



Executive Summary

Diocese of Baton Rouge

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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.

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?

The Catholic Schools Office (CSO) is a ministry of the Diocese of Baton Rouge under the leadership of Bishop Robert W. Muench, who appointed Dr. Melanie B. Verges in service as Superintendent of Schools effective July 1, 2009. In addition to the superintendent, the CSO staff includes an assistant superintendent, curriculum specialist, instruction specialist, and two clerical staff members. The Diocesan School Board meets regularly throughout the year to advise the CSO on matters of policy for schools in the diocese, and recommendations made by the board are submitted to the bishop for approval.

Though Catholic education in the geographical area that is now the Diocese of Baton Rouge began in the mid-1800's, the Diocese of Baton Rouge was founded in 1961 and has served the people of Louisiana through various ministries grounded in strong roots of faith, heritage and tradition. The diocese consists of 68 church parishes, of which 34% are associated with Catholic schools as parochial, inter-parochial or partnership schools. In addition, the diocese has three regional high schools and two private high schools. District accreditation involves all schools and programs, except the private high schools, which are accredited individually by AdvancED. There is one private elementary school in the Baton Rouge area that advertises a Catholic faith curriculum, but is not associated with the Catholic Schools Office of the Diocese of Baton Rouge. The Department of Special Education and the Child Nutrition Program are subordinate departments to the Catholic Schools Office.

Enrollment during the 2015-16 school year for all schools is 14,912, with 11,055 (74%) students in Grades PK4 - 8 and 3,857 (26%) students in Grades 9 - 12. The total number of students includes 18 students enrolled in the Special Education Program, which has classes at five locations throughout the diocese. More than 84% of the enrollment is Catholic. Though the student population represents a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, four are prominent: white (83%), black (12%), Asian (3%), and Hispanic (2%). Total enrollment has declined by 396 students (2.6%) over the past five years, though tuition programs in the State of Louisiana have made it possible for the Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic Schools to serve 1017 students in 2015-16 who would not otherwise be able to afford a Catholic education.

Participation in government-funded programs is highly encouraged and supported by the CSO. Sixteen schools have Title I services for students on their campuses. All schools in the diocese participate in Title II Professional Development. During the 2014-15 school year, more than \$4 million in government funding was utilized by schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge to enhance and enrich educational programs. As of the 2015-16 school year, 26 schools enroll 1,017 students through State of Louisiana tuition programs for low-income families. Twenty-three out of the 24 schools in the district participate in the federal nutrition program, which is directed by Ms. Lynda Carville of the Child Nutrition Office. The total number of meals (breakfast, lunch, snack and supper) served during 2014-15 was 2,001,916, with 45% of the meals provided under the free/reduced meal guidelines. The Child Nutrition Program employs approximately 160 people.

Though qualitative growth was realized across the diocese during the past five years, quantifiable changes have also taken place. The establishment of the Catholic Teacher Leader Cohort has provided a pool of potential administrators for future openings. The expansion of special education services to five school sites has addressed the needs of families across the diocese. Participation in the State of Louisiana Scholarship Program and State Tuition Organizations has allowed Catholic schools to serve low-income families who would not otherwise be able to afford a Catholic education. The plan to open a Cristo Rey school in north Baton Rouge has been welcomed by the Baton Rouge community. Not all change in the past five years reflects growth, however, and the closing of Redemptorist High School (RHS), which began

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as a parish school and became a diocesan school in 1995 when the parish could no longer support the ministry, was difficult for all stakeholders. Though RHS served many families well for years, low enrollment caused the difficult decision to discontinue operations as of June 30, 2015. With the closing of RHS, the Diocesan School Board recommitted itself to creating support for schools and began a process to establish a Dashboard of Vitality to inform pastors and school administrators of areas needing strengthening.

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.

With a vision of Evangelizing Hearts, Educating Minds, Encouraging Talent, and Embracing the Future, the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge work collaboratively in the ministry of Catholic education. The Mission of the Catholic Schools Office is to support schools in their vision by promoting excellence in faith formation, academic rigor, innovative programs, responsible stewardship, and joyful celebration of service to the community.

