

The Keys to a Successful Catholic School



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The Roadmap

There are over 6,000 Catholic schools in the United States right now. This publication includes the characteristics Elementary Advancement Solutions believes exist in outstanding Catholic schools based on the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS), the Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education, and the experience of Founder and President, John Mihalyo. At the center of any Catholic school must be its Strong Catholic Identity and Culture. Without this, a school is a private school, not a Catholic school. As you review the six components of an outstanding Catholic school, each section includes reflection questions to help you benchmark your school in each area. While these questions are not the only way to assess your school, they should serve as an opportunity for deeper conversations within your school with your leadership teams, key stakeholders, and your community.

Strong Catholic Culture and Identity

The Catholic culture is the cornerstone of every Catholic school, permeating all aspects of the school, including the other five areas outlined in the graphic illustrated on Page 2. This fundamental element distinguishes Catholic and faith-based schools from private schools.

Many schools use the term "Catholic Identity," which is part of the broader concept of "Catholic Culture," encompassing the practice of the "Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teachings" from the USCCB. A thriving Catholic school goes beyond weekly Mass attendance. The presence of Christ should be unequivocally central to every facet of the school, guiding all decisions and actions. Every faculty member must take a leadership role in nurturing the school's Catholic Culture. The essence of a Catholic school lies in its rich Catholic culture, which should infuse every aspect of the school, as illustrated by the five surrounding areas on the graph. This unique component sets Catholic schools apart from private institutions.

Key questions for a school to evaluate its Catholic Culture:

- Does the mission of the school bring Christ front and center?
- Does the school come together frequently for Mass beyond "Holy Days"?
- Does the school offer meaningful outreach to the community beyond the four walls of the school?
- Is a priest visible and present for students, faculty, and parents outside of Mass?
- Do students participate in retreats to grow their faith?
- Does the faculty of the school participate in at least one annual retreat?
- When you walk into your school, do you know it is a Catholic school within the first fifteen seconds of being inside the school?
- Does your school use weekly and daily communications to promote the school's Catholic identity?
- Do classes begin with a prayer?
- Does the school come together as a community for special prayer services and days of remembrance throughout the year?
- Does the school community have a presence in the parish outside of school hours?
- Are the sacraments included in student and faculty life?
- Are families invited to attend school Mass?

Leadership

This category encompasses not only the school's principal, pastor, and administrative team but also leaders within parent organizations, student leadership, and faculty members who take on leadership roles within the school. When we mention "leadership," we refer to individuals with designated roles in the school and the parish community whose responsibility is to further the community's mission and vision.

One important distinction is the significant contrast between "leaders" and "managers." Managers are responsible for completing specific tasks, while leaders oversee daily tasks and proactively shape and drive the school's vision. The school's mission and vision must always remain at the forefront, guiding each day's efforts to propel the school forward. As a leader, the goal is to move from alignment to integration.

Key questions for a school to evaluate its Leadership:

- Do the principal and pastor meet and collaborate on an ongoing basis?
- Does the school have a mission statement focused on bringing Christ to the center?
- Are leaders visible in the community both in and out of the classrooms?
- Does the school have a strong presence of a priest who fully supports its mission and vision?
- Does the parish have a strong presence from the principal who fully supports its mission and vision?
- Do meetings have clear goals and purpose in fostering effective communication and decision-making within the school?
- Does the school have a strategic plan that includes alignment with school goals and benchmarks?
- Are faculty members and students asked to take on leadership roles outside the classroom?
- Does the school's culture allow for open and honest crucial conversations and differences of opinion with groups and individuals?
- Does the school's leadership partner with an advisory council or board on issues of mission over maintenance?
- Does the school have an active parent organization that supports its mission and vision?
- Does the school have a central leadership team focusing on mission over maintenance?
- Is leadership asking for informal and formal feedback on the school's direction at least once per year from constituents?

