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Cover Page Footnote

Author Note Dr. Sabatino serves as the author of the curriculum of the Certificate in Catholic School Administration Program (CCSA) as well as its administrative director and professor. The CCSA program has supported the leadership preparation of Catholic school educators from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the Diocese of Orange, the Diocese of San Bernardino, the Diocese of Knoxville, the Diocese of Marquette, the Diocese of Reno, the Diocese of Springfield/Cape Girardeau, the Diocese of Gallup, the Diocese of El Paso, the Diocese of Tucson, the Diocese of Las Cruces, the Diocese of Fresno, and the Diocese of Shreveport.

The Virtual Classroom and Catholic School Leadership Preparation: The LMU Certificate in Catholic School Administration Program

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Catholic Extension and Loyola Marymount University (LMU) have engaged in a partnership to offer a graduate level, virtual classroom-based Certificate in Catholic School Administration (CCSA) program for novice and prospective leaders in Catholic schools in mission dioceses throughout the United States. This synchronous online Catholic School Leadership Development Initiative is designed for those who currently hold leadership positions in Catholic elementary and secondary schools and those who have been identified for a leadership role in the future. Although leadership development is often identified as a strategic concern for Catholic schools in mission dioceses, these schools often lack opportunities for professional development due to barriers of cost and distance.

Keywords

administration, leadership virtual classroom, technology

Catholic Extension and Loyola Marymount University (LMU) have engaged in a partnership to offer a graduate level, virtual classroom-based Certificate in Catholic School Administration (CCSA) program for novice and prospective leaders in Catholic schools in mission dioceses throughout the United States¹. This synchronous online Catholic School Leadership Development Initiative is designed for those who currently hold leadership positions in Catholic elementary and secondary schools and those

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who have been identified for a leadership role in the future. Although leadership development is often identified as a strategic concern for Catholic schools in mission dioceses, these schools often lack opportunities for professional development due to barriers of cost and distance.

This unique and successful educational program, offered by LMU's Center for Catholic Education (CCE) through the Department of Educational Leadership and Administration (EDLA), provides professional development that is specific to the Catholic school administration context. The one-year (4 course/10 graduate level units) program is designed to address four major themes in Catholic school administration: mission-focused leadership, faith and spiritual leadership, operational management, and instructional leadership. The integration of faith and professional practice is made relevant through practical experiences that prepare students to grow as Catholic school leaders through project-based learning strategies. Students learn that assessment, accountability, and transparency can serve well the mission, vision, and learning outcomes of every Catholic school.

Students receive a rigorous curriculum that includes Catholic school history, mission, law, ethics, budget, finance, operations, marketing, fundraising, admissions, personnel management, curriculum, and instruction. Woven through each course are the knowledge and skills important for developing a spiritual community among the faculty, integrating technology, designing an inclusive curriculum, developing a professional learning community, and using the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) as a resource and guide for ongoing school improvement. The entire curriculum of the CCSA program is delivered by one clinical professor who serves as instructor, guide, and mentor for the cohort of adult learners.

Building the LMU Certificate in Catholic School Administration

The original design of the CCSA program was the result of a local need expressed in Spring 2011 by a diocese in the Los Angeles region to have a one-year leadership preparation program for educators coming to Catholic schools with training and professional experience in public education. The diocese found that these experienced educators, trained and licensed to work in public schools, possessed the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be highly functioning and effective school leaders in Catholic elementary and secondary schools, with one missing element: Catholic school mission and

identity. With that in mind, the director of the Catholic School Leadership Academy (CSLA), a program situated in the Department of Educational Leadership (EDLA) at LMU, began an examination of the existing Master's degree in Catholic School Administration (MA in CSAD) course requirements and curriculum to determine the possibility of meeting the expressed need of the diocese.

The CSLA was one of three branches of the Institute for School Leadership and Administration (ISLA) housed in EDLA. ISLA provided three options for a master's degree in school administration: MA in Traditional Public School Administration, MA in Charter School Administration and an MA in Catholic School Administration. All three MA programs in school administration program used the courses required for achieving a California Preliminary Services Credential (19 graduate units) as its core curriculum. In order to be admitted to any of these programs, an applicant must be in possession of a valid California Clear Teaching Credential and have taught for three years.

