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The NSBECS: The Foundation for Effective Catholic Principal Preparation

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The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) are a national articulation of defining characteristics and performance benchmarks that guide Catholic schools in assessing, strengthening, and sustaining their operations in four Domains: Mission and Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality. In relation to Catholic school leadership, the NSBECS can be a document that suggests a standardized framework from which “. . . a set of competencies can be identified that provide the basis of a universally agreed-upon set of Catholic school leadership standards that can be used in conjunction with national and/or state-based educational leadership frameworks” (Boyle, Haller, & Hunt, 2016, p. 305). This is exactly how the Greeley Center for Catholic Education used the NSBECS to develop the Catholic Principal Preparation Program.

In response to the call for effective Catholic school leaders, candidates in Loyola University Chicago Greeley Center for Catholic Education’s (GCCE) Catholic Principal Preparation Program (CPPP) learn to be agents for change. Even while performing the role of the instructional leader, Catholic school leadership requires additional skill sets, such as monitoring religious education and formation, promoting Catholic identity, serving as the faith leader, leading under unique governance models, and ensuring operational vitality. In order to prepare candidates for such a multidimensional role, the GCCE used the NSBECS as a powerful planning document to help identify the competencies needed for Catholic school leadership. Morten and Lawler (2016) describe the development process well:

The faculty of the GCCE, in collaboration with the veteran Catholic school principals acting as coaches in the program, examined each standard and benchmark and determined the requisite skills and experiences the candidates would need to gain in order to meet the standard of excellence. . . . The result was the Catholic School Principal Compe-

tencies, a list of skills and competencies of a Catholic school principal that are linked directly to the NSBECS. (Morten & Lawler, 2016, p. 339) (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. Loyola's Catholic School Principal Competencies (Boyle, Morten, & Guerin, 2013)

To ensure that the design of the CPPP successfully prepared candidates for the complexities of Catholic school leadership, the GCCE developed a Theory of Action identifying strategies, the anticipated impact of the strategies, and their desired results. The foundational strategy in the GCCE Theory of Action involved embedding the NSBECS and Ignatian pedagogy throughout the coursework and field experiences in the CPPP. The GCCE believes that by ensuring the candidates have experience implementing important leadership activities related to the standards, the candidates are more likely to be prepared for the complexities of delivering on the mission of Catholic school leadership. The GCCE's Theory of Action for the CPPP is detailed in Figure 2.

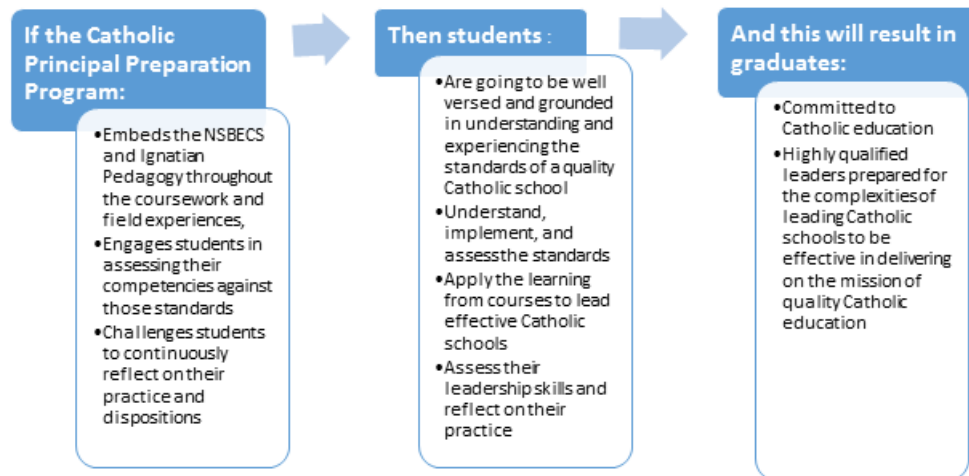


Figure 2. The GCCE CPPP Theory of Action

Integration of NSBECS in LUC CPPP

Illinois, like many states, requires the courses and internships of principal preparation programs to be aligned to specific professional standards. While this is helpful in preparing candidates for some of the responsibilities of being a school leader (i.e. instructional leadership), it barely scratches the surface on addressing all the things that a Catholic school leader needs to be able to do in order to be effective and successful. The CPPP uses the NSBECS as the foundation to ensure that candidates develop proficiency in those identified Catholic competencies for school leadership, in addition

to meeting all of the requirements for state licensure. “These competencies articulate the unique responsibilities of the Catholic school principal due not only to the faith-based mission but also to differences in governance, staffing, and funding structures” (Morten, S.D & Lawler, G.A., 2016, p.339).

