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Introduction to the Focus Section: Implementing the NSBECS

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The articles in this Focus Section showcase the wide-ranging and impactful ways that practitioners at all levels have adopted and implemented the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NSBECS) to promote and improve PK-12 Catholic schools. Results from the 2015-2016 Catholic School Standards Study (CSSS) (see Ozar, Weitzel-O'Neill, Barton, Calteaux, & Yi, 2019, "Making a Difference: The Promise of Catholic School Standards" in this issue), showed that users report the NSBECS to be a vital framework for assessing and improving Catholic school effectiveness, and generally calling Catholic schools to greater excellence. The adoption strategies and implementation initiatives, programs and methods shared in these articles by professionals representing dioceses, universities, and accrediting entities, provide living examples of the reach and impact of the NSBECS.

As shown in the CSS Study, accreditation and school improvement planning represent two of the most cited purposes for using the NSBECS. In their article, "National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools: An Effective Tool for School Accreditation," Margaret Erich and Angelia Salas describe the shift to using the NSBECS for Catholic school accreditation by the Michigan Non-public School Accrediting Association, highlighting the successful work of the Diocese of Kalamazoo, MI. David Faber, in his article, "NSBECS Program Effectiveness Surveys: A Tool for Strategic Planning and School Improvement," details the impact that using the NSBECS surveys has had over time in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, MI. In "The National Catholic Standards as a Unifying Strategy," Henri Fortier shares the decision-making processes by which the Diocese of Orlando and the Florida Catholic Conference chose to revise their approaches to planning and accreditation by aligning with the NSBECS. Of note is the impact these decisions had on the Diocese of Orlando and across the state of Florida.

Superintendents from two different NCEA regions describe the ways in which they use the NSBECS to frame their work with Catholic schools. In “The NSBECS Impelling Action in South Carolina,” Sandra Leatherwood describes how the NSBECS gave the schools and the Catholic Schools Office tangible ways to build a common language and work toward common goals. This resulted in a strategic planning task force organized around the NSBECS Domains, a Diocesan School Advisory Council charged with oversight of the plan, diocesan-wide standing committees, and a Leadership Formation Program. In 2012, Kathleen Cepelka secured a commitment from Catholic schools and the Catholic Schools Office in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee to use the NSBECS as the overall framework for excellence. In “National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools: An Archdiocesan Framework for Excellence,” she shares how the Archdiocese of Milwaukee uses the NSBECS in a broad range of programs and initiatives including elementary school accreditation, exemplary school recognition, teacher effectiveness, mission and Catholic identity school self-assessment, the annual report, and principal formation around the NSBECS Defining Characteristics of Catholic schools.

Two of the articles focus on principal leadership development and evaluation. In their article, “The NSBECS: The Foundation for Effective Catholic Principal Preparation,” Debra Sullivan and Jorge Peña from the Greeley Center describe how the NSBECS frame and drive the Catholic Principal Preparation Program aligned to both the NSBECS and the Professional Standards for Educational leaders (PSEL), preparing graduates to hit the ground running as the instructional, managerial, and faith leader of their schools. Thomas Kiely, in his article, “Leadership by the Standards: Constructing a Principal Evaluation Protocol Based on the NSBECS”, recounts the recent collaborative process to develop principal evaluation that is both formative and summative, targeting areas of growth for the leader using NSBECS-aligned criteria in the individual school context.

Also in relation to leadership formation as well as innovative school design, Kristin Melley, in her article, “Sowing the NSBECS: Professional Development Approaches for Sustained Catholic School Change”, reflects on how the NSBECS frame and infuse two professional development programs of the Roche Center: the Emmaus Series, a 20-month professional development program offering school leaders executive-level training on Catholic school improvement; and the Two-Way Immersion Network for Catholic Schools (TWIN-CS) which guides school-level educator teams in creating and operating dual-language immersion schools.