In order to be a public school administrator in California, public law requires an aspiring public school administrator to first possess a California Preliminary Administrative Services Credential (Tier 1 credential) before applying for any school administrative position. The Tier 1 credential would be awarded to the candidate after successful completion of a preparation program from a state-approved college or university and validation that the candidate had been hired as a school administrator. All public school leadership preparation programs were required by the State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC, 2009) to use the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSELS) in the formation of curriculum and performance project design. Students were required to provide evidence of their knowledge, understanding, and ability to skillfully apply the CPSELS to a real school setting by successfully presenting a culminating project to a panel of educational professionals selected by the director of the leadership preparation program. The project was designed, implemented, and assessed by the candidate under the guidance of program professors and project supervisors.

After five successful years as an administrator in a public school and successful completion of a college or university leadership program approved by the State of California that included theory and practical application oversight, the student could then file an application with the State of California to clear the Tier 1 credential and receive the Tier 2 administrative credential,

therefore moving from a preliminary status to clear status. A student enrolled in the Tier I credential program did not have to be simultaneously enrolled in the MA in School Administration program.

Catholic school educators in California are not required by law to hold a California Tier 1 or 2 administrative credential while serving as a Catholic school administrator. The (arch) diocese of employment may or may not require its Catholic school administrators to possess a valid California Tier 1 or Tier 2 credential. The hiring agent has the authority to set the criteria for credentials and degrees necessary for employment as a Catholic school administrator in either elementary or secondary schools. LMU designed its MA in Catholic School Administration to include the courses necessary to achieve the Tier 1 credential in order to provide students with state-sponsored standards for professional practice.

The successful completion of the LMU MA in Catholic School Administration (MA in CSAD) provided the student with a master's degree as well as courses required to apply for a Tier I credential as long as the candidate held a valid clear California teaching credential. There were 37 graduate units required to complete this MA in CSAD program. Twelve units (four 3-unit courses) of the program were designed with leadership development content specific for Catholic school administrator training.

Embedded in each of the three semesters of the Tier I credential component of the MA in CSAD were fieldwork projects. Professors introduced the requirements for project design, which were aligned with course content. A fieldwork supervisor assigned to each student monitored progress and CPSEL connection. The projects were designed to reflect the candidates' understanding and application of the course content designed for public school leadership and administration. Unless the professor had Catholic school administration experience while also holding a valid public school credential, the students might not receive the interpretation of course content to the Catholic school context.

The intention in reviewing the MA in CSAD that included California Preliminary Administrative Credential preparation was not to disrupt or eliminate the Tier I preparation courses and fieldwork projects. Rather, the initial goal was to find a way to adjust the sequence of the existing courses of the MA program in order to create a focus on Catholic school administration that could serve as a lens for interpreting of the content of the public school administration courses. With this in mind, placing the existing Catholic

school courses in a concentrated series throughout one academic year became the primary objective. In doing so, the student would receive as a foundation the content knowledge and skill development in the Catholic school administration courses before embarking on the remaining courses of the MA program including California public school administrative credential preparation.

Program Design

The first decision in revamping the existing course sequence for the MA in CSAD was to take the four 3-unit Catholic school leadership preparation courses and package them into an ordered sequence. Each course was reviewed for content related to Catholic school leadership practice. Although the title and topics for each of the four courses represented relevant knowledge important to Catholic school administration, there were no standards providing curricular direction or desired outcomes used as targets for learning as there were for the California credential courses.

Calling upon the seminal works of Maria Ciriello (1996, 1998) as resources for establishing a coherent curriculum, the four 3-unit courses were consolidated into three. Ciriello (1996, 1998) identified spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership as the three distinct roles of a Catholic school principal and outlined a series of responsibilities corresponding to each role. The author of the new curriculum believed that the role of spiritual leader was so important to the position of Catholic school principal that it should be included in the curriculum of all three courses. The author also believed that the role of the Catholic school principal in effectively leading a school's mission, vision, and learning outcomes was paramount to the success of the school and its impact on student learning. Therefore, using Ciriello's (1996) roles and responsibilities of a Catholic school principal as a guide, three new courses were created: Mission-focused Leadership in Catholic Education, Instruction Leadership in Catholic Education, and Organizational Leadership in Catholic Education.

