seeds of insights in forming the self-assessment tool was based on their proven integration of theoretical design and usefulness in professional practice.

The self-assessment tool was used to survey board chairs and school administrators in Spring 2013, after they had spent a semester working with the plan developed in the previous school year. Participants were asked to reflect on the seeds of insight and benchmarks, using the self-assessment tool to rate their progress on 10 performance benchmarks. Responses used the following scoring categories:

1. *exemplary* (commendable, an example for others);
2. *proficient* (accomplished, competent, skilled);
3. *improving* (getting better, increasing in performance and skill);
4. *struggling* (progressing with difficulty); and
5. *no progress* (not moving past the starting point).

### Summary of Survey Findings

On the self-assessment, 95% of board chairs and administrators rated their board's progress as *improving*, *proficient*, or *exemplary*. The survey responses indicated that both board chairs and administrators believed the training had helped their boards achieve readiness and awareness in the following areas:

- Understanding the community inside and outside the school
- Supporting and encouraging each other in the development process
- Achieving regular and ongoing communication between the school administrator and board chair
- Respecting the role that each plays (school administrator and board chair) in the partnership of a collaborative board
- Developing a mission-focused board community with an understanding of Catholic school governance
- Enacting future-focused thinking and planning of a collaborative board
- Approaching challenges proactively

In addition to the areas of improvement identified above, both the administrators and board chairs rated several performance benchmarks as showing *no progress* or *struggling*; they were:

- Providing orientation for new board members
- Supporting ongoing formation, training, and self-evaluation
- Assessing board performance using measurable progress indicators of board function and annual goals
- Planning and attending an annual board planning retreat
- Holding the board and its committees accountable

From this set of performance benchmarks, objectives for the next phase of formative development were identified. These objectives, which represent a growing maturity of board collaboration, can occur in the next phase of board development.

The self-assessments also provided insights on the LRP process used in developing the committee-driven board concept implemented by the Diocese of Sioux City:

- The development of a concrete process with multiple smaller steps with support from the diocesan office was crucial in creating a clear understanding of the process, purpose, and outcome achievement.
- The design of the process must allow for some variance by the local schools. It was helpful to start with very broad categories or subjects that all participants agreed on. Gradually, local schools narrowed these categories to focus on the specifics of their situation. The program must be flexible enough to adapt to local needs and context, but be designed to retain a global-thinking perspective.
- The committee-driven board concept is essential to effective implementation of the LRP. The committees provided insight on the implementation of the LRP, as well as valuable observations and feedback from the community. Encouraging broad community participation in the long-range planning process assists the administrator and board in seeing the big picture of an issue.
- Differentiation of the training and resources provided to the local boards to meet their individual needs.
- Assessment of effectiveness of the planning process. After the survey was deployed, it was determined that a formative self-assessment instrument must be created to measure progress in achieving the LRP goals. The Office of Education, local school board, and local school site would all participate in the ongoing self-assessment.
- The community of committee-driven boards was an unintended but positive outcome of the LRP process. The diocesan Office of Education must find ways to keep these relationships growing to develop new ideas and maintain a spirit of innovation.

### **Moving Forward in the Diocese of Sioux City**

Several actions are recommended to keep the LRPs a driving force at the diocesan and local levels:

1. Create a systematic approach to measuring progress, including a rubric and self-assessment tool, to ensure consistent goals and understanding of each school's current state. Each administrator's and board's annual goals may be linked to these measurement tools. The adopted goals also may be shared with teachers and staff at faculty

- meetings, and the boards may regularly review the goals at committee-level and monthly board meetings.
2. Use an individualized support plan derived from these tools and conversations to drive the Office of Education's actions. Where possible, the Office of Education can group schools with similar needs to increase efficiency.
  3. Efforts to enhance collaboration calls for several specific actions. A system of communication hubs has been established at six strategic sites around the diocese. The communication hubs extend virtual meetings beyond individual computers to larger groups of people who may interact with others in the same room, the Office of Education, administrators, boards, and even national resources with no more than one hour of travel. This is an important factor in a diocese where schools are many hours from one another and the Office of Education.
  4. The survey conducted for this article may be conducted annually to provide a separate measure of each school's progress.

### Conclusion

Using the committee-driven school board concept supported by effective leadership at the local level is enhancing future possibilities for Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sioux City. Local boards, in partnership with their administrators, are making steady progress in forming their committees and understanding each group's role. Job descriptions for the committees have been generated and shared. Growth is not uniform across all boards, but the LRP process has created higher expectations throughout the diocese along with a greater understanding of critical issues.

Through this process, local boards of education—in collaboration with their administrators—have rapidly developed their capacity to conduct long-range planning. At each regional site involved in the process, a growing sense of community emerged within each school group and among the various boards. The new identity of a community of boards helped reduce parochialism and promote a feeling of being members of the diocese. Greater collaboration among the boards, along with stronger relationships between local representatives and the Office of Education, fostered the formation of a new culture. A community of boards is emerging that unites the decentral-



ized model of Catholic schooling found in the diocese with the centralized function of the Office of Education.

