



Executive Summary

Diocese of Metuchen

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Introduction

Every school system has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school system makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school system stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school system, and the kinds of programs and services that a school system implements to support student learning.

 The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school system with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the community will have a more complete picture of how the school system perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school system to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.

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Description of the School System

Describe the school system's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school system serves?

One of the youngest dioceses in the country, the Diocese of Metuchen was established by Pope John Paul II on November 19, 1981 by reapportioning the Diocese of Trenton. It is comprised of the four counties that span central New Jersey: Middlesex, Somerset, Hunterdon and Warren, with a population of 1,373,796. There are 94 parishes in the Diocese that serve 631,946 Catholics. The Most Reverend Theodore E. McCarrick was the founding bishop. Three bishops have succeeded Cardinal McCarrick: Edward Hughes 1987-1997, Vincent Breen 1997-2001, and, our current bishop Most Reverend Paul G. Bootkoski who has served the Diocese of Metuchen since January 4, 2002.

There are 24 elementary schools in the Diocese, one Pre School, 4 high schools and one Pre-K - 12 school. The current enrollment is: 7,969 elementary students and 2,678 high school students. The racial composition of the students in the schools is: 14.76% Asian; 6.05% Black; 6.00% Multiracial; 2.33% Unknown; 1.00% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 0.36% American Indian/Native Alaskan; 69.51% White. There are a total of 908 teachers in the elementary and high schools. Less than 10% of those teachers are members of a religious order. The racial composition of the teaching community is: 1.4% Asian; 1.0% Black; 0.2% Multiracial; 0.4% Unknown; 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 0.2% Native American; 96.5% White. In our system schools, the number of ethnically Hispanic students is 256 out of 2,678 while there are 35 teachers out of 908 who are of Latino heritage.

During the past fifteen years, the population of the Diocese of Metuchen has grown in the western part of the diocese, yet the bulk of the schools have always been in the eastern half, predominantly Middlesex County. Warren County, the westernmost county in the diocese is home now to only one elementary school, Sts. Philip and James School. Immaculate Conception School in Annandale is the only school in Hunterdon County. Somerset County has one pre-K school, five elementary schools and two high schools. The remainder of the schools, sixteen elementary schools and three high schools, are in Middlesex County. As in many dioceses across the country, our schools have been heavily impacted by the state of the economy. New Jersey is a state with high taxes and a high cost of living; both have contributed to the reduced numbers in many of the schools. The past three years have seen the closing of four elementary and one special needs school. The majority of the schools are parish supported. The diocesan supported schools are: Perth Amboy Catholic School, Raritan Bay Catholic Preparatory School (Pre K to 12), and Bishop George Ahr High School. There is one deanery school, supported by the Middlebrook Deanery parishes: Holy Savior Academy, founded in 2011 as a result of the closing of four elementary schools the previous year.

Although New Jersey is geographically small in size, it is dense in population with five dioceses in the state. The superintendents of the dioceses meet four times a year to develop state-wide policies, share best practices and discuss legislative advocacy. This collaboration has served the families of New Jersey well as evidenced in the services provided by the state and the exchange of services among the dioceses. Through the work of all five dioceses in collaboration with the NJ Catholic Conference, the following services are available to our students: transportation, nursing services, textbooks, and technology funding. While there are constant struggles to maintain these services, they are critical to the success of our schools. Transportation to the schools and nursing services are now two of the most important issues parents raise before enrolling. We must, therefore, remain vigilant to maintain these programs. The technology funding that we receive (\$32 per student) has enabled schools to update equipment for the benefit of students. The Opportunity Scholarship Act, or some other version of school choice, has been on the legislative agenda in New Jersey for almost 20 years. There was great hope that, with this Governor, some form of school choice would be adopted. That has not happened, and at this point the prognosis is not good.