Evangelizing Hearts is the most important component of Catholic schooling in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Each year the bishop visits all high schools and several elementary schools to demonstrate his support of the faith formation provided through the school's programs, and chaplains are appointed by the bishop to serve high schools in the diocese.

The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization works in conjunction with the CSO to provide professional development for teachers and administrators through a certification program and retreats for principals and assistant principals. As of August 2015, 49% of teachers and administrators have already achieved basic certification in religious education, with uncertified staff actively working toward required certification as part of their employment contracts.

As a diocese, all schools participate in the Educators Gathering and Catholic Schools Week Celebrations, which include Mass celebrated by the Bishop, to further connect their school to the district-wide ministry of evangelization. The annual Educators Gathering, with Mass and commitment ceremony, begins the year for all Catholic school educators in the district on a note of unity in faith as the bishop and priests from around the diocese concelebrate. Students throughout the diocese are involved in service as part of faith formation, with more than 250,000 hours of service reported for 2014-15.

Stakeholder surveys support the claim that Evangelizing Hearts is a priority in the Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic Schools. The Catholic Identity Defining Characteristics Survey (April 2013) indicate wide agreement among students, parents and staff that the Catholic Identity is strong, with high agreement that the mission statement clearly express a commitment to Catholic Identity, the opportunity for faith formation outside the classroom is provided, and the religion program is strong.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge are committed to Educating Minds and Encouraging Talent for all students. All schools meet the guidelines for state approval by the Louisiana Department of Education, and the Superintendent serves as a member of the Non-Public School Committee to advise the State of Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on policy affecting schools throughout the state.

To support the educational program, professional development services are offered by the CSO to board, administrators, and teachers throughout the diocese. Annual programs provided include New Teacher Orientation (four sessions), Leadership Cohort (six sessions), Educators Gathering (full day of keynote and breakout sessions at River Center), Summer Leadership Summit (three days), Assistant Principal Workshop, Counselors Workshop, Librarians Association Meetings (quarterly), Board Orientation, Board Overnight Retreat, and Overnight Retreats for both Principals and Assistant Principals. These annual professional development opportunities provide educators with collaborative experiences in which they learn about topics that are priorities for the district as they share best practices.

In addition to annually recurring professional development opportunities, a total of 188 professional development sessions have been provided through the CSO over the past five years, including sessions on classroom supervision walk-throughs, writing across the curriculum, math vertical teaming, Ruby Payne, StrengthsFinder, Rigor & Relevance Framework, School Law, and Campus Safety.

Educational programs have been strengthened through the district's partnership with the University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education Program (ACE), which provides teachers to schools in underprivileged areas. During the 2014-15 school year, ACE teachers were placed at Redemptorist High, St. John the Evangelist, and Ascension Catholic. The CSO coordinates the ACE program in the diocese and supports the teachers through a mentor program and various social events during their two-year service to schools in the district.

Though the schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge are diverse demographically and geographically, there is a strong sense of unity within the Diocese of Baton Rouge. All stakeholders focus on the vision of Embracing the Future as they engage in the continuous improvement process. Local and diocesan board members participate in an orientation program annually and strive to support schools as they expand and adjust services to meet the needs of the families served. School board members, administrators, faculty, and staff demonstrate a spirit of service in their respective roles, and the support of the bishop and pastors is truly a blessing to school communities.

As the Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic schools embrace the future, several areas will be addressed within the next few years. First, the Diocesan School Board will create a Dashboard for Vitality so that various indicators can be identified and monitored to ensure the strength of schools. In addition, all schools will expand the focus on rigorous and relevant curriculum that fosters positive relationships as part of the educational program of study to maximize student learning. Attention will be paid to the non-academic opportunities for student development, including extra-curricular, co-curricular, and athletic activities. With district-wide focus on the vision for the Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic Schools, great gains are expected to continue in upcoming years.

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.

Academic accomplishment is measured in several ways for students in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. For Grades 2 - 8, the Terra Nova Test was utilized from 2004 through 2015 as a means to assess outcomes of academic instruction throughout the diocese. Scores for the district are well-above the national average of 50-percentile.

