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# Making a Difference: The Promise of Catholic School Standards

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# Making a Difference: The Promise of Catholic School Standards

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## Making a Difference: The Promise of Catholic School Standards

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*The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS) were published in 2012 to serve as both a guide and assessment tool for PK-12 Catholic school effectiveness and sustainability. The NSBECS rest on the conviction that adhering to these standards and benchmarks with fidelity will result in highly effective Catholic schools. The present study began the work of examining the use and impact of the NSBECS through two national surveys: Survey 1 (2015) focused on the scope of NSBECS implementation: who has been adopting/implementing the NSBECS and why. Survey 2 (2016) sought to better understand circumstances of implementation: how stakeholders are adopting/implementing NSBECS and with what success. Results and analysis of both surveys demonstrated that users report the NSBECS to be a vital framework for assessing and improving Catholic school effectiveness, and generally calling Catholic schools to greater excellence. Equally important is the scholarly significance of recognizing the use and impact of comprehensive school effectiveness standards such as the NSBECS. This study provides the starting point and new direction for all sectors of education as educators understand the critical impact of such standards, and emphasize the importance of adopting a systemic school wide approach to school improvement and sustainability.*

### Keywords

Catholic school standards, school effectiveness standards, standards-based school improvement

**T**his paper reports the results of the Catholic School Standards Study (CSSS) Phase I, the first stage of a proposed three-stage, mixed methods study designed to capture systematic data from stakeholders on implementation of the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012), (NSBECS). The goal of CSSS Phase I, conducted between January 2015 and December 2016,

was to provide a descriptive analysis of the scope, contexts, and procedures associated with the implementation of the NSBECS by various early adopter stakeholders across the United States. In the short term, this Phase 1 data can inform other schools and dioceses regarding strategies perceived to be effective by respondents for the adoption and implementation of the NSBECS. In the longer term, Phase 1 data will inform the research design and targeted populations for projected Phase 2 in-depth interviews and Phase 3 on-site observations and evidence gathering. By means of this three-phase approach, the researchers will use Phase 1 descriptive data to identify representative topics of inquiry and loci of practices to be examined and understood more fully through in-depth interviews; data from Phase 2 interviews will in turn lead to Phase 3, focused on-site observations and evidence gathering through which researchers can begin to examine the relationships between the implementation of the NSBECS and school outcomes measures of success such as student achievement, enrollment, and financial vitality.<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012), referred to throughout as the NSBECS, was developed over a two-year period (2010-2012) by a team of experts representing Catholic higher education and PK-12 Catholic school practitioners, with the incorporation of formal feedback from additional practitioners in the field, pastors and Bishops.<sup>2</sup> The NSBECS are based on Nine Defining Characteristics, which summarize Church teaching regarding the theology grounding Catholic identity present in Catholic schools. Thirteen Standards in four domains (Mission and Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality), describe policies, programs, structures, and processes expected to be present in effective Catholic schools; 70 Benchmarks provide observable, measurable descriptors for each standard. As school effectiveness standards for Catholic schools, the NSBECS provides guidelines and a common assessment framework that includes criteria unique to Catholic school mission and identity, as well as widely accepted research-based school effectiveness criteria. The NSBECS is intended to serve as a blueprint and a tool for Catholic School

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1 Phases 2 and 3 are not yet underway, contingent on funding.

2 This included meeting with Superintendents at the CACE conference, 2010 and 2011 and principals and pastors at the NCEA Convention 2011, as well as mailing to 30 Bishops and the NCEA department leaders and advisory committees.

stakeholders to use for assessment, accountability, accreditation, and action, toward the growth of highly effective Catholic schools that are sustainable educational institutions immersed in Catholic culture.

The structure of the NSBECS lends itself directly to implementation in schools and as such was adopted by some schools and dioceses as early as 2012 immediately after release. Users were able to engage in immediate data collection, utilizing the benchmark rubrics (available at [www.catholicschoolstandards.org](http://www.catholicschoolstandards.org)) to provide universal rules for the ratings of evidence and the reporting of their perceptions regarding the outcomes of their local implementation. To the extent that these early perceived outcomes are confirmed by users' descriptive reports of outcomes over time from many schools, the results of this study will provide solid information and guidance on how the Catholic educational community can use NSBECS assessments to answer the critical questions such as: What is the Catholic identity of this school and the schools in the diocese? What is the current school performance in each domain? How does this school's performance compare to performance of schools with similar demographics? What actions will likely take the school to the next level of effectiveness and excellence? What is the school's capacity to support and implement proposed changes/actions to benefit students and families?

The NSBECS are based on the conviction that adhering to these standards and benchmarks with fidelity will result in highly effective Catholic schools, in which the standards and benchmarks working together seamlessly are owned, understood, and operationalized. In the years since publication and dissemination of the NSBECS, many stakeholders (including schools, dioceses, universities, funders, and accrediting groups across the country) have offered unsolicited reports, narratives, and other evidence of widespread acceptance and usage. For there to be a more robust adoption and implementation of the NSBECS and for the NSBECS to be recognized and function as an effective data-generating framework for PK-12 Catholic school accountability and improvement, it is necessary to move beyond unsolicited user evidence and systematically collect and analyze data about adoption and implementation of the NSBECS. It is important to study and understand—beginning with early adopters—how these implementation processes work as well as to study the successes associated with varying implementations.

### Review of Literature

Standards-based reforms have defined educational initiatives in recent years. The foundation of the standards-based reform movement rests on a recognition among leading educators, researchers, and policymakers that clearly defined standards have the capacity to drive a school's actions (Finn, Liam, & Petrilli, 2006; Vaughn, 2002). The educational system has evolved such that the process of defining expectations, while not sufficient to improve educational outcomes on its own, is a critical starting point to producing desired results (Bulkley, Christman, Goertz, & Lawrence, 2010; Quay, 2010).

Research concerning implementation of standards in school improvement efforts is significant as it provides guidance for schools, informing school leaders of the variables they should target to increase their success. The research reviewed for the current study highlighted three factors found in the broad literature regarding standards-based school reform that schools can incorporate into their practices and which research shows have enabled standards-based reform efforts to be successful: (a) school leadership and internal management, (b) frequent measurement and data-based decision-making, and (c) educators' buy-in and self-efficacy. The researchers for this study found these factors, described below, to be salient for survey construction and analysis of participants' responses in the CSSS Phase I.

