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# How Can Catholic Higher Education Help K-12 Catholic Schools and School Systems Prepare for and Maximize Participation in Parental Choice Programs? A Reflection on the 2013 Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference on Catholic School Financing

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## **How Can Catholic Higher Education Help K-12 Catholic Schools and School Systems Prepare for and Maximize Participation in Parental Choice Programs?**

### ***A Reflection on the 2013 Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference on Catholic School Financing***

Susan M. Ferguson, University of Dayton

**D**r. Lee Shulman reminded those of us participating in the CHEC Conference of 2013 that some issues are intractable. Financing Catholic education for all who desire this gift seems to be just such a difficult and complex issue. However, offering hope and assurance for progress in issues of finance, Dr. Shulman also noted advances made, both in furthering scholarly work and in raising the bar for excellence in Catholic schools since the inaugural CHEC Conference in 2007. For example, Dr. Shulman highlighted meta-analyses of research connected to outcomes for students graduated from and currently attending Catholic education institutions; he also applauded the publication and implementation of the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools, along with other recent developments furthering the field. The charge for those participating in the 2013 CHEC Conference was to explore Catholic school financing as related to public funding, private support, cultivation of institutional commitment, and financial management. Truly it is the examination of these facets both individually and as integrated pathways that will lead to progress in securing the viability of Catholic schools.

The conference's logistics offered opportunities to listen and respond, to ponder significant questions, and then to network outside of formal sessions. Participants listened to presentations about public funding, private support, financial management, and the cultivation of an institutional commitment, and after these presentations, we could ask questions or add commentary. Separate breakout groups were also held, at which participants with a variety of perspectives examined more specific questions about this range of topics germane to the financing of Catholic schools. Network potential was created in both formal and informal gatherings.

### One Breakout Group: Many Ideas

A breakout group titled *Helping the Church Prepare for and Implement Publicly Funded Programs* reflected upon the following question: “How can Catholic higher education help K-12 Catholic schools and school systems prepare for and maximize participation in parental choice programs?” The discussion was rich because members of the breakout group represented a gamut of affiliations—archdioceses and dioceses, advocacy groups, and Catholic colleges and universities—and because they expressed such a diversity of possibilities for need, for support, and for mutual outcomes. The following list offers a glimpse at possibilities for utilizing Catholic college and university resources and growing partnerships with PK-12 Catholic schools that may enhance preparation for and maximize participation in parental choice programs:

- marketing;
- teacher preparation, school leadership, and academic excellence;
- catechesis;
- legislative understanding and advocacy;
- alumni involvement and witness;
- data gathering, analysis, and dissemination of findings;
- legalities, integrity, and Catholic Identity; and
- conferences, publications, and proliferation of best practices.

An explanation for initiatives related to the above categories follows. While the categories were generated in the breakout sessions, I have chosen to extend ideas generated in the group and add examples of past collaborations between Catholic colleges and universities and PK-12 Catholic schools.

#### Marketing

One relevant suggestion for college and university academic marketing departments and schools of business administration to consider would be to offer their students internships in sales, management, publication design, and web development for Catholic Arch/dioceses or for individual Catholic schools. Interns could work in partnership with school officials to articulate school missions, discern potential markets, and use media and technology to best communicate the assets of Catholic schools in an authentic manner. Working in this manner, interns could gain valuable professional experience and, perhaps, grow in their advocacy for Catholic education. When public funding is available in some states and regions, Catholic education becomes an option for families once unable to consider Catholic education. University

and Arch/diocesan partnerships could create campaigns to inform families of these opportunities, which would promise multiple opportunities for growth for all stakeholders. In the experience of one Catholic university, a professor of marketing assigned his undergraduate students the task of creating a marketing plan for a local Catholic high school. Students conducted surveys, interviewed school faculty, staff, students and families, created a message highlighting benefits of an education at this school, designed graphics and advertisements, developed a plan for communicating the message through a variety of media, and made a presentation to school administrators. The university students had the experience of serving a client and the school had a plan for highlighting the gifts to graduates of their school and enticing others to join their school family. The plan served to enhance enrollment when public funding for Catholic school tuition became available.

### **Teacher Preparation, School Leadership, and Academic Excellence**

Arch/dioceses and Catholic university and college departments of teacher education and educational leadership, as well as centers for Catholic education can collaborate to prepare candidates for teaching and leadership positions in Catholic schools. Insuring quality personnel in Catholic schools leads to academic excellence and quality faith formation. When parents are given a choice through state funding for faith-based schools, every assurance must be given that the choice of a Catholic school will result in maximizing educational results and in faith formation for children enrolled in PK-12 Catholic schools.