The strongest county relationship is between the schools and the Middlesex Regional Services Educational Commission. A number of our other county Catholic schools have switched to the Middlesex Commission to lock in reliable services for the children. All the Commissions provide New Jersey's Chapter 192 and Chapter 193 programs to eligible students with auxiliary services such as compensatory education;

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English as a Second Language; Home Instruction; evaluation and determination of eligibility for Special Education and related services; Supplementary Instruction; nursing and Speech-Language services. A few of our schools remain with Somerset, Hunterdon and Warren County Commissions; however, of these Warren County is the most supportive in services to the Catholic School. In regard to the other commissions, the services can be delayed and difficult to attain. In many instances, Office of Schools personnel have had to intervene to acquire entitled services for these children.

In 2003, the previous Executive Director of the Department of Education announced to a gathering of principals that the schools of the Diocese of Metuchen were no longer a system, but a network. Each pastor, in conjunction with his principal, was free to determine all aspects of school life. This included: curriculum, length of day, number of school days, budgets, etc. This resulted in very independent schools with a weakened relationship with the Office of Schools and little collaboration among the schools. One of the goals of our current Executive Director has been to bring the schools into a more cohesive unit and strengthen the relationship between our Office and the schools. Bishop Bootkoski agreed with that goal and to that end in 2006 he authorized that a study of the schools be conducted and a strategic plan be created. The result was the Meitler Study that was promulgated by the Bishop in 2009.

Several key elements resulted from the Meitler Study and have brought us to where we are now. Since the implementation of the Meitler Study: Every school has formed a School Advisory Council; every school has created a strategic plan that is reviewed periodically by the Office of Schools; the Diocesan Catholic Schools Commission was established; and, the Coordinator of Institutional Advancement was hired to educate and support the schools in their advancement efforts. There was another recommendation that a Marketing Director be hired, but that was not financially possible. However one of the Assistant Superintendent's has assumed that responsibility for the schools. These were all positive steps toward greater collaboration between the Office of Schools and the individual schools.

For more uniformity, the Office of Schools in collaboration with the Office of Information Systems provided a student information system, PowerSchool, to be used in each school. This has provided a uniform report card, an electronic grading system for teachers, and parental access to student progress on a regular basis. Additionally, Success Factors is the system developed by the Office of Human Resources, in collaboration with the Office of Schools and the principals that gives the principals and teachers an online goal setting/evaluation process to promote the continuous improvement of the interaction between teacher and principal and ultimately improvement in student learning.

There is a close working relationship between the Office of Schools and other diocesan ministries. In addition to the Office of Information Systems and Human Resources, there are close ties to the following Offices: Catechesis, Child and Youth Protection, Communications, Development, Finance, Respect Life, and Youth Ministry. This inter-ministerial collaboration offers different perspective to innovative ideas, generates extension of department budgets and uses the collective networking of multiple departments in order to support the best Catholic educational results possible.

In 2011, Bishop Bootkoski approved the request from the Office of Schools that our schools move from individual accreditation by Middle States to a system accreditation by AdvancED. Again, he was supporting a strong system of schools as opposed to a weakened network of schools. In collaboration, we determined the strengths of the schools and found areas of needed improvement and using the AdvancED process as the unifying factor, we are building a strong system of schools. In the past three years, there have been substantive discussions on student improvement, more focus on the best possible professional development and more of a mission driven attitude that has resulted in improved quality Catholic education.

System's Purpose

Provide the school system's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school system embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.

The mission statement of the Office of Schools of the Diocese of Metuchen expresses that: The Office of Schools assists the Bishop in providing opportunities for the people of God to be formed, informed and transformed into disciples of Christ through the ministry of Catholic school.

The Office of Schools personnel participate in diocesan workshops in mission and vision study and revision classes to continue their formation in their Catholicity to support setting guidelines for their actions. The system shares its acquired knowledge and provides support to the schools and communities by readily making available opportunities of formation. The system models and comments as it commences all meetings, ceremonies and gatherings with prayer and the words, "Let us begin, as we begin all things in our lives": In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This is the witness from the system that all we do is Christocentric, for the honor and glory of God. Our mission, vision and beliefs are embedded in our letters and emails and promulgated to each of the schools, stakeholders and communities through our web site and advertising.