The next task was to determine the ordered sequence of the courses and how they would be placed in the academic calendar. The author believed that mission-focused leadership should be the first of the three courses in the sequence in order to establish mission as the guiding light for instructional and organizational leadership. The author believed that organizational leadership should be the second course in the sequence given its immediate importance to the sustainability of Catholic schools, and that instructional leadership

should be the third course in the sequence so that candidates could apply what they had learned about a cohesive and thriving organization focused on mission, vision, and learning outcomes to leading the instructional program of the school. Woven throughout all three courses were to be the concepts and skills related to simultaneously developing a spiritual and professional learning community (PLC). It was further determined by the author that redesigning the curriculum of the existing one unit program introductory course, Invitation to Lead, would be necessary to reflect Catholic school administration and the subsequent three course series. These 10 units became the Certificate in Catholic School Administration (CCSA).

Curriculum Outcomes and Standards Alignment

The overarching theme of the CCSA program is the integration of faith and professional practice in Catholic school administration. Teaching students how effective professional education practice, the faith of the Catholic Church, and an illuminating spirituality can be integrated in the roles and responsibilities of a Catholic school administrator serves as the primary goal of the program. To accomplish this goal within the framework of the 10 units of the 1-year CSSA program, required a reflection on the set of standards to be used as the foundation for professional practice. Since the CPSELS were used in the existing California Preliminary Administrative Credential Tier 1 program, it was initially determined that the CPSELS would also serve as the professional practice leadership standards for the CCSA program. When the CCSA became a national program, it was necessary to rethink the use of the CPSELS as the professional practice standards. Given that the CPSELS were a direct reflection of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration's Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) *Educational Leadership Policy Standards* (ISLLC, 2008), making the connection between the two standards frameworks forged an immediate relationship with nationally recognized professional education leadership standards. Recently, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration embarked on a review of the existing ISLLC 2008 standards. In October 2015, a new set of 10 *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (PSELs 2015) was published to replace the existing eight ISLLC (2008) standards. These 10 standards are also now aligned with the CCSA course outcomes.

Therefore, the initial curriculum design of the CCSA courses incorporated the national professional standards of public school education and the

roles and responsibilities of Catholic school principals expressed by Maria Ciriello (1996) in *Expectations for the Catholic School Principal: A Handbook for Pastors & Parish School Boards*. What seemed to be missing were clearly stated standards for Catholic school administration. In Spring 2012, the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NSBECS) (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) were published. Upon reviewing the standards and benchmarks that included an introductory section describing the defining characteristics of Catholic schools, the author immediately began the process of also incorporating the NSBECS into the framework of the CCSA program. Although the CCSA focus is leadership preparation, intentionally aligning the program's curriculum to the NSBECS provides the students with an exposure to standards and benchmarks that serve as the guide for organizing an entire Catholic school program.

Integrating the ISSLC (2008) professional educational standards and NSBECS as the foundation for course outcome development created the opportunity to backward map the goals and objectives of each course. The author then designed a sequential and coherent curriculum that represented a constructivist pedagogical approach to teaching and learning.

In addition to spiritual leadership development, woven throughout all courses of the CCSA were concepts focused on developing a culture of assessment, accountability, and transparency. Further, the development of a culture of continuous improvement by employing the elements and characteristics of a professional learning community in the Catholic school context became an imperative expressed in all three courses. The language of faith, spirituality, standards, and professional practice simultaneously expressed in curriculum design and implementation developed the distinguishing characteristic of the CSSA program.

Table 1 identifies the alignment of CCSA courses with the NSBECS 2012, PSELS 2015 and ISLLC 2008. All of the 13 NSBECS standards, 10 PSELS, and 6 ISLLC standards are aligned with the four courses of the CCSA.

Table 1

LMU CCSA Course Alignment to NSBECS (2012), PSELs (2015), and ISLLC (2008) Standards

Course	NSBECS (2012)			PSELs (2015)			ISLLC (2008)		
	Domains	Standards	Benchmarks	Domains	Standards	Domains	Standards	Domains	Standards
EDLA 6420 Invitation to Lead	Leadership & Governance	6	6.2	Mission, Vision, and Core Values	1	School Culture for Learning, Instructional Program, & Staff Professional Growth	2		
				Community of Care and Support for Students	5	Collaboration/Professional Learning Community	4		
				Professional Capacity of School Personnel	6	Cultural Context	6		
EDLA 6430 Mission-focused Leadership in Catholic Education	Mission & Catholic Identity	1 2	1.1-1.5 2.4-2.7	Mission, Vision, and Core Values	1	Vision of Learning	1		
	Leadership & Governance	4 6	4.1-4.5 6.2, 6.4	Ethics & Professional Norms	2	School Culture for Learning, Instructional Program, & Staff Professional Growth	2		
				Equity and Cultural Responsiveness	3	Collaboration/Professional Learning Community	4		
				Community of Care and Support for Students	5	Cultural Context	6		
				Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community	8				
				School Improvement	10				

Table 1 (cont.)