#### **Factor One: School Leadership and Internal Management**

Mobilizing a school to meet high expectations set by challenging standards is no easy task, and it begins with strong leadership and internal management (Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Mintrop & MacLellen, 2002). If schools are to set high expectations for students, these must carry throughout the system, with teachers modeling high expectations for students and administrators modeling high expectations for teachers and holding them accountable (Au & Boyd, 2013; Au & Valencia, 2010; Blanc, Christman, Liu, Mitchell, & Bulkley, 2010; Knapp & Feldman, 2012). Furthermore, in a standards-driven school, school leaders are responsible for ensuring that classroom activity is aligned to shared external standards rather than to teachers' particular standards only (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007). This alignment is critical to success. (Lee, Liu, Amo, & Wang, 2014).

#### **Factor Two: Frequent Measurement and Data-based Decision-Making**

Collecting, analyzing, and using data regarding performance against standards is essential to enabling schools to meet those standards (Lawrenz, 2005;

Neher & Plourde, 2012). While punitive accountability measures associated with high-stakes tests may threaten struggling schools, these tests can serve formative purposes as well: successful schools value the large quantity of data they provide for planning instruction and professional development sessions (Blanc et al., 2010; Stecher & Borko, 2002). Schools that meet the expectations set by external standards monitor their progress internally more often than they are evaluated externally (Au & Valencia, 2010; Bulkley et al., 2010).

### **Factor Three: Educators' Buy-in and Self-Efficacy**

Implementation is the necessary link between standards and results (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2012). The people responsible for implementation at a school must exhibit shared goals and a shared sense of accountability to attain those goals (Mitchell, 1997; Murphy, 2013). In fact, the cohesion of the professional learning community appears to be an even bigger driver of student achievement than any particular program or initiative (Au & Valencia, 2010). This underscores the importance of school leadership in aligning individual educators' expectations and personal accountability with externally imposed expectations (Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Lee et al., 2014).

The ability of existing academic standards to influence how schools function—and, with the right practices, the success they achieve—indicates that implementing standards for school effectiveness is a promising path. However, the authors have also found that school effectiveness measures and educational standards currently in use over-emphasize measures of academic achievement (Morley & Rasool, 1999; Normand, 2008; Teddie & Reynolds, 2000), failing to delve deeper into what exactly quality education looks like beyond standardized test scores (Farrington et al., 2012; Fitzgibbon, 1996; Kyriakides & Creemers, 2008; Silver, 1994; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006).

Since Catholic schools are tasked with educating the whole student, an effective Catholic school must achieve outcomes for its students that reach beyond academic achievement alone. Research surrounding nonacademic measures of student success and standards in nonacademic domains is indeed limited at the present, although there is growing support within the field of education for standards in nonacademic domains such as social and emotional learning (Gordon, Ji, Mulhall, Shaw, & Weissberg, 2011; Zinsler, Weissberg, & Dusenbury, 2013). While these are not fully aligned to the desired outcomes of Catholic schools, they represent an expanding of educators' priorities and a previously ignored direction for standards in education.

At the same time, even with a more inclusive approach to standards embodied in trends favoring the education of the child beyond academics, standards that present target outcomes only for students also fall short of the needs of Catholic schools. The Catholic identity of Catholic schools, expressed in the Defining Characteristics of the NSBECS and rooted in the theology which informs and grounds Church teachings on Catholic education must be measured not only by religious education, faith formation, and academic excellence, but also by the nature and quality of the school culture. This is a culture informed by the mission and shaped by practices manifested in its curriculum and instruction, board recruitment and formation, human resource policies, transparency of program and student evaluation, careful and competent stewardship of resources, financial planning, and collaboration across all sectors. The researchers found only one example of more comprehensive school effectiveness standards that included outcomes for students' academic progress as well as outcomes for school governance and finance. This framework published by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA, 2013) is more closely aligned to the structure of the NSBECS, yet there is no current research analyzing or documenting the effectiveness and utility of the charter school Core Performance Framework and Guidance. The researchers were not able to find outcome research for comprehensive school effectiveness standards, although some researchers have argued that more comprehensive standards are needed to grasp the broader reality of effective schools (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Van Hutte & Van Maele, 2010; 2011; Farrington et al., 2012). The review of literature on standards-based school reform makes it clear that research on non-academic standards for schools is extremely limited, and that no set of standards, apart from the NSBECS, exists which covers all of the domains that address the characteristics which comprise an effective Catholic school.

The NSBECS reaches beyond academic and curricula standards to provide schools a roadmap to faith-based education that is academically, spiritually, and operationally rigorous. In particular, the authors believe that the evidence found in the broader literature supporting the use of standards, when combined with the evidence regarding the involvement of strong internal management and leadership, offer important rationale and motivation for Catholic School leaders in support of the adoption and implementation of comprehensive standards such as the NSBECS. It is by this implementation of standards that schools will be able to maintain consistent, high expectations.



### **Methodology**

The Catholic School Standard Study (CSSS) proposal consisted of three phases. This report is based on Phase 1 only, and provides analyses of individual participants' reported perceptions and experiences of the scope, contexts, and methods associated with the adoption and implementation of the NSBECS across the United States. Participants represented Catholic school stakeholders. Initiated in January 2015, CSSS Phase 1 was executed over two years and featured two web-based national surveys that used three different nonprobability survey techniques. The analysis focused on both a descriptive summary presented with frequencies, percentages, and tables and inferential nonparametric statistical tests. The inferential analyses were designed to test relational assumptions made by the researchers at the start of the inquiry, which influenced choice of questions. (For example: Is perceived impact, or levels of implementation related to the length of time the NSBECS have been used? Or, are the perceived outcomes different when controlled for reported purpose of use?)

#### **Purpose for Survey 1**

The purpose of Survey 1 was to provide an informative analysis of who, among Catholic school stakeholders, is adopting and implementing the NSBECS, to what extent, and why. The relationships between reported perceptions regarding length of use, levels of implementation and understanding, and outcomes were also examined.

