



Catholic Identity in our Schools

The standards for Catholic Identity for our schools are rooted in the ancient and sacred Tradition as handed down from the Magisterium. The following guidelines are to be considered minimum standards for maintaining Catholic Identity in our schools. They are not exhaustive and do not address diocesan or accreditation standards which are in addition to these standards. The standards should be reviewed at each accreditation study and any areas found deficient should be put on an improvement plan to be addressed *as a required action within the first year*. The areas covered are based on the Holy See's *Five Essential Marks of Catholic Schools*.

Mark I: Inspired by a Supernatural Vision

The Church sees education as a process that, in light of man's transcendent destiny, forms the whole child and seeks to fix his or her eyes on heaven. The specific purpose of a Catholic education is the formation of boys and girls who will be good citizens of this world, loving God and neighbor and enriching society with the leaven of the gospel, and who will also be citizens of the world to come, thus fulfilling their destiny to become saints.

Benchmark: The supernatural vision named requires that the mission and vision of the school be markedly Catholic and specific to the supernatural vision. Each school of the Diocese must have a Catholic mission statement. They must also have *either* a vision statement or a philosophy of learning. All statements must include a specific reference to Catholic identity (the name of the school is not sufficient). In addition, the statements should not use language that errs of the side of inclusivity so strongly that it waters down the Catholic and supernatural vision. "Universal" or "generic" Christian language is not sufficient. As the school is a mission of the Catholic Church, inclusivity to other faiths is not appropriate. Finally, either the Mission or Vision/Philosophy of Learning must include adherence to the larger Church's teaching. Such statements as "faithful to the Magisterium", "in union with the Catholic Church's teaching and Tradition" or "under the authority of the Bishop of Richmond and the Catholic Church" are appropriate to satisfy this requirement.

Benchmark: The entire faculty must understand that the salvation of souls is the first and primary reason for the operation of the school. Every faculty and staff member must see the Catholic mission as the reason. Faculty must adhere to the teaching of the Church and may not in any way publicly live or profess in such a way that is contrary to the Church's teaching in faith or morals.

Benchmark: It is a requirement of the National Directory for Catechesis of the USCCB, and the Bishop of Richmond that all schools be directed by Catholic administrators. In each school, all those who are hired to be on the administrative staff must be practicing Roman Catholics. Further, the chairs of all Advisory Boards or Boards of Limited Jurisdiction must be Catholic. At least 51% of the members of the Board must be Catholic. All teachers of religion/theology must be Catholic. Above grade 5, all teachers of science and history/social studies must be Catholic.¹

Mark II: Founded on a Christian Anthropology

Emphasis on the supernatural destiny of students brings with it a profound appreciation of the need to perfect children in all their dimensions as images of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). Catholic theology teaches that grace builds on nature. Because of this complementarity of the natural and the supernatural, Catholic educators should have a sound understanding of the human person that addresses the requirements of both the natural and the supernatural perfection of the children entrusted to their care.

Benchmark: As referenced above, Canon law repeatedly envisions that *all* teachers in a Catholic school be active and practicing Catholics. While this is not practically always possible, a greater emphasis on Catholic anthropology for at least the sciences and social sciences is required.

Benchmark: The Catholic school should be clearly established where the living presence of Jesus “the Master” is known to the wider community. The academic requirements of the Religion/Theology department must be on par with the academic requirements of all other departments. The academic faculty, instruction, testing, and expectations must never be watered down or limited in comparison to other subjects.

Benchmark: Every student must take religion/theology every year. The course must be daily (unless on block scheduling) and must be a full credit each semester. No student is exempt—including reclassified students, transfers, or non-Catholic students.

Mark III: Animated by Communion and Community

A third mark of catholicity is the emphasis on the school as a community—a community of persons and, even more to the point, “a genuine community of faith.” Such an emphasis proposes an alternative model for Catholic schools to that of an individualistic society. This communal dimension is rooted both in the social nature of the human person and in the reality of the Church as “the home and the school of communion.” That the Catholic school is an educational community “is one of the most enriching developments for the contemporary school.”

The Congregation's Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School sums up this new emphasis:

The declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* notes an important advance in the way a Catholic school is thought of:

¹Existing non-Catholic teachers in areas (other than Religion/Theology) need not be terminated or moved. However, moving forward, only practicing Catholics should be hired in these areas. If no qualified Catholic applicants come forward after a reasonable amount of searching, then permission from the Bishop of Richmond must be granted before a non-Catholic is hired in these areas. It is never appropriate for a non-Catholic to serve as an administrator (regardless of the title) or to teach Religion/Theology.