Operational Vitality

The operational vitality of your school is essential for achieving its mission and vision. This includes developing a strong and recognizable brand to attract students, effective recruitment strategies to ensure a diverse and talented student body, managing costs not covered by tuition through fundraising and sponsorships, and maintaining ongoing communication with various stakeholders, including parents, alumni, and the wider community.

In a Catholic institution, every person involved plays a crucial role in ensuring the school's long-term sustainability. This responsibility encompasses setting a fair and reasonable tuition to cover current and future expenses, implementing comprehensive marketing and recruitment strategies to attract and retain students, and carefully managing budgets to ensure the efficient use of resources and the continued success of the school.

Key questions for a school to evaluate its Operational Vitality:

- Does the school have areas of its strategic plan specific for advancement and recruitment?
- Is the school proactively setting enrollment goals for the next three to five years?
- Does the school track tuition trends and costs while projecting these costs for the next three to five years?
- How is the school effectively using social media, websites, and weekly newsletters to communicate its mission and vision?
- Has the school successfully created a culture of giving from community members?
- Do parishes that have parishioners attending the school support the school financially?
- Does the school have both an operating and maintenance reserve of funds in the event of an unexpected emergency?
- Is the school conducting meaningful fundraising events that lay out the goals and use of the funds raised?
- Does the school provide a yearly annual report to its stakeholders to share how all monies were raised and used during the previous year?
- How is the school actively engaging alumni, students, and parents in the community to ensure the school's legacy is preserved for future generations?

Community Engagement

"Engagement" is carefully chosen over "involvement" in this context. When a community is involved, individuals may attend events or participate in certain aspects of the school. However, when a community is engaged, the level of involvement goes beyond the surface, encompassing parents as active partners who are deeply involved with the school before, during, and after their time there. An engaged community wholly owns the school, leading to sustained growth.

Schools can nurture community engagement through various approaches. When involving the community, it's essential to strike a balance between work and play. If the focus is solely on "work," community members may experience fatigue from feeling constantly "asked" to contribute. Conversely, if only "play" events are available, engagement may not take firm root.

Key questions for a school to evaluate its Community Engagement:

- Are parents engaged and welcomed in the school beyond when the school needs something?
- Are parents and faculty provided with the chance to provide input into ways the school can engage its community?
- Is the school effectively using social media outlets to showcase what's happening at the school, both inside and outside of the classrooms?
- Are volunteers celebrated and recognized for their contributions to the school?
- Does the school effectively communicate upcoming events in a timely manner to maximize the number of families who can participate?
- When the school holds functions on campus, are they done at low or no cost to families to encourage all families to attend?
- Is the school culture one where faculty members frequently and willingly attend functions outside school hours to support the school mission?
- Are family members provided frequent opportunities to attend school-related events during the school day?
- Are communication strategies reviewed each year for effectiveness?

Workforce

The term "workforce" encompasses all the dedicated individuals who form the backbone of a school, including administrators, teachers, office staff, custodians, kitchen staff, and before and after care workers. Each of these roles is essential in contributing to the school's success and ensuring a positive experience for students and their families.

When it comes to hiring, schools strive to select personnel who not only meet the educational institution's mission, vision, and goals but also align with the values of the community. It is crucial to familiarize each new hire with the school's mission and culture, foster a sense of unity among the faculty, and encourage each staff member to pursue personal and professional growth, thereby contributing to the overall advancement of the school. While faculty retention rates can provide valuable insights, it's important to ensure that retained staff members are actively engaged in and contributing to the school's overarching mission.

Key questions for a school to evaluate its Workforce:

- Do faculty members' daily activities and schedules contribute to the school's mission and vision?
- Are faculty members being allowed to actively shape the goals and outcomes of meetings?
- Are faculty provided with meaningful professional development and growth opportunities throughout the year?
- Do faculty members share professional development and subject matter expertise with colleagues?
- Can faculty members be observed taking active leadership roles outside the classroom?
- Are new faculty members provided with mentors and mentorship during their first year at the school?
- Are teachers provided with meaningful and ongoing professional development that creates a team culture amongst the faculty?
- Are teachers celebrated for their vocation as Catholic educators throughout the year?
- Does the retention rate of faculty members reflect a positive culture within the school?
- Do all faculty feel welcome in all areas, including the main office and the faculty lounge?
- Is there active collaboration outside the classroom to promote the Catholic culture and mission?
- Are all employees paid a fair and competitive salary for their work?
- Are faculty provided planning time during their day?