#### **Purpose for Survey 2**

Survey 2 sought to provide data for a more focused analysis of the following: the processes for implementation of the NSBECS as reported by the users; reported outcomes described as significant; and the reported context and cultural perspectives perceived to be underlying successful adoption. In Survey 2, the researchers sought to answer two questions: (a) Do NSBECS users perceive that the implementation of the NSBECS support desired positive outcomes for schools that use them? And, (b) Do users report that the processes and practices used in implementation of the NSBECS affect those outcomes? Survey 2 allowed participants to describe in their own words what they did to implement the NSBECS, whom they involved, what processes they used, and what they understood to constitute success. Survey 2 also provided questions with drop-down choices, for respondents to identify important factors associated with successful NSBECS implementation outcomes as defined by the users.

### **Data Sources and Demographics for Surveys 1 and 2**

The research team constructed two inclusive national surveys with built-in logic sequences that delivered targeted questions to different respondent groups based on their answers. Surveys 1 and 2 were built and distributed through Qualtrics, which is a web-based survey tool designed to conduct survey research, evaluations, and other data collection activities.

#### **Survey 1 Sample**

Survey 1 occurred from June to October 2015, approximately three years after the NSBECS were introduced to the community in March 2012. Two nonprobability sampling techniques were employed, snowball sampling and convenience sampling. Both techniques allow the researchers to select the respondent pool. The initial responders were identified by the research team and a database was constructed to include: those managing Catholic schools at the diocesan level, those engaged in training and professional development for Catholic school personnel, those working in financial oversight of Catholic schools, and those engaged in accreditation or assessment of Catholic schools.

Employing a snowball sampling technique (a method for recruiting hard-to-reach populations), a target population was selected to serve as the initial respondents for Survey 1. This population included key leaders who manage Catholic education at the (arch)diocesan level (including Secretaries, Superintendents, and Catholic education directors). These initial recipients were invited to send the link to the survey to school level leaders, board chairs and pastors, as these populations' email addresses were not possible to access. School level leaders (principals, presidents and head of schools) were also invited to share the link to the survey with pastors and board chairs. Employing a simple convenience sampling technique, the other Catholic school stakeholders, identified as leaders of school finance, accrediting and other agencies, and university programs received the same survey. At the close of the on-line survey, 1,141 survey links were sent out and 939 were completed (response rate: 82%), yielding 908 valid cases for Survey 1 analysis.

#### **Survey 2 Sample**

Survey 2 employed a nonprobability volunteer survey technique. Respondents to Survey 1 were invited to volunteer to participate in Survey 2. Survey 2 was sent to 291 volunteers from Survey 1 employing Qualtrics, the same on-line web delivery method as Survey 1. From May to July 2016, 291 survey

links were mailed and 122 were completed (response rate: 42%), yielding 116 valid cases for Survey 2.

Unsurprisingly, most participants in both surveys work in or with schools; primarily, these individuals included principals/presidents, school administrators and superintendents/ secretaries/education directors. The next largest group of participants in both surveys were those who provide training and professional development for schools, most notably university practitioners and diocesan office staff. The populations for Surveys 1 and 2 were closely matched by work role classifications. (See Table 1). Because the majority of participants work directly with PK-12 Catholic schools, the researchers concluded that the observations and responses generated by these surveys represent respondent perceptions based on experiences in Catholic PK-12 schools.

### Survey Respondents

Table 1 summarizes the roles within K-12 Catholic education held by survey respondents.

Table 1  
*Participants' Primary Work with K-12 Catholic Schools*

Work Role	Survey 1 (N=908)		Survey 2 (N=116)	
	n	%	n	%
Working with/for schools	700	77.0	92	79.3
Providing education/training for school personnel	104	11.4	17	14.6
Providing financial/resource support for schools	41	4.5	3	2.6
Involved in assessment for schools	34	3.7	4	3.4
Missing	29	3.2	0	0.0

CSSS Survey 1 and 2 participants work in all regions of the United States and its territories. For both surveys, more participants worked in the NCEA designated Great Lakes and West/Far West regions than in other areas—438 out of 908 (48%) in Survey 1 and 59 out of 116 (51%) in Survey 2.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the participants were overall a professionally mature group. The majority of participants for both surveys—73% of Survey 1 participants and 87% of Survey 2 participants—have been professionally associated with Catholic schools for 11 years or more. (See Table 2).

3 These two NCEA regions host the greatest number of schools when compared to other regions.

Table 2  
*Years Professionally Associated with K-12 Catholic Schools*

Years	Survey 1 (N=908)		Survey 2 (N=116)	
	n	%	n	%
0-10 years	242	26.6	15	12.9
11-20 years	245	26.9	29	25.0
21 years or more	420	46.2	72	62.0
Missing	1	<1.0		

The profile of respondents in Survey 2 is similar to the profile of those who participated in Survey 1. Although the Survey 2 sample is much smaller than the Survey 1 sample, the similarity of their respective demographic profiles strongly suggests that Survey 2 respondents closely represent the Survey 1 population.

### Analysis and Results

Analysis of survey data can be both descriptive and inferential. The reported results are primarily descriptive, with the presentation of frequencies and percentages. Inferential nonparametric statistics are applied to assess the strength of relationships between variables, the research team assumed to be correlated at the outset, such as the length of adoption and the levels of implementation. This will be evident in the reported results for both Survey 1 and 2.

### Survey 1 Results

Selected results from Survey 1 are shared to provide background and context for the presentation and discussion of Survey 2 results. Survey 1 yielded 908 respondents, and 79% (717) know about the NSBECS; among these 717 respondents, 78% (557) use the NSBECS. In other words, 61.3% of the 908 Survey 1 respondents reported knowing and using the NSBECS. This specific group of respondents became the focus of Survey 1 analysis (N=557) and are referred to as the users throughout the paper.

### Areas of Use

For those who reported that they know and use the standards (N=557), the users, the most often reported areas of use were Accreditation 62.7% (349), Planning 61.9% (345) and Accountability 52.4% (292) followed by

Professional Development 47.9% (267), Guidelines 44.2% (246), and School-Wide Assessment 37.3% (208). See Table 3 for the complete list of reported areas of use, ordered by frequency.

Table 3  
*Frequency Rank of Areas of Use for the NSBECS (N=557)*

Area of Use	n	% of Users
Accreditation	349	62.7
Planning	345	61.9
Accountability	292	52.4
Professional Development	267	47.9
Guidelines	246	44.2
School-Wide Assessment	208	37.3
Reference	178	31.9
Policy Development	165	29.6
Personnel Evaluation	143	25.7
Program/Course Design	143	25.7
Program Assessment	138	24.8
Training	135	24.2
Marketing	121	21.7
Resources Development	78	14.0
Advocacy	70	12.6
Research	68	12.2
Fund Raising	40	7.2
Other	26	4.7
Missing	7	1.3

*Note.* Respondents were able to select more than one area of use if applicable.

