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GCCE website:

<https://www.luc.edu/gcce/index.shtml>

For a deeper dive into
NSBECS 2.0, check out our
[webinar](#) on this topic.

NSBECS 2.0: Elevating How Effective Catholic Schools Deliver on Their Promise

By Debra Sullivan, Ed.D.

As a Catholic school principal, I was an early adopter of the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools* (NSBECS) in 2012, and over the last seven years, I have been an ardent proponent of them in my Greeley Center work supporting Catholic schools across the country. Given my strong investment in this work, I awaited the 2023 publication of the second edition, NSBECS 2.0, with great anticipation, and I'm thrilled to share that I am not disappointed. Before I get too far ahead of myself though, let me take a step back and share some context information about how the NSBECS 2.0 came to be.

Background

The NSBECS (2012) was developed “to provide a national articulation of defining characteristics and performance benchmarks for effectiveness that would enable all sponsors of Catholic elementary and secondary schools to assess, strengthen and sustain their operations” (National Catholic Educational Association [NCEA] NSBECS Advisory Council [NNAC], 2023, p.2). Upon publication in March 2012, a copy of the NSBECS was sent to all bishops, Catholic school

superintendents, Catholic elementary and secondary school principals and presidents, as well as presidents of Catholic institutions of higher education with a school of education program, ensuring broad accessibility.

During the first 10 years of schools and dioceses implementing the NSBECS (2012), data was collected via *The Catholic School Standards Study 2015-2016*, with the full report and analysis being published in *Making a Difference: The Promise of Catholic School Standards* by Ozar, L. A., Weitzel-O'Neill, P., et. al. (2019). “In short, the study found that ‘the NSBECS are reported by users to be a vital framework for assessing and improving Catholic school effectiveness, and generally calling Catholic schools to greater excellence.’” (NNAC, 2023, p.3).

It is important with all standards (especially those relating to education, to ensure their ongoing relevance), that a process for review and revision is implemented on a regular basis. As the NSBECS approached 10 years of implementation, it was time for this review-and-revision process to begin.



**National Standards
and Benchmarks**
for Effective Catholic
Elementary and
Secondary Schools

Second Edition

The NSBECS Revision Process

The NNAC is made up of Catholic school principals, superintendents, university faculty and NCEA staff. This body used a process of reflection and collaboration to review and revise the original NSBECS over the course of two-and-a-half years. The NNAC then solicited input and feedback from all NCEA school principals and superintendents over a six-week period in late 2022. The final draft of the second edition of the NSBECS was then reviewed and approved by Bishop Gerald Kicanas, chairman of the NCEA Board of Directors, and by Lincoln Snyder, NCEA President/CEO, and went to press in Spring 2023.

What are the notable changes in NSBECS 2.0?

While the overall framework of the NSBECS remains consistent in the revised version, there are some notable changes to highlight:

- The NSBECS 2.0 includes references to updated Church documents which convey a stronger call for Catholic schools to be agents of evangelization, with attention to issues of sustainability and inclusion. The following 3 benchmarks serve as examples:

2.7 The theory and practice of the Church's social teachings are essential elements of the curriculum.



Domain 1:
Mission and Catholic Identity

- 5.3 The governing body with the leader/leadership team systematizes the policies of the school's operations to ensure fidelity to mission; support for justice, equality, and equity; and continuity and sustainability through leadership successions.
- 6.7 The leader/leadership team works in collaboration with the governing body to provide an infrastructure of programs and services that ensures the operational vitality of the school, and upholds the dignity of the whole child.

The outdated reference to "21st century learning" has been removed and replaced with language that reflects current best practice, while still allowing for growth and evolution in practice.

For instance, the original NSBECS included the following benchmark:

- 7.3 *Curriculum and instruction for 21st century learning provide students with the knowledge, understanding and skills to become creative, reflective, literate, critical, and moral evaluators, problem solvers, decision makers, and socially responsible global citizens.*

Now, in NSBECS 2.0, this content has been divided into 3 benchmarks which identify multiple skills and behaviors that students will need to be successful post-graduation:

- 7.3 Classroom instruction actively engages and motivates each student to learn.
- 7.4 Curriculum and instruction provide students with the knowledge, experience, understanding, and skills to communicate, collaborate, and think critically and creatively for the common good.
- 7.5 Curriculum and instruction empower students to responsibly use and evaluate technology for research, computation, innovation, communication, and collaboration.

The addition of language that explicitly includes diverse learners aligns the NSBECS 2.0 with recent Church documents.

The term "diverse learners" includes students who have a variety of educational needs, such as: learning disorders, giftedness, ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, or sensory-processing issues.



Domain 2:
Governance and Leadership

The following benchmarks are prime examples of this language:

- 7.7 *To ensure the inclusion of and to meet the needs of diverse learners, classroom instruction utilizes current research in interventions, student accommodation, and curriculum modification.*
- 7.10 *For effective instruction, faculty and professional support staff demonstrate and continuously improve knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy that aligns to Catholic social teaching that supports the full dignity of each student.*

- 9.2 Guidance services, wellness programs, behavior management programs, and other services offer appropriate, mission-aligned support focused on the spiritual, social, emotional, academic, and physical well-being of students and their families.

NSBECS 2.0 promotes the deliberate integration of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) throughout the standards and benchmarks.