Approaching insurance of quality personnel for Catholic schools through Catholic colleges and universities may be explored in teacher education training of undergraduates including course work linked directly to Catholic education and field experiences in PK-12 Catholic schools. Catholic colleges and universities with departments of teacher education can provide training of novice teachers and leaders through programming and field experiences targeted for a deeper appreciation and understanding of Catholic education. In an effort to support and provide further growth in academic excellence, novice teachers and administrators need to be encouraged to see life in Catholic schools as a vocation. A sense of vocation leads to building relationships with students, families, and co-workers with a strong sense of mission and vision. As the mission and vision in Catholic schools includes academic excellence and faith formation, opportunities while students are in

teacher training may include additional courses in Catholic education and field experiences in Catholic schools to assist with understanding how the mission and vision of Catholic schools calls for being a witness to and promoter of the faith in a different way from those choosing to serve in public schools. Courses may provide grounding in the vision and mission of Catholic schools in terms of origins and proposed manifestations in school culture. Field experiences in Catholic schools permit teacher education candidates to be immersed in the culture and integrate what has been learned about Catholic schools through course work, making concepts real and, hopefully, capturing their souls and hearts to make commitments to Catholic education. It has been fascinating to watch some teacher education candidates at the author's institution, graduates of public high schools, consider and sometimes commit to Catholic education after a field experience in a local Catholic school.

Specific courses in the history and culture of Catholic schools may be provided for undergraduates intending to serve in Catholic schools upon graduation. For example, the University of Dayton offers these courses. Such courses may attract greater numbers to University Consortium for Catholic Education (UCCE) teacher service programs (<http://www.ucceconnect.com>). Obviously, professional development specifically intended for practicing Catholic school teachers and administrators provides for the special perspective of Catholic school culture and logistics. Providing ongoing professional development that is reasonably priced and widely accessible (e.g., web access) is particularly important for Arch/dioceses that do not have a Catholic college or university in close proximity.

When public funding is accepted, Catholic schools may have to participate in similar evaluation methods of students as do public schools. When the prescribed testing is unfamiliar to Arch/dioceses, departments of teacher education at Catholic colleges and universities familiar with government mandated testing may be a resource for Arch/dioceses who choose to accept the mandates of state testing. Professional development to interpret new statistics such as value added data may be helpful to administrators and teachers mining data for means to improve curriculum and instruction. Analysis of the data may improve achievement in the journey to academic excellence for all students. A positive experience for students will better assure a family's continued participation in a Catholic school chosen as a result of public funding.

Catholic colleges and universities benefit from the willingness of PK-12 Catholic schools to host candidates completing internships through mentoring and demonstrating the charism of their particular school to novice teachers and administrators. These partnerships also can serve as the foundation for action research conducted by PK-12 personnel and university professors. Scholarly work is needed to better analyze teaching and learning in Catholic schools as they relate to academic achievement and post secondary degree attainment among other outcomes resulting from participation in PK-16 Catholic education. Doctoral programs with at least a cognate in Catholic education studies can prepare the superintendents, curriculum and assessment directors, and principals for the future of Catholic schools and institutes of Catholic higher education. Quality Catholic schools may lead to parent selection when public funding is available.

Dr. Patrick Wolf's work is an example of what college/university scholarship can demonstrate to legislators when making the case for public funding. These findings may also impress parents when they have an opportunity to take advantage of public funding. As Dr. Wolf of the University of Arkansas so wonderfully articulated during the CHEC conference, college and universities need to gather, analyze, and disseminate data to better articulate the outcomes of participation in PK-12 Catholic education. Dr. Wolf's meta-analysis clearly demonstrated the positive outcomes of PK-12 Catholic education. For legislators needing to provide a rationale to create or continue public funding for faith based schools, such scholarship provides evidence of positive results for students enrolled in Catholic education that few can deny. In addition funding from private sources may be encouraged by this positive evidence. Researchers of Catholic schools gathering data directly from Arch/dioceses will be able to describe best practice locally and across states. Understanding of these practices may inspire those who have not yet been able to articulate their story to those supplying public and private funding. Clearly detailing the difference a Catholic education makes for students, families, and a community is paramount to growing advocacy and parental choice.

Targeted course work in Catholic education for those in teacher formation and in leadership formation, field experiences in Catholic schools, research, and professional development for Catholic school educators provide better assurance for a dedicated faculty and administration formed in an understanding of the foundations of Catholic education. Catholic colleges and universities with departments of teacher education and educational leadership in collaboration with Arch/dioceses improve the probability of a quality

teaching force that will provide expected academic excellence and inspired faith formation, hallmarks of Catholic education. This quality product will better insure parental choice for Catholic education when it is made possible through public funding.

### **Catechesis**

Departments of theology/religious studies could partner with Catholic schools and parishes in catechetical and evangelical endeavors. Catholic schools are a special ministry of the Church. What can Catholic colleges and universities in partnership with Arch/diocese do to assist practicing Catholic school teachers and administrators to better grow spiritually and deepen their faith? As students of non-Catholic denominations or nonreligious students enroll in Catholic schools, the importance of maintaining a strong Catholic identity and of welcoming those who may share different tenets of faith must be examined by both colleges and universities and by Catholic PK-12 schools. As a result of public funding, Catholic schools do welcome those outside of the Catholic tradition and may come to see this opportunity as a means to grow interfaith dialogue. As Catholics, we seek always to understand as well as to be understood. Surely this is in line with the message Pope Francis sends.