### Levels of Implementation

Regarding levels of implementation, 39.5% (220) of the 557 users reported partial implementation of the NSBECS (implementing in some areas) and 28.9% (161) reported full implementation of the NSBECS (implementing across all areas) within their organizations; another 29.3% (163) were just getting started with implementation. (See Table 4).

Table 4  
*Levels of Implementation of the NSBECS (N=557)*

Level of NSBECS Implementation	n	%
Just started implementation	163	29.3
Implementing in some areas	220	39.5
Implementing across all areas	161	28.9
Missing	13	2.3
Total	557	100.0

Users reported working with the NSBECS across all four domains. (See Table 5). The highest percent of users reporting extensive use appear in Domain I, *Mission and Catholic Identity* (48%) and Domain III, *Academic Excellence* (40%). The highest percent of users reporting partial use occur in Domain II, *Governance and Leadership* (52%) and Domain IV, *Operational Vitality* (50%).

Table 5  
*Levels of Implementation of the NSBECS by Domain (N=557)*

Domain	Not at All		Minimally (Just started)		Partially (In some areas)		Extensively (Across all areas)		Missing n
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
I. Mission & Catholic Identity	4	0.7	57	10.2	212	38.0	268	48.1	16
II. Governance & Leadership	13	2.3	98	17.6	288	51.7	140	25.1	18
III. Academic Excellence	6	1.0	69	12.4	245	43.9	223	40.0	14
IV. Operational Vitality	16	2.8	94	16.9	279	50.0	151	27.1	17

### **Length of Adoption**

At the time of Survey 1, the length of NSBECS adoption varied from 4 to 1 years among the 557 users. Among these users, 63% (351) reported they began to use the NSBECS before 2014; while 35% (193) reported they began to use the NSBECS in 2014 or later. Chi-square test ( $p < .01$ ) and Gamma coefficient (.46,  $p < .01$ )<sup>4</sup> showed that the length of adoption is significantly and positively associated with the level of implementation. In other words, earlier adopters who began to use the NSBECS before 2014 report using the NSBECS more extensively than more recent adopters. Interestingly, this is true across all domains.

### **Perceived Impact**

A majority of NSBECS users in Survey 1, 53% (295 of 557), reported a small amount of impact, (a little) while 37% (205) reported a lot of impact and 7% (37) reported extensive impact. Correlational analysis looked at the relationship of perceived impact and length of adoption. Chi-square test ( $p < .01$ ) and Gamma coefficient (.55,  $p < .01$ ) showed that the length of adoption is also significantly and positively associated with users' perceived impact of the NSBECS on their practices.

### **Level of Understanding**

Other relationships were examined including levels of understanding and levels of implementation, and levels of understanding and levels of impact. Interestingly, the 557 users' self-reported level of understanding of the Standards are positively associated with the level of implementation in their organizations (Gamma = .47,  $p < .01$ ). The self-reported level of understanding of the NSBECS is also positively associated with the 557 users' perceived impact of the NSBECS on practice (Gamma = .55,  $p < .01$ ). In summary, the better the NSBECS are understood, the more they are used; and the more they are used (across more programs and/or for longer periods of time), the greater the reported impact on users' practices.

Overall survey 1 results demonstrated that the NSBECS were being used and implementation was being reported across all domains, with Domain I:

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4 Chi-square test is a nonparametric statistic used to measure the strength of association for nominal level data from one sample. Gamma coefficient (Goodman and Kruskal's Gamma) is a nonparametric statistic used to measure the strength of the association between two ordinal variables. Thus, the gamma coefficient can be used for data consisting of respondents' reported ranking of perceptions.

Mission and Catholic Identity and Domain III: Academic Excellence the most frequently used. Also, there are apparent links between length of use, levels of implementation, understanding and perceived impact by the users. These findings set the stage for the generation of survey 2 and the analysis of survey 2 data.

### Survey 2 Results

Survey 2 reports the results of 116 respondents who volunteered from survey 1. Survey 2 sought out information to describe and analyze the implementation processes and outcomes as they were perceived and understood by the users. Survey 2 provided respondents questions which allowed respondents to describe processes and perceptions in their own words. These answers provided interesting data.

#### Primary Purposes/Areas of Use

In Survey 2, each of the 116 participants was directed to identify only one primary purpose for the implementation of the NSBECS and then asked to respond to the remainder of the survey based on the identified purpose. The top four areas of use—Accreditation, Accountability, Guidelines/References, and Planning—accounted for 83% of the Survey 2 participants' identified purposes for adopting and implementing the NSBECS. (See Table 6). These four areas represent the same top areas of use reported by a sub-population from Survey 1 which included superintendents, principals, and presidents.

Table 6  
*Primary Purposes for Implementing the NSBECS (N=116)*

Primary Area of Use	Frequency	%
Accreditation	40	34.5
Guidelines/ References	21	18.1
Accountability	18	15.5
Planning	17	14.7
Professional Development/ Training	11	9.5
Assessment	4	3.4
Other	3	2.6
Course Design	2	1.7
Total	116	100.0



### Perceived Success of Implementation

Of the 116 respondents 17% (20) rated their NSBECS implementation process as “highly successful,” and an additional 49% (57) reported “successful”. This group, 66% (77) of 116 respondents are referred to in this paper as the “most successful” users. An additional 29% (34) of respondents believed their implementation process was “somewhat successful,” and only one respondent identified their process as “not successful.” (See Table 7).

Table 7

*Perception of the Overall Success of the Implementation of the Standards (N=116)*

Overall Success	Frequency	%
Highly Successful	20	17.2
Successful	57	49.1
Somewhat Successful	34	29.3
Not Successful	1	0.9
Missing	4	3.4
Total	116	100.0

### Implementation Steps

In an open-ended question, participants identified the major implementation steps (up to 10) utilized for the adoption and implementation of the NSBECS at their institution/diocese. The first four steps reported by participants were classified according to these dominant themes. (See Table 8).