Eight Faith Formation workshops, seven of them video-conferenced, for Catholic educators are a strong opportunity for them to aspire and attain the next level of personal Catholic formation through the experience of experts in theological studies. There is a mandated "sixty in five" spiritual development protocol that invites all educators to achieve sixty religious course credit hours in five years. And a mandated, one hundred hours of professional development in five years is a minimum requirement recorded and celebrated through certificate of accomplishment with the diocesan educators.

Included in our new teacher orientation annually is one full day of instruction dedicated to our Catholic mission as Catholic school educators. The new Religion curriculum guidelines were developed to both form the catechist in mystagogy, the use of papal documents and to open new avenues of resources while also catechizing the children.

Knowing that the parent is the first teacher of the child and that there can be a lack of parental knowledge or zeal in defending the faith to others, the system offers four classes in parent faith formation, again through video-conference mode, to support growth in family faith understanding and expansion of parents' strength in catechesis so they may evangelize. Through this adult preparation, the system is creating a religious embrace for the students so they witness a tradition of evangelization and the real world application of faith. The children are immersed in a Catholic environment and learn to expect and enjoy giving service, tradition, scripture, and faith community that builds the culture of the Kingdom of God.

Workshops are offered in advocacy to provide stakeholders with the best practices in legislative issues that are important to the Catholic Church and that reflect Catholic teachings. The Diocese of Metuchen Public Policy Committee uses various ministry contacts and networking to broaden outreach capacity in sending legislative alerts to influence policy change.

The Diocese of Metuchen Office of Schools informs the children, teachers, administrators, stakeholders and fellow diocesan ministries in all matters of Catholic education. There is frequent communication between the Office of Schools and the ministries of the Diocese of Metuchen and other dioceses both in and out of state. Through networking with peer educators, the system accrues and shares current curriculum trends, high-tech strategies and diverse methodologies. These can translate into further research, updating and development of curriculum guidelines and educational processes. The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendents participate in many councils and committees that provide schools with safety and compliance requirements and curriculum and assessment resources that support excellence in Catholic education.

Both PowerSchool and Success Factors are tremendous tools of information that are a fast connection from the diocese to the schools, schools to homes and workplaces that loops back to the diocese. The technological information system at the diocesan center is currently in an upgrading mode that will be greatly helpful to the participants of the numerous groups that meet and accomplish educational work.

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The people of the Office of Schools self-reflect on their progress in transformation as Catholic administrative educators through Liturgy and prayer, professional development, discussions with the Bishop and diocesan peer ministries, meetings with the AdvancED Steering Committee, retreats and deliberations with principals and encounters with teachers, Home School Association members, School Advisory Councils, Board of Limited Jurisdiction, Diocese of Metuchen Catholic Education Commission participants, stakeholders and children. Annually, a survey is sent to the diocesan educators to retrieve information about how the members of the Office of Schools are perceived. Through the analysis of the AdvancEd surveys, the strength of Catholic Identity in the Office of Schools is reflected in the positive responses from the stakeholders from our Catholic school communities.

The Office of Schools personnel are in continual pursuit of transformation in their Catholic faith.

Our Vision statement is: The Office of Schools believes that the children are the church of tomorrow. It is our moral imperative to provide a strong foundation in both Catholic faith formation and academic excellence. We collaborate with the entire adult community as we actively participate in the formation of our students. Through shared governance, our schools utilize the expertise and creativity of our stakeholders as they address the need to maintain financially stable schools through sound fiscal policy, marketing and advancement. Our children as 'the church of tomorrow' are empowered spiritual, social and financial leaders, who have a profound impact on our global world.

The schools of the Diocese of Metuchen epitomize the words of the Bishops in their statement, "Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools": "Catholic elementary and secondary schools are of great value to our Church and our nation; and that, in our role as chief teachers, we are each responsible for the total education ministry of the local church."

Our schools are places where Bishop, Diocesan Ministries, principals and teachers with the shared wisdom of stakeholders support the faith development of students and families through the lens of new evangelization. The system adopts the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools as the rubrics to assess ourselves and with which we plan our present and future. Through these standards, students are being prepared to live faith-filled lives that reflect a Catholic world view; one that believes in the dignity of every human person, living lives of holiness while facing the challenges of the secular world.