This formation of a new culture is the direct result of the insight and leadership of the diocesan superintendent of schools. Research identifies leadership as essential to shaping Catholic school boards (Convey & Haney, 1997). The superintendent called on local school leadership, presidents, and principals to help guide a planning process that focused on the committee-driven board's concept. The superintendent knew he neither had all of the answers to the issues confronting the schools of the diocese, nor could manage the implementation of solutions at the local level, so he embarked on a collaborative approach to discovery and planning. He rallied the administrators, in partnership with their boards, to participate in large group sessions to address the critical issues facing their schools. As a servant leader, he provided the local leadership with the resources and structure to begin creating solutions to immediate challenges that give light to long-range planning. The superintendent ignited a transformational process that can provide the schools of the Diocese of Sioux City with a viable future in a culture of community support.

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## Panel Discussion on Small and Rural School Governance

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**D**uring a panel on rural and small school governance, the author described an initiative designed to create a sustainable model of governance for three small rural schools in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The model, Virtual Consolidation at Satellite Sites, leverages technology to support the consolidation of administration and selected instruction. Its development and initial implementation is described in the sections that follow.

### Virtual Consolidation

St. Michael, St. Catherine, and St. Joseph Schools are located within an approximate 15-mile radius of one another in rural southwest Michigan. The schools, which had respective enrollments of 26 (K-7), 41 (K-7), and 58 (K-8), were recommended for consolidation during a two-year diocesan-wide pastoral planning process. In a 2010 poll of the three communities, it became clear that most families would only continue to enroll their children if the consolidated school site was physically located at their current school. This finding meant that even with a traditional Catholic school consolidation that includes school closures and student transfers, the future viability of a school in this area of the diocese would still be in question.

### Creating a Virtual Consolidation at Satellite Sites

With a sense of urgency, leaders with expertise in strategic planning, finance, instructional technology, marketing, and higher education emerged from the three school communities. These leaders engaged with faculty and staff, meeting regularly, visiting other small schools around the state and in neighboring states, identifying best practices, and creating a new sustainable model.

By November 2010, the diocese decided to reduce the school administration from three principals to one shared principal who would assist the three

communities in collaborative planning efforts. By February 2011, through the collaboration of the three communities and the strong leadership of several talented individuals, the WINGS Satellite Initiative was introduced to the consolidated community.

### **WINGS Satellites**

“WINGS” is an acronym for World Knowledge; Individualized, Innovative Education; Nurturing, Family Environment; God-centered; and Supportive Technology (Grover & Morey, 2011). St. Catherine, St. Joseph, and St. Michael are the first three WINGS Satellite school sites. The schools have been virtually consolidated under one administration with many shared services. For example, the schools feature one-to-one computing and blended learning in classrooms of students of multiple grade levels. Students in these classrooms work with their teacher through an individualized workshop model that allows students to advance at a personalized pace, offers new challenges to those who are ready and reinforces skills for those who need a little more support.

Systemic change from a traditional Catholic school model to the WINGS model presented hardships such as a significant reduction in faculty, transition to multiple grade levels in one classroom, new teaching methodology, and new technology. The WINGS Satellite model focused on three simple goals: (a) significantly upgrade the quality of 21st century instructional delivery through a personalized workshop model, one-to-one computing, and blended learning (US Department of Education, 2010; Wolff, 2010); (b) maximize potential enrollment by making the satellite locations as convenient as possible (remaining at local parishes); and (c) create a sustainable student-to-faculty ratio that allowed the WINGS virtual consolidation to grow to 113% of the previous year’s combined enrollment, while realizing an overall reduction in total expenses of nearly 17%, or over \$150,000 annually.

### **Governance**

Richard Burke of Catholic School Management was consulted to study and help restructure governance models within the Diocese of Grand Rapids. The WINGS Satellite model was completed as part of this process (Diocese of Grand Rapids, 2012). The WINGS Satellites are transitioning governance from three separate consultative boards to one expanded board of directors acting as a board of limited jurisdiction under the direction of a pastor/ca-

nonical administrator.

Unlike other boards within the diocese, this board will include three additional standing committees, one representing the needs of each of the three participating parish/schools. The funding model is still parish based. Each parish is responsible for the facility and faculty that are specific to its site. All shared resources are divided proportionally according to the number of students participating at the individual site. Tuition and parish investment is negotiated with the finance council and pastor at each individual site using diocesan benchmarks to move the three sites toward more standard operating practice.

As many families move out of the city centers and into suburban and rural settings, there is an opportunity to develop new small WINGS Satellite sites at parishes that are unable to sustain a school of their own, but likely could sustain a classroom or two. By virtually connecting small new WINGS Satellite sites to other well-established Catholic schools, we can expand the ministry of Catholic education, providing a powerful tool for the new evangelization.

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