Table 8

*Themes Reported in Users' Initial Four Implementation Steps*

Theme	Description
Introduce/Study	Becoming familiar with the standards
Align - Accreditation	Comparing the NSBECS to other standards and/or evaluating the NSBECS for accreditation purposes
Self-Assessment	Using surveys or rating scales to determine current school functioning in relation to the standards
Planning	Creating goals or plans related to the standards

### Stakeholder Involvement in Implementation

Regardless of the theme associated with the steps, there appears to be a pattern of stakeholder involvement. Principals and superintendents have more or less the same rate of involvement in Step 1 (58% and 53% respectively). In Step 2, principals' involvement clearly exceeded superintendents' (62% to 53%), and in Step 3, principals' and teachers' involvement was highest (59% and 46%) while superintendents' rates of involvement decreased (35%). Board members were involved at every step, as were teachers, principals, and superintendents. Both parents and accreditation agencies/university personnel were more often involved in the first few steps (being informed and taking surveys) and then not very involved in later steps. Parishioners, alums, and students were also occasionally involved in the implementation process.

### Implementation Practices

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which each of the nine listed expected practices, based on the literature, provided in Survey 2 contributed to their implementation process. The most commonly cited practice that respondents reported that made a major contribution was "demonstrated personal commitment of the leader," followed by "received commitment from (arch)diocesan leaders." Only those who implemented the NSBECS for Guidelines/References did not cite "received commitment from (arch) diocesan leaders" among their top five practices. A comparison to note are the four top practice choices for those users who are self-described as "most successful" when compared to the total population. The ranking of these practices is similar, but stronger for those self-described as most successful (see Table 9). This group of respondents reported "establishing faculty and staff buy-in," "received commitment from (arch)diocesan leaders," "fostered respectful engagement for relevant stakeholders," and "used data/evidence to measure outcomes and to make decisions" as the major components of implementation more often than the overall Survey 2 population. The practice reported to have contributed the least to implementation was "established parent and community buy-in." Judging from this and other data gathered in Survey 2, parent/community involvement has not been a dominant practice thus far; when it occurs, it most often takes the form of parent surveys and information meetings and/or communication. These findings are consistent with the wider body of research referred to earlier in the review of literature (e.g. Hamilton, Stecher & Yuan, 2012; Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Mintrop & MacLellen, 2002; Neher & Plourde, 2012; Lawrenz, 2005) on the factors that

contribute to the successful implementation of standards. In short, the top three practices for the implementation of the NSBECS are the same as those reported in the literature. (See Table 9).

Table 9  
*Practices Involved in Implementation Among Survey 2 Participants (N=116)*

Practice	Major Component		Moderate Component	
	% Total Population (N=116)	% "Most Successful" Users (N=77)	% Total Population (N=116)	% "Most Successful" Users (N=77)
Demonstrated personal commitment of the leader to implementing the standards	67	69	24	25
Received commitment from (arch)diocesan leaders	53	59	22	18
Establishing faculty and staff buy-in	48	55	34	31
Used data/evidence to measure outcomes and make decisions	43	46	40	39
Provided training/ professional development to faculty and staff	41	43	43	42
Fostered respectful engagement for relevant stakeholders	37	42	48	49
Provided regular feedback to personnel involved	35	34	36	43
Established parent and community buy-in	15	17	35	40

#### **Further Analysis of Selected Implementation Practices Reported by Users Establishing Faculty/Staff Buy-In**

Participants, who reported that establishing buy-in at the school level was a major component of their implementation process (48% of all 116

respondents), were asked how they achieved this buy-in from faculty and staff<sup>5</sup>. Over half, 53% (62 of 116) reported that “administrator and/or diocesan presentations were made about the Standards.” Additionally, 47% (55 of 116) reported “accreditation protocols were adopted which required the use of the Standards,” and 39% (45 of 116) reported “key staff learned about the Standards and influenced others.” Further analysis showed that these strategies are present when data is sorted by all primary purposes for implementation.

### **Data Collection to Monitor Implementation Outcomes as Related to Purpose**

Researchers looked at how often users reported data collection to monitor outcomes, finding 43% of all 116 respondents reported this as a major component. Data was examined to uncover potential differences when sorted by purposes for implementation. Data, monitoring outcomes, appears to be collected at least once per year for most users implementing the NSBECS for Accountability, 83% (15 of 18) and Accreditation, 73% (29 of 40). This data collection practice is less common for those implementing the NSBECS for Guidelines/ References, 43% (9 of 21) and Planning, 39% (10 of 17). It appears that this practice is more prevalent among those who implement the standards for accountability and accreditation.

### **Professional Development Formats and Topics**

Professional development was reported as a major step by 41% of all respondents. The most common formats for professional development related to NSBECS implementation included “school leadership supported peer/group training within school,” 42% (49 of 116), “participants attended training at off-site conferences/workshops,” 29% (34 of 116), and “professional/consultant provided one- day or less training on site,” 23% (27 of 116). When asked what topics were used for professional development, respondents most often cited “school improvement planning,” 52% (60 of 116), “developing a common understanding of the NSBECS,” 50% (58 of 116), and “using the benchmark rubrics to assess school performance,” 47% (55 of 116). This was true when looked at across all areas of use. Data collection appeared most frequently as a topic for professional development for those whose purpose for implemen-

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5 For the responses related to questions about Achieving Buy-In, Parent/Community Involvement, Professional Development Formats and Topics, and Tools, respondents were able to “select all that apply” from choices listed.

tation was Accountability 44% (8 of 18), and for those whose purpose was Accreditation 52.5% (21 of 40).

### **Parent/Community Involvement Strategies**

When asked to report how parents/community were involved in the implementation process, 49% (57 of 116) of respondents reported “surveys were sent to parents/community,” and 36% (42 of 116) reported “explanation of the NSBECS and their use was given to parents/community.” Only 20% (23 of 116) reported that parents/community were invited to participate in focus groups and/or to serve on implementation committees. A small proportion, 6% (7 of 116) reported that “no attempt was made to involve parents/community” and 20% (23 of 116) believed the question was not applicable to their implementation process. Currently, it appears that parent involvement is not an important step in the implementation of the NSBECS, and when it occurs, participation consists of informing parents and asking for input, through surveys.

### **Implementation Outcomes by Domain**

Results from the 116 respondents indicate that when schools and dioceses use the NSBECS, they report positive outcomes including increased commitment to mission, increased commitment to continuous improvement, increased collaboration, and improved use of best practices. The top outcomes reported for each domain of the NSBECS are described in Table 10.

