Connecting NSBECs to the classroom: The mission driven classroom

According to Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and *First Things First*, mission statements “capture what you want to be and what you want to do…and the principles upon which being and doing are based.” Mission statements can define a purpose for the student, teacher, parent and other important stakeholders. The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Elementary and Secondary Catholic Schools (NSBECs) stress the importance of mission statements. NSBECs Standard 1 directly emphasizes the importance of the presence and use of mission statements and requires evidence that they are used in a variety of ways.

**Standard 1**

An excellent Catholic school is guided and driven by a clearly communicated mission that embraces a Catholic identity rooted in Gospel values, centered on the Eucharist and committed to faith formation, academic excellence and service.

The associated benchmarks are as follows:

1.1 The governing body and the leader/leadership team ensure that the mission statement includes the commitment to Catholic identity.

1.2 The governing body and the leader/leadership team use the mission statement as the foundation and normative reference for all planning.

1.3 The school leader/leader-

ship team regularly calls together the school’s various constituencies (including but not limited to faculty and staff, parents, students, alumni) to clarify, review and renew the school’s mission statement.

1.4 The mission statement is visible in public places and contained in official documents.

1.5 All constituents know and understand the mission.

But what about students—shouldn’t they know the mission of the school as it directs the purpose for why they are in school? A classroom mission statement can reinforce this purpose on a regular basis. Taking the NSBECs benchmarks to a classroom level, the classroom mission statement can help provide an incredible organizational template for instructional planning as well as a wonderful reinforcement of the overall school mission. A classroom mission statement operationalizes the school mission statement into a “living” document as opposed to the static document that is usually printed, beautifully framed and hung in a forgotten place. By having students actively engaged in contributing the creation of the classroom mission statement, student ownership is increased. Students can see themselves, not just as individuals, but also as part of the larger organization. They can see how the day-to-day happenings in the classroom are part of the larger system.

**Creating classroom mission statements**

Classroom mission statements should flow from and be directly aligned to the school mission statement (Figure 1). Having direct alignment like this can be evidence toward meeting NSBECs Standard 1. As this standard suggests, the classroom mission statement should be used as a reference point throughout the year and students should have strong working knowledge of the mission statement.

Writing missions statements can often be a daunting task. However, using a process to creating classroom mission statements can help.

**Step 1: Defining mission**

The term “mission” can be ambiguous. You may want to consider introducing mission in terms that are familiar to your students’ lives (i.e. perhaps a mission in a video game). The idea is that the school is trying to accomplish something.

Review your school’s mission statement with the students, ask them what they think it means. This, of course, may mean that you may to “translate” the school’s mission statement into language that is developmentally appropriate, especially for younger learners.

Older learners could then be asked to collect examples of corporate mission statements by going on a scavenger hunt on the web or visiting local places of business and taking pictures
of mission statements located in stores or restaurants. This collection could then be analyzed and similarities and differences could be noted. As you read through the examples, create a list of powerful words or phrases that capture attention or help to convey the meaning of the organization. These phrases may be helpful when creating your classroom mission statement.

**Step 2: Introduce the parts of a mission statement**

Almost every mission statement has predictable components. Often, the mission statement contains the answers to the following questions:
- Who are we?
- What do we want to accomplish?
- How are we going to accomplish the above?
- Why do we want to accomplish the above?

Working in groups or individually, students can use the graphic organizer (found at www.luc.edu/ccse) to answer these questions as they apply to the mission of their own classroom. The school’s mission statement should also be used as a reference as it is important the classroom mission statement show alignment.

**Step 3: Writing the classroom mission statement**

Working together as a class, share the ideas that were generated on the graphic organizers. Review the list of powerful words and phrases collected from the mission statement scavenger hunt. Draft a classroom mission statement for the class. You may even want to consider having students create a personal mission statement (that is aligned with the classroom and school mission.). This personal mission statement can be used to set individual learning goals for the school year.

Creating classroom mission statements can be a great process in which to begin the school year. It provides a concentrated focus for the classroom and can be used as an excellent communication tool for parents. Imagine how impressive this might look on the school’s website.

The Center for Catholic School Effectiveness-Loyola University Chicago, the National Catholic Educational Association and the Roche Center for Catholic Education-Boston College are sponsoring a conference for those interested in learning more about implementing the standards. Working with nationally recognized Catholic educators and authors of the Standards, participants will explore what’s in the standards, examine why so many schools and dioceses are embracing them, learn about benefits and challenges of implementation from schools and dioceses already implementing, and connect to national initiatives and resources. For more information about the standards Implementation Institute, please visit: http://luc.edu/ccse/conferences/novemberconference/

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**References:**

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