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Partnerships with Catholic colleges support schools

Animating our faith and hope for our church and our future, Catholic higher education and P-12 Catholic school partnerships are growing in number and variety. New times call for new measures grounded in respect and recognition of our deep and lasting traditions. Recent events seem to show the way to new endeavors that will bring innovative means to cultivate formation in faith and heighten academic excellence for students in our nation's Catholic schools. Critically considering partnership formation, sustainability and impact creates excitement and spurs action.

Bishops' commitment

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has called Catholic higher education to prepare teachers and administrators for Catholic schools. In "Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium" (2005) the bishops state, "We must provide a sufficient number of programs of the highest quality to recruit and prepare our future diocesan and local school administrators and teachers so that they are knowledgeable in matters of our faith, are professionally prepared, and are committed to the Church."

The bishops also call for "ongoing faith formation and professional development programs...[that] will introduce new and effective initiatives, educational models and approaches while always maintaining a sound Catholic identity in our schools." In light of recent collaborative efforts among Catholic institutions of higher education, these requests are being answered.

Power of UCCE and CHESCS

Two organizations that have brought light to the possibilities for

Catholic higher education involvement include the Association of Catholic Leadership Programs (ACLP) and University Consortium for Catholic Education (UCCE). "Encouraged by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), the ACLP, founded in 1983, aggressively worked to develop, standardize, and support the preparation of school leaders through its collegial network" (Schuttloffel, 2010). In recent years ACLP became Catholic Higher Education Supporting Catholic Schools (CHESCS).

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The UCCE, an organization of teacher service programs at mostly Catholic colleges and universities, was formally named in 2004. The UCCE works hand-in-hand with the dioceses and archdioceses in which teachers are placed. Teachers from these programs serve in under-resourced Catholic schools, nurtured in communities through which teachers affirm each other in hope and in best practice teaching and learning methodology. These teachers are supported by college and university directors. Archdioceses and dioceses supply mentor teachers and housing for the participants in these programs (Hunt, Carper, 2012).

Programs, services, professional development and research

The literature highlights many activities, programs, services and

research activities that demonstrate cooperation and success between P-12 Catholic schools and Catholic colleges and universities. Whipp and Scanlan (2009) note the following:

Boston College and St. Columbkille School collaborate in matters of "leadership, finance, enrollment management, student development, curriculum, facilities management and religious formation" as it regards St. Columbkille School.

The Catholic University of America provides training for special education assistants to work in archdiocesan elementary and secondary schools to "improve service delivery options for students with special needs."

The University of Dayton hosts the Urban Child Development Resource Center, a team of mental health therapists and social workers who "address students' emotional, physical, and spiritual needs."

The University of Notre Dame and three Magnificat elementary schools are tackling together "comprehensive school reform that includes systematic data collection and analysis of student achievement, instructional coaching" and a host of other school improvement processes.

These represent a very small sample of the cooperative work of Catholic colleges and universities and P-12 Catholic schools.

Catholic Higher Education Collaborative (CHEC) and CHESCS

Two more recently founded organizations that promote partnerships and research are CHEC and CHESCS. In September 2007, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, along with the University of Notre Dame sponsored a conference on "Building a Movement and Strengthening a Field: The Revitaliza-

tion of American Catholic Education,” to address the future of Catholic K-12 education. As a follow-up to this conversation, eight Catholic colleges and universities formed a partnership to explore and develop collaborative initiatives in support of Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States. The founding members of this group were named the Catholic Higher Education Collaborative (CHEC). Founding members came to include other Catholic colleges and universities in subsequent meetings. (<http://soe.lum.edu>, 2013)

The third meeting of CHEC, held at Loyola University of Chicago, resulted in ground-breaking work that eventually led to the recently launched Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools.

National standards and resources

The recently launched *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* will be the foundation for accreditation of Catholic schools in a number of regions in the country. Rubrics have been developed to assist school leaders in assessing effectiveness to include mission and Catholic identity, academic excellence, and operational vitality (<http://www.catholic-schoolstandards.org/standards>).

Through the leadership of Dr. Lorraine Ozar and Dr. Patrica Weitzel-O’Neill, work among Catholic higher education institutions continues. At the October 2012 CACE meeting a number of college and university leaders committed to collaborating for purposes of better disseminating the standards and creating resources that will assist dioceses and schools in fully realizing the standards.

How to partner

With standards now in place and organizations to foster these partnerships some guidelines for formulating partnerships come to mind. The

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University of Dayton’s Fitz Center for Leadership in Community fosters collaboration between the university and community partners. Their work is not unlike ours as we forge solid relationships to move Catholic education forward. The Fitz Center is founded on many tenets of servant leadership. Consider the following as you are encouraged to work together, P-12 Catholic schools and Catholic colleges and universities.

When the Center undertakes initiatives with these partners, we do so with a shared notion of the desired outcome- sometimes articulated in writing. We also insist on mutuality.

Is there something in the initiative that will generate community (school or diocese) value? Is there something in the initiative that will generate university value? (Ferguson and Fitz, 2003)

Walls (2000) recommends the following and more from a servant-leadership perspective:

- “Build relationships at every opportunity. They could result in important collaborations later. Allow time for good ideas to emerge....
- Risk is inherent in collaboration. Without it, you can have no reward. It is not change people fear, it is loss. Meaningful communication is critical.
- Put hard stuff in writing early. Leave everything else as loose as you can.
- Differences are as important as similarities. They are the source of creativity, discovery and change. Invest the necessary time and energy to understand them.

- Crisis can make collaboration stronger. Remember the importance of facilitation.
- If in doubt, do it anyway. It will be worth the effort.”

Assessment

In light of the current world of data and funders’ quests for investment in “what works,” assessment of the outcomes of partnership is imperative. Whipp and Scanlan (2009) suggest scholarship that explores “the effectiveness of IHE/school partnerships and their impact on schooling for social justice in Catholic schools.” There are likely “implications both within the Catholic education community” and beyond.

With hope and faith our partnerships can and will bring faith, excellence, spirit, and a bright future to students in Catholic schools. ✚



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