In Domain I, mission is being recognized as central to the work of the community and more importantly mission understanding is viewed as improving. This is essential for a school to be effective. Findings for Domain II are important because one of the foundational operating principles underlying the NSBECS is that implementation will promote and sustain continuous improvement. Not only did 60% of the 116 respondents experience this outcome in their NSBECS implementation, but 28% (32 of 116) ranked it as among the most significant outcomes across all domains. Of note in Domain III is that “collaboration among faculty members about teaching and learning has improved” also ranked second among outcomes identified as most significant across all domains, 20% (23 of 116). Finally, when the NSBECS were designed, planning was an intended purpose for users. In Domain IV results, it is evident that planning is the dominant theme when respondents discussed their perceived outcomes. Equally important is the recognition of the need for continuous improvement and operational planning, which replicates the responses for Domain II.

Table 10  
*Top Outcomes by Domain (N=116)*

Domain	Top Outcomes
Domain I: Mission and Catholic Identity	<p>“School community demonstrates a deeper understanding of mission,” 61% (71 of 116)</p> <p>“School mission has greater centrality in the life and practice of the school community,” 47% (55 of 116).</p>
Domain II: Governance and Leadership	<p>“The governing body and leadership team increased commitment to continuous improvement,” 60% (70 of 116)</p> <p>“Governing body and leadership team demonstrate increased fidelity to mission,” 45% (52 of 116).</p>
Domain III: Academic Excellence	<p>“Collaboration among faculty members about teaching and learning has improved,” 61% (71 of 116)</p> <p>“The practice of sharing school-wide data with stakeholders has increased,” 54% (63 of 116)</p>
Domain IV: Operational Vitality	<p>“Planning for operations (facilities, technology, finances) is more intentionally linked to mission,” 45% (52 of 116)</p> <p>“All planning is now focused on continuous school improvement,” 43% (50 of 116)</p> <p>“Regular review and updating of operational plans have improved,” 43% (50 of 116)</p> <p>“Communication, marketing, and advancement strategies more effectively incorporate best practices,” 42% (49 of 116)</p>

### **Implementation Outcomes by Domain Related to Purpose**

As noted earlier, Survey 2 respondents identified their primary purpose for implementing the NSBECS, with the top four identified as: Accreditation, Guidelines/References, Accountability and Planning. Interestingly, when the reports on domain outcomes, previously presented, are examined across these four user-stated purposes, the findings are similar within each domain. See Table 11 for a presentation of the stated outcomes, with percentage of associated responses, within each domain by purposes. Of note are the similarities of domain outcomes across purposes.

Table 11  
*Top Outcomes by Domain Related to Purpose (N=116)*

Domain	Top Outcomes by Purpose			
	Accreditation (n=40)	Guidelines/References (n=21)	Accountability (n=18)	Planning (n=17)
Domain I: Mission & Catholic Identity	Deeper understanding of mission (68%) School mission has greater centrality (63%)	Newly expressed commitment to Catholic identity in mission (52%) Deeper understanding of mission (43%)	Deeper understanding of mission (67%) More engaged faith community (61%)	Deeper understanding of mission (65%) Newly expressed commitment to Catholic identity in mission (53%)
Domain II: Governance & Leadership	Increased commitment to continuous improvement by gov. & leadership (73%) Increased fidelity to mission (58%)	Increased commitment to continuous improvement by gov. & leadership (48%) Increased fidelity to mission (48%) Clarity of roles on gov. board improved (43%)	Increased commitment to continuous improvement by gov. & leadership (72%) Increased fidelity to mission (44%)	Increased commitment to continuous improvement by gov. & leadership (53%) Improved collaboration between gov. & leadership (41%)
Domain III: Academic Excellence	Collaboration among faculty has improved (70%) Improved faculty knowledge & skills (63%)	Increased sharing data with stakeholders (57%) Curriculum aligned to appropriate standards (52%) Improved faculty knowledge & skills (52%)	Collaboration among faculty has improved (72%) Increased or improved formative assessments (61%)	Collaboration among faculty has improved (65%) Improved faculty knowledge & skills (65%) Increased sharing data with stakeholders (65%)
Domain IV: Operational Vitality	Operations planning more linked to mission (55%) Communication, marketing & advancement strategies increased best practices (55%) Improved review, updating of operational plans (50%)	Increased best practices in financial planning (52%) Operations planning more linked to mission (48%) Communication, marketing & advancement strategies increased best practices (48%)	Improved review, updating of operational plans (44%) Increased best practices in financial planning (44%) Increased enrollment, retention (44%) Communication, marketing & advancement strategies increased best practices (44%)	All planning more focused on continuous improvement (41%) Operations planning more linked to mission (35%) Improved review, updating of operational plans (35%)

## Other Relevant Findings

### Tools

Respondents identified tools/strategies which they used in their NSBECS implementations for initial assessment and ongoing monitoring. All respondents report extensive use of the benchmark rubrics and surveys provided on the Catholic School Standards Project (CSSP) website, both to determine the school's status at the outset of implementation and to monitor progress during implementation. In the case of rubrics, respondents also reported the rubrics to be highly useful. More of those who self-report a "most successful" implementation used the resources found on the website (especially the benchmarks and rubrics), and fewer of this same group used self-created tools (see Table 12). Clearly, the website has served to provide necessary tools and support for implementations.

Table 12

*Tools Used for Initial Assessment and Progress Monitoring (N=116)*

Tools Used	Assessment of school's current status at the outset of implementation		Monitoring school's progress during implementation	
	% (n=116)	% of "Most Successful" (n=77)	% (n=116)	% of "Most Successful" (n=77)
Website benchmarks & rubrics	59	70	51	62
Website surveys for faculty & staff	40	46	31	39
Self-created rubrics, surveys, or checklists	40	36	41	39
Website surveys for parents & other stakeholders	37	44	24	31

*Note.* Respondents were able to "select all that apply" from choices listed.

### Future Use of the NSBECS

Fewer than 2% (2 of 116) of participants report that they "do not plan to continue using the NSBECS." The majority of respondents, who plan to continue using the NSBECS, 93% (108 of 116), were asked to describe planned changes or expansions to their current implementation processes. Of the 108



respondents who planned to continue using the NSBECS, 31 respondents provided multiple descriptions of planned changes. After analysis, 33 unique descriptors of actions related to planned changes or expansions to their current implementation processes were identified. Of these 33 descriptors, 18 described actions related to planning or monitoring implementation of the NSBECS. A few others (6) described plans to provide additional training or professional development. The prevalent themes suggest that for these participants the next steps are related to building sustainable, long-term processes for implementation.