Course	NSBECS (2012)			PSEIs (2015)			ISLLC (2008)		
	Domains	Standards	Benchmarks	Domains	Standards	Standards	Domains	Standards	Standards
EDLA 6431 Organizational Leadership in Catholic Education	Leadership & Governance	5	5.1. 5.2, 5.6	Mission, Vision, & Values	1	School Culture for Learning, Instructional Program, & Staff Professional Growth	2		
		6	6.1, 6.3, 6.6, 6.7	Ethics and Professional Norms	2	Organizational Management	3		
	Operational Vitality	10	10.1-10.8	Equity and Cultural Responsiveness	3	Collaboration/Professional Learning Community	4		
		11	11.1-11.4	Professional Community for Teachers and Staff	7	Ethics, Integrity, & Fairness	5		
		12	12.1-12.3	Operations and Management	9	Cultural Context	6		
		13	13.1-13.3	School Improvement	10				
EDLA 6432 Instructional Leadership in Catholic Education	Mission & Catholic Identity	2	2.1-2.7	Mission, Vision, & Values	1	School Culture for Learning, Instructional Program, & Staff Professional Development	2		
		3	3.1-3.4	Ethics & Professional Norms	2	Organizational Management	3		

Table 1 (cont.)

Course	NSBECS (2012)			PSELS (2015)			ISILC (2008)		
	Domains	Standards	Benchmarks	Domains	Standards	Domains	Standards	Domains	Standards
EDLA 6432 Instructional Leadership in Catholic Education (cont.)	Leadership & Governance	6	6.3, 6.5	Equity and Cultural Responsiveness	3	Collaboration/Professional Learning	4		
	Academic Excellence	7	7.1-7.10	Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	4	Cultural Context	6		
		8	8.1-8.9	Professional Capacity of School Personnel	6				
		9	9.1-9.3	Professional Community for Teachers and Staff	7				
			Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community	8					
			School Improvement	10					

Program and Course Outcomes Assessment

In order to recognize successful achievement of the program and course outcomes, students participate in multiple measures of assessment. The primary source of assessment each semester is the course project. The project is expected to reflect the student's understanding of course concepts and ability to apply those concepts to a real school scenario. Students do not work alone. In keeping with the ongoing developmental understanding and use of a PLC, students are placed in teams of three. Project teams commence working together at the beginning of each semester to develop their unique project based on the performance expectations and guidelines provided in the course syllabus. Periodically throughout the semester, the professor meets with each project team to provide feedback and consultation regarding the project's formative progress. At the end of the semester, the project team submits a communal paper and presents their project details as a team to classmates during the final class session. Using rubrics specifically designed for each course and assignment, the professor assesses the paper and presentation. The categories of each rubric are reflective of the program's desired outcomes, course concepts, professional writing/presentation style, the candidate's ability to collaborate with team members, and the standards alignment of the project. Students have access to these rubrics throughout the semester to assist them in responding to the performance expectations of the professor of the course. This assessment process follows the same procedure in each of the three 3-unit courses.

To assist in building capacity for spiritual leadership, students are expected, for a 10-week period in the fall and spring semesters, to actively engage in a weekly guided blogging assignment with classmates. The blogging is conducted within parameters of the course learning management system (LMS) with access only available to the students and instructor of the course. The LMS is provided by the university and is used for all course management.

Each weekly blog is started with a question or questions created by a trained spiritual director (serving in the instructor capacity for this assignment) to promote focused dialogue among classmates regarding their reactions and reflections pertaining to the questions. The professor and trained spiritual director monitor the blog but do not participate.

In addition, guided online spiritual direction is provided to support the individual faith and spiritual development of each student. Mirroring the blog assignment of the ten-week period in both the fall and spring semesters,

students reflect, and contemplate on assigned reading each week. The focus of the fall semester reading is Ignatian spirituality and the spring semester reading is about listening and communication. Each week of the assignment period, students are expected to write a 300-word personal reflection paper and submit it online to the spiritual director for guided feedback. Confidentiality is maintained by using the secured web based course LMS online link that can only be accessed by the student, spiritual director, and professor.