The policies and programs of the Diocese of Metuchen flow from the Vision Statement, beginning with the Admission Policy and culminating in graduation.

Our Admissions Policy states: "Catholic schools in the Diocese of Metuchen admit students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The schools do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national, ethnic origin, or the sexual orientation of a student's parents/guardians in administration of educational policies, admission policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school administered programs." Our system and schools embrace this policy.

Along the educational pathway, the Catholic Social Teachings are evident through the use of the Diocese of Metuchen's own Good God Choices Program that incorporates Respect Life lessons that inspire kind, fair, and loving behavior from each person to all others. This program offers problem solving techniques and incorporates the Ignatian Daily Reflection as a way of well-being and the Sainthood of St. Therese Lisieux as the patroness of good and Godly decisions, no matter how small. Curriculum guidelines are embedded with our Catholic faith wherever possible and student religion classes are savored as daily sessions in the schedule and cross-curricular offerings throughout each one's day. Co-mingled with the prescribed curriculum content day of the students are the continual Catholic graces that are woven into the days, weeks and months of Catholic education. Opportunities to participate in the rich heritage of prayer, worship, sacraments and traditions abound. And collections for the poor such as: food; clothing; books; hats; sports equipment to name a few are plentiful. The children are raised in the spirit of giving and this becomes an expectation, a learned life skill and good habit.

It has been a focus of the Office of Schools to incorporate as many Latino children as possible into our schools to reflect the ratio of Hispanic populations that live in the diocese. In 2011, a Latino Recruitment goal was devised that used the foundation of the University of Notre Dame study: "To Nurture the Soul of a Nation". The system offered Metuchen workshops with Fr. Joseph Corpora, C.S.C. Sessions to teach strategies to our schools in courting and registering Hispanic students were shared with principals, teachers, and School Advisory Council members while the Inter-diocesan Catholic School Marketing Council offered a "Hispanic Marketing for Catholic Schools" for any interested school members. This class was underwritten by the Diocese of Metuchen for five participants from any Metuchen Catholic school. Metuchen administrators from two of our schools traveled to Notre Dame to receive training in the recruitment and retention of Latino families into

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Catholic schools. During the 2014 school year, we will host a workshop for our secretaries in supporting them as the gatekeeper of the school in strategies to be welcoming and understanding of the needs of the Hispanic and other immigrant families interested in the registration process.

In response to the Meitlar Study's call for schools to develop external funding sources beyond Home School Association fundraising efforts, the Office of Schools Institutional Advancement Officer works in partnership with our schools to help them achieve their strategic goals. These efforts find common cause and build community around that cause, always with the goal to form, inform and transform at the heart of every endeavor and activity.

Institutional Advancement has provided an annual program of professional development and one-on-one training opportunities to all schools, school volunteers and advancement staff since 2009. This program includes quarterly workshops and webinars, many of which are published on the diocesan website, and an annual survey of members for input into each year's offerings. It has evolved into the Catholic College Partners Program, where speakers from New Jersey Catholic Colleges present on a variety of topics as part of a budding collaborative effort to support and promote Catholic education across all grades. Institutional Advancement administers student financial and emergency aid for the Foundation for Catholic Education (FCE), the Tuition Angel Program, and various donor-advised funds and bequests. Through this work we strive to transform Catholic school education by keeping a Catholic school education affordable and accessible to as many families as possible. Since 2001, over \$10,000,000 in financial aid has been distributed to families who want their children to have the advantage of a Catholic school education. Finally, Institutional Advancement also supports this work through its own fundraising efforts. The Students to Leaders Catholic Education Dinner provides annual FCE tuition assistance, and our grant writing efforts support operating and infrastructure projects across the system - they have funded security systems for three schools to date.