The transition from the school as an institution to the school as a community. This community dimension is, perhaps, one result of the new awareness of the Church's nature as developed by the Council. In the Council texts, the community dimension is primarily a theological concept rather than a sociological category.

Benchmark: Retreats to build Communion with Christ and the Church and community with each other and the faculty are essential to the life of the Catholic school. At the elementary level, there should be some time for reflection and prayer in an age-appropriate amount. At the middle school level, dynamic and engaging retreats should be offered for all grades, with great length in the upper middle-school grades. At the high school level, each student should have a minimum of one retreat per year with at least juniors and seniors having significant spiritual retreats of 2-3 days. The retreats must be centered on the Sacraments of the Church and significant in Catholic content and teaching. Faculty must have *at least one* annual retreat of at least one full school day.

Benchmark: Each school should work to develop connections with the local Catholic parishes. The Pastors of schools should be intimately involved in the running of the school and should oversee all actions of the Principal in union with the directive of the Office of Catholic Schools. In regional or high schools, at least one area pastor must serve on the Advisory School Board. Other priests should be frequently involved in the life of the schools. Connections with area parishes and pastors should be a regular and invested effort by each Principal.

Benchmark: It is important that the Catholic School be immediately recognizable as “other than” the world. From the moment that a student steps into the Catholic School, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment. To that end, the school must carry an authentic Catholic ethos. The school should be marked at its entrance with a statement about its Catholic mission, noting “Christ is the reason for this school”. The following are minimum standards to this benchmark: 1. The flag of the Holy See/Vatican City should fly underneath the American flag on the primary flagpole. 2. An image of the Pontiff and Bishop of Richmond should

be prominently displayed in the entranceway to the school or main lobby. 3. A cross with the crucified Christ should be prominently displayed in every public area of the school, every office, and in every classroom, gymnasium, and other public area. 4. Images of Our Lady and other Saints, including patrons and devotional statues should be present throughout the school. 5. Student artwork should frequently be religious and Catholic in nature.

Benchmark: In the elementary level, each classroom should have a sacred or set apart prayer space for students to engage with the faith and spend time in devotional prayer. In addition, a school Chapel (if not connected to a parish Church) should be established or built according to the norms of liturgical law.

Benchmark: All activities, sports, or extra-curricular activities of the school in order to build community must be seen as an extension of the work of the Church. To that end, they must be connected deeply to the building of virtue. Prayer must be at the center of all activity, including before and after every event. Field trips or excursions should reflect our Catholic connections with one another and the larger world.

Mark IV: Imbued with Catholic Worldview throughout its Curriculum

A fourth distinctive characteristic of Catholic schools is that the "spirit of Catholicism" should permeate the entire curriculum.

Catholic education is "intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person." An integral education aims to develop gradually every capability of every student: his or her intellectual, physical, psychological, moral, and religious capacities.

Benchmark: The curriculum in every subject and across all subjects reflects a Catholic worldview. All teachers agree to teach in conformity with Catholic teaching, regardless of the subject. Further, they work to integrate the faith into their subjects in any way possible, connecting faith and reason in creative but orthodox ways.

Benchmark: The entire school community is in union with the Church's teachings regarding faith and morals. In particular, the school is in union with the 7 Principles of Catholic Social Teaching; the first and paramount is the respect of every human life. The school supports and encourages an end to abortion and works to educate and teach the Church's teaching about the Gospel of Life. Students and faculty are activists for the cause of the vulnerable, with the Church's preferential option for the poor.

Mark V: Sustained by Gospel Witness

A final indicator of a school's authentic catholicity is the vital witness of its teachers and administrators. With them lies the primary responsibility for creating a Christian school climate, as individuals and as a community. Indeed, "it depends chiefly on them whether the Catholic school achieves its purpose." Consequently, the Holy See's documents pay a great deal of attention to the vocation of teachers and their participation in the Church's evangelizing mission.

Benchmark: The faculty and staff exhibit a Catholic way of life. They seek by their living to be examples of the faith. Each Catholic employee is active and involved in a parish, fulfills the precepts of the Faith, and encourages the community, especially the students, to live the faith and practice it truly.