The CCSA Applied to the Virtual Classroom

For two academic years starting in Fall 2011, the CCSA program was offered to students in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the Diocese of Orange through a face-to-face on-site cohort model. Class session meeting locations were either on the LMU campus for the Archdiocese of LA students or at the central location in Orange County for the Diocese of Orange students. EDLA 6420 Invitation to Lead was scheduled for Summer Session 2 (The first weekend in August); EDLA 6430 Mission-focused Leadership in Catholic Education was scheduled for the fall semester, EDLA 6431 Organizational Leadership in Catholic Education in the spring semester, and EDLA 6432 Instructional Leadership in Catholic Education in Summer Session 1 (Mid May through the end of June). This schedule of courses fit well into the school year calendar of a working Catholic school professional. The CCSA provided the first 10 units of the MA in Catholic School Administration or could be recognized as a stand-alone certificate based on the needs and interests of the student.

In the 2013 Spring Semester, Loyola Marymount University and Catholic Extension partnered to offer the CCSA program to aspiring and novice leaders in the Diocese of San Bernardino, a mission diocese. Catholic Extension provides financial support through outreach programs and grants for mission dioceses throughout the United States and was interested in supporting leadership development for Catholic educators of those dioceses. The curriculum of the CCSA program was delivered to the cohort of the Diocese of San Bernardino CCSA through a hybrid technology model. The course professor met with the students at the beginning, middle, and end of each 3-unit course. The other class sessions of each 3-unit course were conducted virtually online. This pilot effort to provide the CCSA program through an online format concluded with positive reviews from students and diocesan administrators.

With this in mind, LMU and Catholic Extension continued their partnership to offer the CCSA program to prospective and novice Catholic school leaders with another cohort that began studies in August 2014. Catholic Extension states in its outreach letter to mission diocese school administrators and bishops seeking to build leadership capacity among Catholic educators in the schools of their diocese, “Although leadership development is often identified as a strategic concern for Catholic Schools in Mission Dioceses, they often lack opportunities due to barriers of cost and distance.” With the cost of the program significantly reduced by substantial scholarships made available by the partnership of LMU and Catholic Extension, prospective and novice Catholic school leaders of mission dioceses participate in the graduate level CCSA program by sitting in the virtual national online classroom.

The students in the national online cohort (NOC) and the LMU Los Angeles cohort (LAC) receive an identical CCSA curriculum. Both cohorts meet for the same number of class sessions for each course and students of both cohorts are required to meet the same performance expectations related to the course outcomes. Both cohorts use an identical learning management system (LMS), are placed on project teams of two or three, and are assessed by the same categories of the course performance expectations rubrics.

The differences in programs appear in how the students form a professional learning community (PLC). To begin this process, both cohorts are required to attend EDLA 6420 Invitation to Lead on the LMU campus over the first weekend in August. Airfare and two night’s accommodations are provided for the NOC students. The NOC students meet each other in the same physical room and begin the steps in building a PLC. This opportunity to meet together in an onsite environment has proven to be an important first step in the PLC development process. Capitalizing on the human relationships started during the on-campus meeting, students continue the program in the virtual classroom.

Conclusion

Schools of Education need to be nimble and flexible in their program offerings, responsive to needs, and forward-thinking to engage the national community. Catholic school administration requires the guidance of standards that can shape planning and decisions for all aspects of the school’s program. Found in the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catho-*

lic Elementary and Secondary Schools (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) is an opportunity for Catholic universities that provide Catholic school leadership preparation programs to use a common language in curriculum design and implementation.

Creating an environment for learning is a primary task for any teacher. If that environment engages students utilizing vibrant, challenging, relevant and meaningful strategies, learning occurs. Using an effective web conferencing application that enables a cohort of 15-20 students to be present together in the virtual classroom is paramount to success of the virtual classroom for Catholic school educators. The application should provide tools for organized discussion, document sharing, and breakout group sessions. Sufficient bandwidth provided by a wi-fi or ethernet connection must be present to permit uninterrupted dialogue by participants in the class session.

The virtual classroom for Catholic school educators can be as productive a learning environment as the onsite classroom if the professor is able to see beyond the superficial aspects and perceived threats of technology hardware and software and look deeply into the mind and heart of each student. Catholic school educators value a strong sense of community in the schools where they teach and administer. It makes sense that their expectation of a learning environment for themselves would also require a community atmosphere as well.

The virtual classroom has provided, for the past three years, an opportunity to bring this community based Catholic school leadership preparation program to students in locations at an extreme distance from a Catholic university. Combining public education's national leadership standards and the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) provides a common language spoken by all students in 14 (arch) dioceses served by the LMU CCSA program.

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