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Editors' Comments

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EDITORS' COMMENTS

Over a year ago, the journal selected “assessment and accountability” for the December 2008 focus section. Catholic schools at all levels engage in many forms of assessment—assessing individual student performance, class performance, school-wide achievement, program effectiveness, personnel effectiveness, school effectiveness. Historically, the predominant purpose of assessment in Catholic schools has been to inform and elucidate rather than to provide a basis for high stakes comparisons and consequences.

When assessment considerations in Catholic schools shift into the more public, high stakes arena where stakeholders seek to compare schools with one another and/or with some standard or benchmark, thorny questions arise: What exactly should be measured and how? Can one validly measure such things as faith formation and values integration, which lie at the heart of Catholic school identity? If a school does not “measure up,” what are the consequences and enforced by whom? And, in addition for the journal, the question surfaces: How can, how should, and how does research inform and/or drive the assessment process?

Valid assessment presupposes sound data, accurate analysis, and verifiable conclusions as well as a firm understanding of the purpose and objectives of schools and assessment. In this issue, the journal begins what it hopes will be a significant and sustained conversation among scholars and practitioners about the collection and use of data to build knowledge, inform practice, and improve results in Catholic schools. An interview with Tony Bryk, president of the Carnegie Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and author of the seminal book *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, launches the conversation, outlining possible objectives and purposes of assessment and accountability as well as research in the field and touching upon salient topics presented throughout this issue of the journal. From there, Cardinal Grochowski, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, outlines the purpose of Catholic schools, grounded in an understanding of Canon law, in a recent speech at Fordham University, and provides a clear agenda for the goals of Catholic education. Noting the Roman Catholic Church’s celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1983, the publication of this document is both historical and sagacious and as such will be a catalyst to understanding the place and context of the Catholic school in our Church and society. This issue then explores assessment of a variety of components of Catholic schools, including new teacher induction (Shields), use of technology (Gibbs, Dosen, & Guerrero), and the academic effects of

Catholic and Protestant schools (Jeynes). In addition, the focus section features three additional articles that reflect the range and variety of data collection and use for informing practice in Catholic schools: a highly sophisticated statistical method for identifying “growth” in student achievement in Catholic elementary schools in Indianapolis (Costello, Elson, & Schacter); a narrative inquiry relating life experiences of disadvantaged female graduates of urban Catholic high schools to components of their Catholic school cultures (Merritt); and a content analysis assessing vision statements from a nationwide sample of Catholic colleges and universities (Abelman & Dalessandro).

Let the conversation continue.

Lorraine Ozar, Joseph M. O’Keefe, S.J., & Michael James, *Co-Editors*