GCCE aligned the CPPP to the NSBECS using the 20 Catholic School Principal Competencies which were derived from the NSBECS (see Figure 1) and leveraging Ignatian pedagogy for candidates to engage in reflective practice. The CPPP incorporates reflective practice to help candidates make meaning of their learning and move to action based on what they have learned, then evaluate the success of the action to result in change. Candidates regularly assess how their learning impacts them as individuals and how it defines their relationship to the world.

The CPPP uses the NSBECS to frame the field experiences, ensuring candidates have multiple opportunities throughout their program to engage in meaningful job-embedded learning across the four NSBECS domains. Figure 3 outlines just a sampling of the types of field experiences within each domain that CPPP candidates engage in throughout their time in the program. By using the NSBECS domains to frame these field experiences, the CPPP ensures that candidates are given well-rounded exposure and hands-on experience to the real-life work of a Catholic school principal. The reflective dialogue that ensues as part of their ePortfolio documentation of these competencies challenges candidates to consider deeply their application of knowledge, skills and dispositions in each of these specific learning experiences.

Field experiences serve a central role in the CPPP and are infused throughout the coursework and internships. These job-embedded learning activities, along with all of the CPPP coursework, are grounded in the leadership standards, both the NSBECS and the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). To track candidates’ developing proficiency in the standards, and specifically the NSBECS, the CPPP uses an electronic portfolio (ePortfolio). The artifacts in the ePortfolio “provide a holistic representation of who the candidate is, personally, professionally and academically” (CPPP Participant Handbook, p. 15). The candidate, his/her coach and his/her advisor use the ePortfolio artifacts to engage in reflective dialogue, drawing connections between experiences and the NSBECS, deepening the application of learning and nurturing the development of the dispositions critical for a Catholic school leader.



Figure 3. Examples of LUC CPPP field experiences aligned to NSBECS domains

NSBECS Impact

The GCCE CPPP has just welcomed its fifth cohort since the program's implementation in 2013. There have been several significant benefits as a result of integrating the NSBECS as the foundation for the CPPP.

1. Through the use of the ePortfolio, the tracking of the candidates' development in the Catholic competencies is demonstrated over time. In addition to the ePortfolio artifacts and reflections, the CPPP tracks student growth through recurring standards-based feedback provided to the candidates and their program advisor by their coach and the site principal supervising their internships. This feedback is then used by the candidate, coach and advisor to set goals for growth

moving forward. In tracking these multiple points and sources of feedback across the duration of the program, the evidence indicates that the LUC CPPP candidates demonstrate proficiency in the Catholic competencies drawn from the NSBECS and exemplify consistent collaborative, reflective and ministerial leadership habits by graduation.

2. As a system-level partner, the Archdiocese of Chicago, is accredited through AdvancED, which has integrated the NSBECS for Catholic school/system accreditation. CPPP graduates' familiarity with, and deep understanding of the NSBECS in action, ensures they are fully prepared to effectively implement and lead the continuous improvement processes that are part of the AdvancED system level accreditation of the Archdiocese of Chicago.
3. Through the embedded coaching component of the program, the CPPP utilizes the expertise of experienced Catholic school principals who are in the "Next Step" phase of their career, as described by Boyle, Sullivan, Huizar, Lia, Morten and Peña (2018) in order to mentor candidates and nurture in them the habits of reflective and ministerial leadership, while engaging in dialogue around the Catholic competencies for principals. The coaches have reported having a sense of satisfaction in being able to not only share their knowledge and skills gained from their years of experience, but also in being able to remain connected to the mission of Catholic schools.
4. Through the field experiences aligned specifically with the Mission and Catholic Identity domain, candidates receive faith formation and first hand experiences in ministerial leadership, better preparing them to be spiritual leaders in their school communities. This element of adult and leadership formation is critical for a Catholic school leader. It is essential that not only do the candidates know how to lead the spiritual formation for their faculty and students, but that the candidates also understand the essential nature of ongoing formation of themselves, knowing that you can't nurture in others what you don't nurture in yourself.
5. Through coursework and field experiences aligned specifically with the Operational Vitality domain, candidates gain a deep understanding of how school budgets are developed and managed. In addition,