To use the quote from our Diocese of Metuchen Office of Schools Executive Director who closes all writings and discussions with "And may God always be pleased with us...", the members of the system also pray that all we live and work is pleasing to God and "that our students are empowered spiritual, social and financial leaders, who have a profound impact on our global world."

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Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

Describe the school system's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school system is striving to achieve in the next three years.

Purpose & Direction

Most notable was the confidence Bishop Paul Gregory Bootkoski showed to the Office of Schools by accepting the proposal to change our accreditation institution from Middle States to AdvancED. He listened to the concerns of the pastors who were skeptical and encouraged them to trust in the wisdom of the Office of Schools personnel. His support throughout the process has been invaluable.

The formal training, research and planning that has been the hallmark of the Office of Schools' Pastoral Strategic Plan has set direct goals and objectives that were transferred into actions by the Office of Schools personnel and the result of this work is evident in the directional knowledge and function of all the people in the system of schools. Our Mission and Vision statements have been a mainstay since 2009 following the Meitler Study and have continued as a bastion of support for the actions of the Office of Schools and its system. The Pastoral Strategic Plan is currently in a second cycle of implementation due to the research, analysis and revision from the Catholic Identity surveys completed for AdvancED.

Putting Mission and Vision into practice is the Diocese of Metuchen's Policy Handbook that is comprehensive in content and yet necessarily in a cycle of continual revision. In order to accommodate more educators in diocesan professional spiritual development, our Catholic Faith Formation process was changed two years ago by using six video-conferencing school hubs that brought the sessions in closer proximity to the attendees. This increased the attendance for some classes by threefold. Listening to the appeal of all the school hubs, for the 2013 school year forward, the faith sessions will be open to as many hubs that request participation. Knowing the need to support Catholic school parents with more complete Catholic catechesis and giving them more strength to evangelize, for the 2013-14 school year and implemented again for the 2014-15, we will make available four parent faith video-conferences to requesting school hubs.

The Good God Choices Program, the Diocese of Metuchen's own precursor to an anti-bullying good decision making program, was developed and re-created with educator identified different themes or focuses for the past four years. The focus for each year is as such:

1. St. Therese Lisieux & The Catholic Social Teachings
2. The New Evangelization & Media Literacy
3. The Ignatian Daily Examen and Daily Check-Up
4. Respect-Life Lessons & Using student - developed games to practice good and Godly decisions

The use of Professional Learning Communities and Professional Learning Plans to improve technology, math and the academic scoring of the children in the lowest Terra Nova assessed quartile made a significant difference in student math scores, in the improvement of the lowest quarter of the students in whichever content area the school focused on and research into how the use of technology for student benefit could be improved in the schools.

The system has a well-defined orientation for new teachers, a year-long new principals' program and a new pastors' presentation that informs, forms and with the grace of God transforms newcomers to our Catholic system so they are instruments of evangelization and strong models of Catholic education.

Governance & Leadership

The Diocese of Metuchen's Steering Committee graciously put on the yolk of Christ as they lead the system of schools through the AdvancED process with ardor and professionalism. They developed multiple domain committees; organized group collaborative work sessions and then supported similar counterpart work in each school which resulted in leadership and collegial discussions and plans and implementations for improvement.

The School Advisory Councils that have become a working arm of the system schools are a tremendous accomplishment. Through training,

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the mind-set of the administration needed to be re-directed to understand the benefits of council support, understanding the correct balanced collection of council members and the in-servicing needed for those members. The functioning of an assistive council for each and every school took time and effort on the part of the total system. Completing reports and acting upon strategic plans brought the School Advisory Councils to a higher functioning skill level that has resulted in more expertise in numerous areas that are generally not within the excellence of practice of the principal or pastor.

The use of the Diocesan Exit Survey sent to all families that left the system's schools has been a viable data bank of information to be shared with each of the schools named. This invites the governance of the school to be well-informed by the parent/s of the children.

Both Honeywell Instant Alert and the PowerSchool Parent Portal and Homework access have brought parent involvement in their children's safety and education to a maximum. Parents receive information and can respond immediately in regard to their students.

