



Effective Evaluations for | Dr. Tim Uhl | Catholic School Leadership

Over 20 years ago, a group of ambitious educators, led by Sister Maria Ciriello, OP, embarked on a program to improve principal training and evaluation. The fruit of their work was the three-volume set entitled *Formation and Development for Catholic School Leaders*. Volume I centered on “The Principal as Educational Leader,” Volume II on “The Principal as Spiritual Leader” and Volume III on “The Principal as Managerial Leader.”

Ciriello’s work was seminal in helping conceptualize how a layperson can succeed as a principal. By focusing on competencies and skills, the work was specific and easy to measure. Principal preparation programs at Catholic universities absorbed her teaching, superintendents developed new evaluation tools, which are in use across the country today, and principals use the criteria to measure their own success. It was and is ubiquitous.

The advent of the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBCS) has challenged our skills-based conception of what makes

a successful administrator. By focusing on school standards, our administrators have been challenged to lead their schools toward excellence. But many people struggle to operationalize the NSBCS. What should effective NSBCS leadership look like?

Several dioceses have developed their own evaluation tools based on the NSBCS. In the Diocese of Ogdensburg, N.Y., for example, their new instrument is taken directly from the NSBCS.

Ciriello's competencies can help by matching up to the appropriate NSBCS. For each one, I have identified an "exemplary" set of behaviors that an accomplished administrator would demonstrate. I have produced a sample administrator evaluation form with descriptive behaviors, available in the NCEA Resource Library at www.NCEA.org.

The purpose of this exercise is to identify how a competency-based understanding of leadership can interact with the new standards-based approach. For Standard #1, for example (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), there are eight applicable Ciriello competencies:

1. Gives leadership for achieving the goals of Catholic education
2. Involves employees in study and formation of school's mission and original charism
3. Utilizes Church documents on Catholic education
4. Actively participates in the Catholic community
5. Models Catholic values
6. Integrates liturgical seasons and celebrations into school life
7. Promotes parish partnerships
8. Integrates different cultural faith expressions

Let's take one of the above competencies identified by Ciriello, which fall under Standard #1. For "promotes parish partnerships" an exemplary set of behaviors would be participating in parish staff meetings, meeting with pastor once a week and keeping local parishes involved. To develop the evaluation tool, those exemplary behaviors would disappear or become less infrequent:

- Exemplary: participating in parish staff meetings, meeting with pastor once a week, and keeping local parish(es) informed
- Accomplished: participating in parish staff meetings, meeting with pastor occasionally, and keeping local parish(es) informed
- Satisfactory: keeping local parish(es) informed
- Absent: No evidence

This evaluation tool could provide a 360 degree view by incorporating various perspectives. Depending on the school organization, the following members could fill out the evaluation: board/council members, pastor, superintendent and the administrator him/herself. Ultimately, the results from all stakeholders should be compared to the self-evaluation in order to give the administrator the most comprehensive picture.

Does this help administrators in their professional practice? It does. It clarifies what a strong relationship between administrator and parish looks like. It gives both the school and parish administrators a view of what a healthy relationship looks like and it also gives diocesan administrators a framework to understand a healthy school-parish relationship.

For Standards 2-4, there are a total of nine competencies—making this evaluation tool 17 measurements of faith and mission leadership. While it might seem like an additional burden to adapt/adopt a new evaluation tool, and the new criteria might seem like superheroes only need apply, it will give our Catholic schools language to articulate effective mission leadership behaviors using an approach from the world of competency-based leadership.

Just as pastors and hiring committees struggle to ask interview questions that draw out mission and faith leadership, our evaluation tools often fail to highlight the right behaviors. These behaviors will then serve as the formation framework for leaders. The third part of this series is coming in the spring!

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