candidates learn best practices in tuition setting, financial aid allocation, tuition collection protocols and grant writing, as the ability to identify and apply to outside funding sources is critical for effective Catholic school leaders.

Lessons Learned

Monitor the Theory of Action. The CPPP Theory of Action is grounded in multiple layers of measurement in order to be able to assess its impact and to make adjustments to the strategies. Sources of evidence include tasks from coursework and internships as identified in syllabi, work samples from candidates, reflections from candidates in coursework and internship, faculty and coach assessments on competencies and dispositions using rubrics, coach logs, course participation, and course evaluations. The GCCE monitors the realization of the Theory of Action by tracking these data points across the program for each cohort, identifying opportunities to strengthen the teaching strategies used for implementation in order to improve desired impact and outcomes.

Nurture diocesan partnership. Nurturing a strong, collaborative partnership with candidates' diocese is critical. This partnership is forged in the common goal of ensuring a comprehensive, practical preparation program for the candidates, so that graduates are able to "hit the ground running" in service to the diocesan schools. Having the NSBECS as the foundation for the field experiences and coursework in the CPPP ensures close alignment between the learning activities and the actual work of principals in the diocese.

Infuse coaching throughout. The coaching component is essential in developing the reflective, collaborative and ministerial dispositions and habits in the CPPP candidates. Having the coaching component infused throughout the entire program, rather than just during the internships, allows for the development of a deeper relationship between coach and candidate, which fosters deeper reflective dialogue as well as solidifying the habits of reflection and collaboration, which are critical for supporting the development of the Catholic competencies.

Implement a cohort model. The cohort model has played a critical role in the effective implementation of the program as well. The CPPP recognizes the pivotal role community plays in the life of a Catholic school leader. The ability to function in and nurture a truly collaborative and reflective community is vital for a Catholic school leader.

Embrace continuous improvement. The CPPP is a rigorous Catholic principal licensure program as a result of being grounded in the NSBECS. GCCE is continually engaged in evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the program. Based on faculty, candidate, coach and internship supervisor feedback from the first three cohorts to go through the program, several adjustments were identified to tighten up and streamline the coursework and field experiences in order to make the program more efficient and affordable (both time-wise and financially), without sacrificing the quality or comprehensive nature of the preparation.

Looking to the Future

In looking to the future, GCCE plans to broaden the reach of the CPPP by opening a new blended format Masters of Education in Catholic School Leadership, not tied to state licensure, but still grounded in the same rigorous standards and competencies. This will allow us to serve cohorts of leadership candidates from around the country.

Additionally, the CPPP faculty will also be developing a professional learning and support program tailored to meet the needs of novice Catholic school leaders (years 1-3) that is grounded in the ongoing development of the NSBECS and PSEL leadership standards and competencies.

Beyond the principalship, the GCCE is in the process of developing a NSBECS-grounded program to support the ongoing leadership development for school and system level leaders.

Finally, the GCCE will continue to collect data to study the effectiveness of the CPPP. Specific attention will be paid to questions around candidates' feelings of preparedness, system level leaders' perspectives on graduate's preparedness, the longevity of service within Catholic schools by our CPPP graduates and the impact our CPPP graduates have in their school or on the system as a transformative leader and agent of change.

In sum, by leveraging the power of the NSBECS to identify the Catholic Competencies for school leaders, the GCCE has focused the CPPP on developing the knowledge, skills and dispositions that differentiate Catholic school leaders from their secular counterparts, and on better preparing candidates for the complexities of Catholic school leadership. Using CPPP's Theory of Action, GCCE engages in a process of continuous improvement for the CPPP, ensuring the program's continued relevance and effectiveness in developing future leaders for Catholic schools.

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