SUSTAINING OUTSTANDING SCHOOLS: SOS
By Michael J. Boyle, Ph.D.

The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Elementary and Secondary Catholic Schools (NSBECS) were designed to describe how the most mission-driven, program-effective, and well-managed Catholic schools operate. The document contains nine defining characteristics of Catholic schools based on church teachings, 13 standards and 70 benchmarks (www.nceaa.org or www.catholicschoolstandards.org).

With the accompanying checklists and rubrics, NSBECS is designed to provide a powerful template for schools to analyze their practice, to validate their strengths, and identify growth areas.

Connecting NSBECS to the classroom: student data folders


Standard 8 of NSBECS challenges Catholic schools to find a variety of methods to assess student learning. Benchmark 8.3 further delineates the expectation of multiple methods to assess learning:

8.3 Faculty use a variety of curriculum-based assessments aligned with learning outcomes and instructional practices to assess student learning, including formative, summative, authentic performance and student self-assessment.

Student data folders can be a way to answer this call for rigorous assessment of student performance. In fact, student data folders can be a powerful method to use to collect the data to show progress toward the classroom mission statement (discussed in the September 2013 NCEA Notes at www.ncea.org/membership/resources) and connect Benchmark 8.3 directly to classroom practice. The use of student data folders can significantly impact student learning several ways:

Student data folders empower students

Student data folders can help students see how their choices impact their progress. These folders can assist with the self-monitoring aspect of classroom performance and minimize power and compliance issues with adults.

Folders provide powerful feedback

By representing student performance graphically over time, the folders show patterns of academic and behavioral progress. This process can make the student a more active participant in the learning process.

Folders help students become more responsible

Students can take ownership of their learning by setting goals, making action plans to achieve their goals, and tracking their performance. By tracking the attainment of short-term goals, students can see how long-term goals are more attainable.

How to develop data folders

Using the classroom mission statement (see template at www.ncea.org/membership/resources), students develop individual mission statements to show how they are working to meet the overall mission. Using this personal mission statement, students formulate an action plan that delineates their goals and objectives. From this, students name the evidence they need to show they are making progress toward their goals. With this in mind, students create a way to collect and analyze the data and develop visual representations of it (charts, graphs, etc.).

Merely collecting data is not sufficient. The power of this approach comes from the analysis. When looking at their own data, students can see patterns that help them identify improvement areas. Using a variation of force-field analysis (an organizational problem-solving process), students can find the drivers or factors that facilitate ("drivers") their improvement in academics and behavior as well as the factors that inhibit ("preventers") their progress. A template to help with this process is at www.ncea.org/membership/resources.

A benefit of this approach is that student data folders can be an effective tool for communicating with parents. The student's voice is significant in this approach and can help denote levels of progress to parents. In areas requiring intervention, it can help to include the student in the process, increasing the potential for success. Many schools have used the student data folder as the basis of student-led conferences.

When initiating an approach like this, it is better to start in a concrete fashion with items that are easily measured: spelling tests, math facts, homework completion, attendance, and behavior. Teachers should model
how to set goals and track data to look at attainment of goals. A suggestion is to start with class-level data (example: homework completion for the class). Setting a goal (i.e., class attaining a 95 percent homework completion rate) and tracking the data can model using data over time for continuous improvement. Once students understand the concept of and skill required for data collection, they can become more involved in measuring individual progress and multiple goals.

**What to include in student data folders**

**Academic domains**

The typical kinds of documents included in a student data folder fall within the academic domain. Examples include the following:

- Homework completion (could include both quality and completion rates)
- Test and quiz grades
- Aimsweb or DIBELS data (curriculum-based measurements)

Remember that the power of this approach is not the collection of artifacts. The power lies in the analysis of the trends and the action planning that accompany this process.

**Behavioral domains**

These are powerful kinds of documents that can be added to the student data folder and really address the motivational aspects of learning. Kinds of data to use include the following:

- Attendance and tardiness data
- Results of the classroom behavior management system

An interesting document that could be added is the “enthusiasm versus learning” graph that asks students to rate how enthusiastic they were about a unit versus the amount of knowledge that they gained. It can be helpful for students to see how motivation is related to learning. A version of this scale is at www.ncea.org/membership/resources.

**Spiritual domains**

This is the most difficult area on which to collect data, but it is not impossible. Student data folders can be a way to engrain the process of systematic and routine reflection. Using a routine prompt (i.e., “How have I found God in my everyday life?”) as a reflection can help students be mindful of God’s presence. Taking a page from the Jesuits and using a process like the “Examen,” students can reflect on finding God in all things.

The following is a version of a Daily Examen St. Ignatius of Loyola practiced that could be used as a basis for elements to include in the student data folder:

1. Become aware of God’s presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

—St. Ignatius of Loyola

**Next steps**

As with any new initiative, start with small steps. Look at the data you already collect. Think about ways students could collect and organize the data. Build in small times for students to reflect on the data and create action plans for improvement. Challenge your students to show evidence that growth is occurring. Finally, look for areas to expand. Visit the Center for Catholic School Effectiveness at www.luc.edu/ccse for the templates discussed in this article as well as other templates that can help you in this process.

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**References:**