

Statement to Principals about Assessment and Data Collection

The new strategic plan for Catholic schools will call for several actions that will strengthen our shared mission. Two of these “systems” approaches involve a more robust collection of data for the sake of planning and a common assessment of student learning. I want to explain briefly what is being proposed and to invite your cooperation in designing and implementing these actions.

Data for Planning: Presently, all schools annually submit data on their operations, such as enrollments, as requested by the NCEA, and those data are, in turn, provided to schools in the year they are preparing accreditation reports for the WCEA. The strategic plan is calling for a more robust collection of these data and others, which will serve as “indices of vitality” for the school, indicating how well the school is meeting the standards of our mission: Catholic identity, excellence in academics, accessibility, and wise stewardship. That is why, in addition to the data that OCS has requested in the past, principals will be asked for additional data in this year’s data collection cycle that will be useful for planning at the school, regional, and archdiocesan levels.

The plan calls for the indices to be collected along with the NCEA data and to be analyzed each year by the Office for Catholic Schools and the Archdiocesan School Board so that the state of each school can be ascertained quickly and, if necessary, assistance can be provided proactively. The intent is to keep our schools sustainable and open by spotting trends and proposing remedies, with assistance from the offices of the Archdiocese and the Fulcrum Foundation.

Principals or their delegates will be requested to submit accurate data in a timely manner and, if necessary, to respond to follow-up questions. I ask that principals assist us by shaping the indices of vitality, submitting data as requested, and using the indices to create their own tactical plans.

Assessment: Presently, 40 elementary schools participate in the ITBS consortium, which collects test scores on all subjects in grades 3-8. Thanks to those data, each principal and the teachers of each school can adduce objective reasons for the success of their curriculum and pedagogy and can detect subject areas or grade levels where more work could be done: for example, achieving sharper articulation between grades so that students are better prepared for advanced work or creating more challenging assignments, where students are already achieving above grade-level expectations. Similar assessment has been conducted in the high schools, through the collection of data from SAT tests and AP scores, showing that our students are well positioned for success in college. Assessment data can help each school make strategic choices for improving student learning and should be used with integrity for that purpose, not for evaluating teachers out of context or promoting a movement to “teach to the test.”

Assessment data can also help the Office for Catholic Schools and the Fulcrum Foundation to make a convincing case for the success of Catholic schools throughout western Washington. For

example, present data show that in all subjects and in all grades that are tested our students, on average, perform above grade level. This is impressive news and would be even more impressive if we could say that it is the average for all of our schools.

The strategic plan will call us to adopt a common test and a common testing period, and funding may have to be found to assist schools that cannot pay for the test. I ask that our principals work with the OCS to adopt the plan for assessment that will work best for promoting student learning and allow us to tell the story of academic excellence in our Catholic schools.