### **Resources for Use**

When asked to identify resources which would assist their school/organization to further the implementation of the NSBECS, 70% of respondents (81 of 116) chose “tools for assessment data collection based on benchmark rubrics”, 69% (80 of 116) chose “examples of assessment protocols for each standard”. Further training webinars were cited as important for school leaders, 62% (72 of 116) and for teachers, 56% (65 of 116).

### **Challenges**

Participants were also asked if their organization faced any challenges while implementing the NSBECS; 40% (46 of 116) said they faced challenges. Of these 46, 85% (39) reported “lack of time” as the top challenge, followed by “lack of sufficient personnel,” 46% (21) and “insufficient resources to support data collection and analysis,” 41% (19).

### **Descriptions of Success**

In an open-ended question, participants who self-described their implementation as successful at all levels were asked to describe what successful implementation meant to them. The investigators identified eight recurring themes from the 65 responses provided, with some responses identifying more than one theme. Of the themes described in Table 13, the most frequently reported response was focus/direction, 29% (19 of 65). A primary purpose for creating standards is to provide a framework for one’s work, which may explain the popularity of this theme. Other themes included unity, 26% (17 of 65), continued improvement, 22% (14 of 65) and Catholic identity, 22% (14 of 65). The same top four themes were found among the subsample “most successful” users. In general participants described their implementation as successful because 1) they attained a clear direction for their work, and/or 2)

they felt that their school community became more unified and/or more in tune with the larger Catholic community, or 3) simply because they are seeing progress over time. These findings will provide an important context for further research.

Table 13  
*Themes for Users' Definitions of Success (N=65)*

Theme	Description	n (%)
Focus/Direction	Having a framework, touchstone, or clear idea of where one is heading	19 (29)
Unity	School community coming closer together, feeling more unified, and/or improving feelings of buy-in and ownership	17 (26)
Continued Improvement	On-going growth, progress, or improvement planning	14 (22)
Catholic Identity	Focus on Catholicity or becoming more in tune with the larger Catholic community	14 (22)
Accountability	Expectations, external review processes, or improvements in management and oversight	8 (12)
Self-Assessment	Use of ratings, rubrics and/or surveys to identify gaps and overlaps in various areas of school functioning	10 (15)
Understanding	Increasing awareness, familiarity, and/or knowledge related to the NSBECS within the school community	8 (12)
Implementation/Action	Having an on-going action plan, doing the work of implementation over time	5 (8)
No Code Applies		10 (15)

### Advice for Others

The investigators analyzed the 66 respondents' statements which provided advice and identified seven themes. (See Table 14.) Statements often related to more than one theme. The themes that were found most frequently in participants' responses were "have patience," 27% (18 of 66), "promote engagement," 26% (17 of 66), and "provide support," 26% (18 of 66).

Table 14  
*Themes for Users' Advice for Others (N=66)*

Theme	Description	n (%)
Have Patience	Take your time with the process, move at a realistic pace	18 (27)
Promote Engagement	Educate and communicate with stakeholders, promote buy-in and ownership, involve stakeholders in the process	17 (26)
Provide Support	Importance of professional development, training, and providing those involved with tools and resources	17 (26)
Use for Improvement	Use the NSBECS to improve school, curriculum, or staff competency	12 (18)
Clear Understanding	Become familiar with the standards, importance of understanding what one is doing throughout the process	15 (23)
Planning	Goal setting and data gathering/utilization	11 (17)
Persist/Commit	Stick with it, don't give up	8 (12)
No Code Applies		10 (15)

Interestingly, among respondents who provided advice and also described their implementation of the NSBECS as "successful" or "highly successful" (n = 42), the most common theme was "promote engagement," 32% (13 of 42), followed by "clear understanding," 27% (11 of 42). This suggests that promoting engagement and ownership among stakeholders was considered especially important among the "most successful" users. These same participants also recommended that having a clear understanding of the NSBECS is important to the implementation before beginning the process.

### Discussion of CSSS Phase 1 Results

In CSSS Phase 1, the researchers set out to provide a description and analysis of the scope, contexts and procedures associated with the implementation of the NSBECS by various early adopter stakeholders across the United States. Two national surveys administered during Phase 1 differed in the number of respondents (908/116 respectively), and these two responding groups exhibited tightly parallel demographic profiles. The observations and responses from both groups represent respondent experiences in Catholic PK-12 schools. (See Tables 1 and 2 and related discussion above.)

The results are encouraging for PK-12 Catholic Schools and the field of school improvement more broadly. Responses show that the NSBECS are, in fact, widely used. Further, responses show that the longer the use, the greater the reported impact; the higher the level of understanding, the greater the use and the greater the reported impact. Certainly, additional research can and must flesh out details and uncover stronger associations among implementation strategies and concrete results; however, these initial indicators bode well for the staying power and applicability of the NSBECS as a vehicle for continuous improvement.

In both surveys, superintendents, principals, and presidents reported the same top four areas of use in their implementation of the NSBECS: accreditation, guidelines/references, accountability, and planning. The implementation process across all these areas followed a similar pattern: (a) study and learn about the NSBECS, (b) compare NSBECS with existing standards and accreditation criteria, (c) use the NSBECS to self-assess at the school level to determine current practice, and (d) use the self-assessment findings to create improvement plans. (See Table 8). Leaders at both the diocesan and school levels were heavily involved in the launch of NSBECS implementation; as the process continued, leadership focus shifted to the school leader and then to teachers, staff, and board members working with the principal.

In analyzing these results, the researchers were especially interested in whether the factors and patterns of action found in the broad literature on standards-based school reform also appeared in the early implementation of the NSBECS. Factors and patterns of action were found to be similar. CSSS Phase 1 respondents reported that the top three practices they deemed as “major components” in their successful implementation of the NSBECS were: (a) demonstrated commitment of the leader (both school and diocesan); (b) establishing faculty and staff buy-in; and (c) using data to measure outcomes and make decisions. (See Table 9). These are the same three prac-

tices that have enabled standards-based reform efforts to be successful, as shown in the broad literature. Of further note, these three practices ranked as top contributors to successful implementation of the NSBECS for the total survey 2 population (n=116) and even more strongly for the subset of self-reported “most successful users” (n=77).<sup>6</sup> (See Table 9). The fact that CSSS Phase 1 data reinforces earlier research on successful implementation of standards provides an important confirmation for Catholic school leaders as they design NSBECS implementation to be certain that leaders are committed and engaged (superintendents and principals), that faculty and staff have the time and space to understand and buy-in to the process, and that data informs decisions and frames progress.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, parent/community involvement as an implementation practice appeared noticeably absent in both the broader literature and the CSSS Phase 1 data.