Teaching & Assessing

The Office of Schools dedication of an Assistant Superintendent to curriculum allayed the stakeholder concerns of guarding the content area education of the system's students. This has not only boosted confidence in our course offerings but has realized an outline plan of ways to study and develop curriculum for the Catholic schools. The new Mathematics Curriculum guidelines and the draft Religion Curriculum Guidelines, Respect Life Curriculum and the Good God Choices Curriculum are examples of the anticipated excellence of course content for students who are educated in the system. Think tank meetings such as the Inter-diocesan Curriculum Council (IDCC), Math Research Committee and the IDCC Math roundtable for the Catholic School superintendents of NJ have resulted in valuable data and analysis to improve the professional development of the educators to impact the learning environment of the children. The teacher/principal leadership and Office of Schools of the system were instrumental in the decision to standardize the names and content of the Pre-Algebra and Post-Algebra courses and assessments across the system. The system "special subject" teachers met and planned grading rubrics for the diverse array of specials classes that exist across the system. This makes rubrics for the grading possible and more reliable choices for PowerSchool grade book. Using available data to derive professional development for educators and providing the correct educational specialists to complete workshops in the fields of education, Catholic Identity and theology is representative of our quest for continual improvement. In a few instances, the schools pooled their monies to pay for the workshops. The use of the ELEOT for the 2013-14 school year in the system schools and the resultant peer visits to many of the schools has given a direct link to desired school learning environment and the reality of the schools' learning environments.

Our system Professional Spiritual Development, Catholic Faith Formation sessions, have become video-conference workshops for both educators and parents. This makes the availability near home or office greater so that the attendance and knowledge of attendees can be positively increased.

Both the research and pilot study of PD360 and the flipped classroom pilot came from the leadership of the principals. Through research and attendance at professional development sessions, it was decided that these pilots were worthwhile endeavors. The PD360 has led to an improved on-line Success Factors Evaluation System for the educators of the diocese. And the Flipped Classroom Pilot, begun in September, will be assessed as it proceeds. It is the hope of this project to:

1. improve the frequency of the failure of homework being completed by students
2. give academic and strategy support at the homes of the students
3. allow teachers extended time to give the critical practice component of the learned concepts in the classroom.

The preparation and pro-active training for the new Terra Nova Assessment 2014, completed by the system, made the transition to the new assessment simple and the expected drop in the students' percentiles non-existent. The CTB On-Line Reporting has been mastered by the system to support numerous data and analysis reports and the parent Home Report has expanded information and explanations to help non-educator understanding.

Resources and Support Systems

The system increased the emailing capability for direct access to teachers and stakeholders. In 2010-11, 101 stakeholders were contacted by email. While in 2013-14, 1,264 stakeholders received their email information directly from the system. Direct access translates into

improved communication.

The Tech Expo and the Tech Circles have been instrumental in supporting more worthwhile technology in the classrooms and boosting quality resources as possibilities to align with curriculum by supplying 13 technology workshop opportunities to the system.

The Tech Needs and Assessment Survey of 2013, hosted by the Office of Information Systems of the Diocese of Metuchen, was the precursor to their Tech Plan to support improved technology in the system's schools. The planned and budgeted increase in digital and networking capability for September 2014 with a reassessment and improvements in January 2015 by the Office of Information Systems will be a welcomed and needed adjustment to the technological capacity of the diocesan center. This will enable our stakeholders to use various types of tech equipment during presentations.

A STREAM (Science; Technology; Religion; Engineering; Art; Mathematics) pilot program will be researched in 2014-15 by a committee from a group of five schools to analyze the benefits that these cross-curricular extended lessons will have on improving student learning and application of that learning.

Using Results for Continuous Improvement

"You cannot hope to build a better world without improving the individuals. To that end, each of us must work for our own improvement and, at the same time, share a general responsibility for all humanity..." Marie Curie

The system uses assessment in the process of continuous improvement. The formalized evaluation of teachers by principals through on-line Success Factors and the ability of the Office of Schools to monitor this teacher supervision through the Success Factors tool has given real and helpful feedback to administrators and stakeholders. The system superintendent and assistant superintendents are in partnership with the school communities through the evaluation of the principals, either annually with a thorough immersion into the success of the school's student learning environment for that year or an in-depth review of the principal and school on a three year rotating cycle.