Individual Student Growth

Our Catholic schools must place our students at the forefront of everything they do. They are the heart and soul of our educational community. Without their presence, our schools would be mere shells, lacking the vibrant energy and diversity that our students bring. Every decision we make is rooted in the question: "What is in the best interest of our students?"

We cherish the uniqueness of each student, embracing individuals from all walks of life. As a Catholic school, we are committed to providing an inclusive environment where financial constraints never prevent a student's access to our education. We firmly believe that our role as educators in a Catholic school extends beyond academics; we are dedicated to nurturing each student's holistic development - academically, socially, spiritually, morally, physically, and emotionally.

Key questions for a school to evaluate its Individual Student Growth:

- Are students being met where they are when they enter the school for the first time?
- Does the admissions process serve as a crucial gateway for the school to understand the prospective student, while also providing the prospective student with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the school's unique culture?
- Are students being challenged with classes and materials to ensure growth from year to year consistent with their age?
- Are students with disabilities and learning differences being provided reasonable resources to accommodate their needs based on the school's limitations?
- Are materials being updated in a reasonable timeframe and on a consistent timeline to ensure each year builds on the previous one with a shared mission and goals?
- Do students receive instruction rooted in the faith, and have the faith present across all content areas?
- Are students recognized for their achievements both in and out of the classroom?
- Does the school have extracurricular activities and clubs for students to participate in after school hours?

What is Elementary Advancement Solutions?



Elementary Advancement Solutions is a comprehensive educational consulting company that offers innovative solutions to the challenges facing Catholic and faith-based school leaders today.

John Mihalyo, the founder of Elementary Advancement Solutions, understands faith-based school leaders' challenges. After hearing the same concerns from principals year after year regarding recruitment, marketing, and fundraising, he was strongly motivated to create a company that could provide solutions. Elementary Advancement Solutions specializes in helping school leaders succeed in advancement, leadership, and recruitment by providing them with fresh ideas, time to collaborate, and effective strategies unique to each school.

With over 25 years of experience in education, including 20 years as an administrator and 15 years as a Catholic school principal, Founder and President John Mihalyo is a highly experienced leader in the field of education. Elementary Advancement Solutions offers valuable solutions to the challenges faced by school leaders and provides essential support in areas such as leadership, advancement, and enrollment.

John Mihalyo has built a solid reputation in school leadership. He has collaborated with six pastors, two bishops, five superintendents, and two dioceses across multiple states. He has also partnered with thousands of parents and constituents, finding creative ways to keep the light of Christ alive in parochial schools.

John's experience in advancement is particularly noteworthy. He has overseen the creation of two Advancement Offices and has helped raise over \$1.8 million in funding through annual funds, special events, grants, and other programs. He has also led a \$6 million renovation project and has achieved an average enrollment increase of 21% throughout his tenure as a school principal.

Elementary Advancement Solutions takes a personalized approach to help each school meet its unique needs and achieve success in the future. John believes in working directly with schools to develop a tailored strategy that addresses their specific challenges and opportunities. With his extensive experience and proven track record, John and his team are well-equipped to support school leaders in achieving their goals.

Services offered include:

- **Advancement Coaching** offers personalized solutions to meet every school's unique fundraising, enrollment, and marketing requirements, challenges, and opportunities.
- **Executive Coaching** is designed for current and future school administrators to create and realize their vision and bring it to reality at their respective schools.
- **Mastermind Groups** are biweekly video sessions with 6-10 leaders in your career area, providing support and accountability to help you grow professionally. Groups are available for principals, advancement directors, enrollment directors, and aspiring administrators.