The ACT Aspire Test was adopted as the district's standardized test for Grades 3 - 8 beginning in 2015-16, and interim assessments were added throughout the year to give educators real-time assessment to inform instruction. In addition, the formal testing dates were changed from spring to fall so that schools serving State Scholarship students were not burdened with an unmanageable schedule for multiple assessments in the spring.

High schools have employed the ACT, PSAT and other partner assessments to measure instructional effectiveness during the past five years. Students in the Class of 2015 scored an average of 24.0 on the ACT and were awarded more than \$63 million in college scholarships and TOPS funding and received almost 3,000 hours of advanced credits for their work during high school.

Program effectiveness surveys of stakeholders in 2014-15 indicated strong agreement between parents, staff and students (84%, 91%, and 59% respectively) that schools have a clearly articulated rigorous curriculum infused with Gospel values, preparing a student for life and work.

Three schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge have received recognition since 2011 as Blue Ribbon Schools under the Top 15% NCLB program. Most Blessed Sacrament, St. Aloysius and Catholic High in Baton Rouge were honored as Blue Ribbon Schools between 2013 and 2015.

Additional Information

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

The district utilized the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS) as the framework for the recent accreditation self-study report for local schools. As in the past, the district's accreditation initiative involved the appointment of two accreditation coordinators for each school to work along with the principal to process data with the faculty and produce the self-study report. To support schools in their self-study, monthly workshops were provided by the CSO for accreditation coordinators to support the self-study process and to develop layers of instructional leadership within schools. Principals received updates during monthly Principal Meetings and through the CSO's weekly bulletin, and all presentation documents and templates were available to principals and coordinators via the diocesan Moodle site.

The final collaboration for the self-study process involved Collaborative Review of Reports in June 2015, during which accreditation coordinators and principals read and commented on the reports of other schools. Feedback given to schools informed their final updates on their self-study reports, and the experience enriched the understanding of everyone about the strong similarities and uniqueness of schools throughout the diocese. Such activity illustrates the high level of cooperation and support that schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge provide each other.

As a ministry of the Catholic Church, schools work with the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection to ensure that policies and procedures are followed to ensure the safety of all students in schools throughout the diocese. In addition to serving as a resource whenever needed, the office provides victim assistance, safe environment curriculum, certification requirements for educators, continuing education opportunities, and information about policies. Schools also work with other departments within the diocese, and the CSO and Catholic Charities shared recognition from Catholic Relief Services when they received the 2013 Operation Rice Bowl National Award because of the strong connection between the two departments. Catholic schools also work closely with the Finance Department, which oversees financial and facility aspects of operation. Several schools have undertaken construction projects during the past five years with the assistance of the Diocese of Baton Rouge Finance Office.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge have faced many challenges during the past five years. In 2014, the diocese made the difficult decision to close Redemptorist High school, which opened as a parish school in 1947 and became a diocesan school in 1995, because of low enrollment. As with Catholic schools throughout the nation, financial concerns underlie the majority of issues facing our schools. Economic conditions have affected the ability of parents to pay tuition, and the expansion of magnet and charter schools throughout Louisiana has resulted in loss of enrollment as parents make the difficult choice to remove their children from a Catholic school. The high cost of technology for classrooms and offices along with the desire to reach a competitive salary scale have stretched budgets that are already lean.

The district accreditation process has strengthened relationships in and among schools in the diocese. By requiring collaboration, educators were challenged to work together for a common goal, and they learned to appreciate the similarities and differences between and among their schools. As the district proceeds into the cycle of continuous improvement and quality assurance, such relational connections will provide the context in which school personnel accept the challenge of striving for excellence.

Layers of leadership were expanded during the process, with accreditation coordinators at each school assuming leadership for the endeavor

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instead of relying solely on the principal for direction. Further, administrators and faculty members joined together in analysis of data as they focused on establishing an action plan for the improvement of student learning. The knowledge gained from the process equips schools to expand the disaggregation of data as they focus on areas in need of improvement.