Yearly, there is also a routine evaluation of the principal completed electronically by the teachers. The pastor through the use of a diocesan template is given the opportunity to share his thoughts about the professionalism and educational function of the principal and then documents his decision to contract with his principal for the next school year.

The revision of the Religion Curriculum that is currently in its post-theological evaluation mode and is being edited to reflect some spiritual re-writes is an accomplishment because it points the way of the future for the system. The guidelines are filled with Catholic Social Teachings, Papal writings that correlate to cited curriculum age-appropriate concepts, Good-God Choices references and the Catechism of the Catholic Church as the bedrock upon which to build the faith knowledge of the school community.

The system already has a goal to complete the circle of Terra Nova data collection, analysis and planning for student improvement and communication of the plan back to the system. However, the Office of Schools has determined that we will also use the National Percentile of the Normal Curve Equivalent more frequently and its comparative diagnosis of student results to give an accurate global perspective to our analysis that will assist in supporting continuous improvement to the learning environment of the students.

Additional Information

Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.

Both our Bishop and our Executive Director envision that the schools of the Diocese of Metuchen will form a more cohesive system that truly reflects Gospel values, fosters academic excellence and strives for financial stability by implementing the AdvancEd process of continuous improvement. It is providing the vehicle the system needs to assist the schools to reach their full potential.

Before we began to focus on the Internal Review, we had several independent initiatives that we knew were critical if we were going to provide a quality education to our students. These included: the systematic evaluation of principals and teachers, use of surveys, professional development and continual faith formation. Participating in the AdvancED process has provided the tools we needed to bring a structure to all we do. Across the diocese, we are developing a strong spirit of collegiality and collaboration as we study and analyze data together to direct the continuous improvement of our students and enhance the skills of the educators.

While we have robustly encouraged school satisfaction surveys in the past, with the initiation of our new accreditation process, surveys have become a more practiced data resource. All of our stakeholders were surveyed twice during the past 18 months: once for the Catholic Identity feedback and then for the AdvancED standards. These surveys have provided valuable information that will guide our professional development efforts at the diocesan level and the local school level. Pastors and members of School Advisory Councils are using the information for marketing and selection of consultants.

Most notably, the use of the Terra Nova scores to make solid data driven decisions about student progress is now in the forefront of the professional discussions being held at principal meetings. The focus on the Student Performance Diagnostic resulted in very lively discussions among the principals, leading to productive decisions about how to report our students' progress and how to improve instruction based on the results of the tests. These are the professional conversations we will continue to have under the umbrella of our Goal Plan developed for our accreditation.

Our principals struggled with the actual use of ASSIST and this caused some frustration. Principals had difficulty taking the information from our Steering Committee and staff and then transferring it once they had to meet with the individual school teams. In order to address that, we had two general meetings at the diocesan center with the steering committees from each school to try to assist them. Some of the confusion was the use of ASSIST and some was just lack of familiarity with the process and the discussions that were occurring.

Recognizing the need for continuous improvement in all we do, it is clear to see why AdvancED is routinely improving the process for accreditation. Although we see the need for it, it has also caused the Office of Schools some difficulties as we led the schools through each phase of the process. As changes came to us from AdvancED and we introduced them to our principals, they became frustrated with the office and began to lose confidence in our leadership in this area. Much good had been achieved and valuable conversations took place, but the changes that occurred mid process dampened the enthusiasm of the participants and changed the dynamic that had begun. It is our belief that as we move through the implementation of our goals, we will regain that momentum.

The Office of Schools has very actively proclaimed the good news of AdvancED in a variety of formats and to many audiences including the Council of Priests, Diocesan Catholic Schools Commission, School Advisory Councils and the Council of Catholic Superintendents. We have great confidence that the work that has just begun will flourish under the guidance of the Office of Schools and the dedicated pastors and principals in our schools.