### **Outcomes of Implementation**

As a significant goal of Phase I survey 2, researchers sought to learn about the perceived outcomes respondents experienced in their implementation of the NSBECS. The responses confirm the intent of the NSBECS and point to their noteworthy potential for shaping and driving Catholic school excellence.

Respondents reported positive outcomes across all Domains and all areas of use. In other words, study participants indicated that they perceived positive change and growth in their school communities when they implemented the NSBECS. Also reported by participants is that this change and growth centered around four compelling themes:

1. Deepening understanding and centrality of mission among stakeholders;
2. Adopting a continuous improvement mindset among leadership, governance, faculty and staff;
3. Increasing collaboration among stakeholders in the school community; and
4. Paying greater attention to best practices. (See Tables 10 and 11).

These outcome themes underscore the essence of the NSBECS as a set

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6 See Perceived Success of Implementation above for the description of “most successful.”

7 In fact further research might examine how the use of the NSBECS affects Catholic school leadership practices and Catholic school reform efforts.

of criteria that incorporates characteristics unique to Catholic schools and integrated with widely confirmed characteristics of excellent schools. This is crucial as it affirms the potential long-term impact of the NSBECS as the first and only comprehensive set of standards for Catholic schools.

Admittedly, in this study these outcomes are stated broadly – “mission,” “continuous improvement,” “collaboration,” “best practices.” The next level of research must drill down to reveal more targetable, concrete results: How many? What kind? Showing up in achievement scores and demonstrations? Correlated with satisfaction, enrollment, funding, etc.? Nonetheless, this study puts educators and researchers squarely on the path to knowing that digging deeper is promising. This study strengthens the claim that in the NSBECS, Catholic education has an important tool that relates both to factors that are unique to Catholic schools (such as Catholic identity and mission, Catholic school governance, integration of faith-based mission in all aspects of Catholic schools) AND to best practices in school effectiveness (such as leadership, buy-in, use of data). Simply stated the NSBECS are unique school effectiveness standards available to Catholic schools.

Finally, the study revealed several additional take-aways. One, superintendents’ leadership surfaced as critical to successful implementation of the NSBECS: schools and school leaders learn about the NSBECS first and most frequently from superintendents, and superintendents play a key role in launching implementation. Two, users rely heavily on tools found on the Catholic School Standards Project website ([www.catholicschoolstandards.org](http://www.catholicschoolstandards.org)), especially the rubrics and surveys. Three, virtually all respondents (98.3%) intend to continue using the NSBECS; those who also indicated that they intend to expand their use of the NSBECS described changes in the direction of building resources and/or infrastructure to support a more sustainable, long-term process.

When asked to describe what “success” [in implementation] looked like, the top four responses were consistent with the perceived positive outcomes discussed above: having a touchstone or increased focus about where the school is headed, coming together as a school community with greater buy-in and ownership, having a greater focus on growth and continuous improvement, and becoming more in tune with the larger Catholic community. (See Table 13). Respondents’ advice to those beginning implementation says a lot: This is worth doing but it is not a quick fix; spread it out; give support and explain; don’t bite off too much at once; get ownership and have clear understanding. (See Table 14).

In sum, from the outset, the NSBECS were designed to provide Catholic school stakeholders with a guide for building, improving and sustaining faith-based education that is academically, spiritually, and operationally rigorous. This purpose required the creation of comprehensive school effectiveness standards that provide grounded and applicable criteria for school improvement across four broad domains. The resulting standards and benchmarks (NSBECS) integrate criteria for widely accepted research-based best practice and criteria unique to and essential for actualized Catholic identity and mission. The CSSS Phase I data provide an important first level affirmation of this goal. The descriptive and self-reported implementation practices and outcomes indicate that the majority of users experience positive results from implementing the NSBECS and perceive the NSBECS as contributing to Catholic school improvement and Catholic identity across all four domains. In short, 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.

### **Scholarly Significance of the Study**

CSSS Phase I analysis focused on research designed to set the stage for a Phase II and Phase III analysis. The execution of phases II and III will be a significant scholarly addition to the research and literature on both Catholic school effectiveness and whole school effectiveness standards across all school sectors.

For Catholic school researchers and practitioners, the next phases of research provide the first opportunity to study, in more depth, the impact and relevance of comprehensive effectiveness standards created specifically for Catholic schools. Moving beyond the Phase I descriptions and analysis of implementation process and success, researchers in Phases II and III will be able to explore the longer-term effects of sustained implementation of the NSBECS beyond user perceptions by utilizing current school data and measurements of Catholic identity, governance structures, academic outcomes, enrollment, and finance. As noted in the discussion, the NSBECS are reported to be a vital framework for assessing Catholic school effectiveness, and generally calling Catholic schools to greater excellence. The next wave of researchers can and should ask: What does effectiveness using the NSBECS criteria look like with current outcome measures? and How does it contribute to Catholic school excellence and sustainability?

Studying the use and impact of the NSBECS also provides value to education researchers and school-based practitioners across all school sectors (public, charter, Catholic, etc.). The Catholic School Standards Study Phase I research began the work of examining unique, comprehensive Catholic school effectiveness standards. It is time to study this phenomenon across all types of schools, as comprehensive school effectiveness standards have yet to be thoroughly researched. (In fact, a review of literature confirmed that few, if any, comprehensive school effectiveness standards exist beyond the NSBECS, although some researchers acknowledge the need for such standards.) Thus, this study provides the starting point and new direction for all sectors of education as educators understand the critical impact of such standards, and emphasize the importance of adopting a systemic school wide approach to school improvement and sustainability. The CSS study and continued research on the NSBECS provide a blueprint and catalyst for the creative imagination of school leaders, university practitioners and national organizations committed to school effectiveness and the utility of national standards. The NSBECS have set the bar for the future of this academic work.

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