CST focuses on four pillars: dignity of the human person, subsidiarity, the common good, and solidarity. This aligns beautifully with the Catholic School commitment to educate the whole child through partnership with parents/guardians, creating a community. It provides formation centered on relationship with Jesus, and living out the Gospel values, to create a more just and equitable world.

- The creation of a fairly comprehensive glossary to ensure that all constituencies using the NSBECS 2.0 have a common understanding of the terms used therein, to enable more productive dialogue and goal-setting. This glossary helps make the document more user-friendly than ever before.

What hasn't changed in NSBECS 2.0?

The NSBECS remain organized over four domains: Academic Excellence, Mission and Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, and Operational Vitality. Following the NNAC's rigorous review and revision process, there are 3 notable elements of the NSBECS which stand unaltered. First, the *Defining Characteristics of Catholic Schools*, which serve as the foundation for the standards and benchmarks, and come right out of Church teachings, remain unchanged. The second element that

stays the same is the deliberate use of the term "parent/guardian" versus "family(ies)" throughout the benchmarks. This was an intentional coordination with church documents, as well as recognizing the specific relationship between the parent/guardian and the school. Finally, while there have been some streamlining edits within standards 11, 12 and 13, the overall focus of the standards continues intact.

Personally, I find the NSBECS 2.0 to be more clearly focused and user friendly, while raising the bar on expectations for what it means to be a truly effective Catholic school. The NSBECS 2.0 are standards for school effectiveness, rather than curriculum-based standards, and as such deliver on the "roadmap" referenced in the following quote:

"The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (2012, 2023) (NSBECS) was first developed and is now updated to complement, support, and reach beyond academic and curricula standards to provide schools a roadmap to faith-based education that is governed with integrity and academically, spiritually, and operationally rigorous" (NCEA NSBECS Advisory Council, 2023, p. 2).

Shortly after the publication of the NSBECS 2.0, I was invited to deliver a half-day professional development session to a small Catholic diocese's elementary and high school faculty and administrators, as well as leaders from the Catholic Schools Office. Some of the

schools had been early adopters of the NSBECS (2012); other schools had not done much in terms of implementation, and the teachers were unfamiliar with them.

One of the key objectives for the session was helping teachers to see what connection they have to all of the domains, not just the Academic Excellence domain. Over the course of the morning, participants engaged in table discussions, "unpacking" each standard, and making some preliminary self-assessments about how their school measures up to each benchmark. I heard numerous teachers expressing that this was a new perspective from which they had never considered their school, and that they felt empowered to better support their school's growth and sustainability. It was such a rewarding experience to hear the creative ideas and suggestions for growth being generated by the teachers, rather than imposed on them. The energy in the room was faith-filled, mission-driven and contagious. What a blessing it was to be among them!



**Domain 3:
Academic Excellence**

Catholic School Management Services

Assessment	Advancement	Planning	Leadership
LIA – Limited Institutional Assessment	Fundraising Development	Strategic Plans	Board Development
Audits	Alumni	Goal Setting	Governance
Evaluation	Communications	Mission, Vision, Values	Staff Coaching
Administrative Structure	Planned Giving	Programs	Training
Staffing	Marketing	Departments	Search
Programs	Enrollment	New Initiatives	Facilitation
Departments	Student Recruitment	Partnerships	Workshops
Satisfaction	Campaigns		Seminar Series
	Feasibility Studies		Conference Presentations

As I continue my work supporting the continuous spiritual, academic, and operational improvement in Catholic schools, the NSBECS 2.0 is providing the same solid framework, but with an elevated rigor more responsive to the current realities challenging Catholic schools. It endorses the strategic work of truly transformative leaders.



**Domain 4:
Operational Vitality**

Next Steps for Using NSBECS 2.0

1. Get copies of the NSBECS 2.0 for use at your school. You can order it on the NCEA website (www.NCEA.org) under the “Shop” section. NCEA members get a 1/3 discount on the books.

There is also a NSBECS page on the NCEA website, but it has not yet been updated to reflect the NSBECS 2.0. However, once this site is updated, it should be a great resource, with access to a digital version, as well as tools to support the use of the NSBECS 2.0. So keep checking it!

2. Share copies with specific stakeholders:

- School Board or Governing Body** – use NSBECS 2.0 as a framework to shape overall strategic planning and/or continuous improvement work.

b. **Faculty** – leverage NSBECS 2.0, the Mission and Catholic Identity domain and the Academic Excellence domain, to focus on continuous improvement work for the instructional program, including formation for the faculty, related to both Catholic identity and instructional effectiveness.

c. **Business Manager and Finance Council** – use NSBECS 2.0, the Operational Vitality domain, to focus on opportunities for growth within the business operations of the school.

d. **Parent Organization leaders** – use NSBECS 2.0, Standard 9, to focus on how parents/guardians can “partner with the school to enhance the educational experiences for the school community” (NCEA NSBECS Advisory Council, 2023, p. 27)

References

NNAC (Eds.) (2023). *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*, 2nd edition. Arlington, VA; NCEA.

Ozar, L. A., Weitzel-O’Neill, P., Barton, T., Calteaux, E., Hunter, C. J., & Yi, S. (2019). Making a Difference: The Promise of Catholic School Standards. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 22 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.2201102019>



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