### **Legislative Understanding and Advocacy**

Another means for Catholic colleges and universities to assist in preparing for and maximizing participation in parental choice programs includes involvement of personnel from departments of political science and of alumni of PK-16 Catholic schools who are committed to a life of public service. These faculty members and alumni may provide advocacy in formulating laws or processes and/or enhancing existing legislated public funding and processes so that families desiring a Catholic education but unable to afford the tuition costs may be able to enroll in Catholic schools. Forums for legislators, Arch/diocesan leaders, university and college personnel, families, social services, and business leaders bring multiple voices to the table, and such forums provide impetus to explore state constitutions and find the best means to aid families seeking a faith-based education. Advocacy coupled with positive data that evidences the value in Catholic education may infuse greater attention to and legislative action for public funding of Catholic schools. Partnerships between Catholic colleges and universities and the Arch/dioceses of their states can work create such forums, the goal of which would be to provide many families more educational options.

### **Alumni Involvement and Witness**

Many Catholic colleges and universities and some Catholic schools have realized the advocacy for Catholic education that their alumni provide. Collaboration among Catholic institutions may inspire their alumni to be advocates for Catholic schools and to promote taking advantage of public funding opportunities. How many alumni enroll their children in Catholic schools? Why do they do so? What are their experiences? How might PK-16 Catholic institutions listen to their alumni to improve the institutions and entice others to consider Catholic education? How might alumni be encouraged to promote Catholic education among their families, friends, and community members? How can a campaign be developed to enlist the advocacy of alumni to promote utilization of public funding for school choice? How can alumni advocate for a choice of Catholic education when public funding is available?

### **Legalities, Integrity, and Catholic Identity**

As Catholic schools increasingly accept public funding, there may be a need to carefully scrutinize school policies and procedures to determine changes that might be expected when public funds are available to Catholic schools. A thorough analysis of resulting consequences upon acceptance of state funds may determine that state mandated changes violate Church teaching. Questioning necessary changes in policies and procedures for employees and for students and families must be reviewed for possible loss of integrity of Catholic principles should public funds be accepted. How will Catholic schools remain true to their mission and identity if public policy demands processes contrary to tenets of the Catholic faith and tradition? Recent questions of faculty life style and medical insurance have brought Catholic schools and institutions to the forefront of legal battles. Being proactive about these questions in consultation with Catholic institutions of higher education, particularly schools of law, would supply a "safety net" to insure adherence to mission, vision, and identity for Catholic schools, as well as, Catholic institutions of higher education. When Catholic schools agree to accept public funding for tuition from families, the families must be assured that the school maintains the tenets of the Catholic faith. Catholic schools of law may be able to assist Arch/dioceses when decisions are made about required state changes to practices and procedures as a consequence of accepting public funds.



### **Conferences, Publications, and Proliferation of Best Practices**

In the vision of the Catholic Higher Education Supporting Catholic Schools (CHESCS) as affiliated with the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), Catholic institutions of higher education should sponsor continued conferences and publication of conference findings as the Catholic Higher Education Collaborative (CHEC) has done since 2007. Inviting Bishops, Archbishops, and the clergy; Catholic professional organizations; state and national legislators; superintendents, principals and teachers of Arch/dioceses; Catholic and state sponsored (with an interest in Catholic education) college and university personnel from various departments and divisions; social service agencies; philanthropists; families; and business collaborators to conferences will provide a vast array of stakeholders in the endeavors of Catholic education. Networking opportunities at CHEC conferences have led to inspiration for innovation, standards, and greater impact in the community for Catholic education. The University of Dayton Center for Catholic Education has begun a series of summits each summer since 2012 to bring together this array of stakeholders. Although still evolving, the summits have been crucibles for energy and hope. The 2012 summit focused on partnership initiatives between Arch/dioceses and Catholic higher education. The 2013 summit brought together those intending to sustain and support urban Catholic PK-12 schools. In the summer of 2014, the theme was Charism, Culture and Curriculum. Presentations and materials from the Summits will be available on the University of Dayton e-commons site in the next year and the keynote summit presentations have been made available virtually through the web in real time. Means to carry on networking and fruitful discussions beyond the Summit continue to be explored through electronic communication. Prayer, enthusiasm, ongoing networking, innovative measures of communication can assist Catholic education in issues of finance but also in other categories suggested in the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Secondary and Elementary Catholic Schools. Perhaps a summit or symposium for a broad set of stakeholders including teachers and families will provide the impetus to rally legislators to advocate for school choice and the means to make all families aware of their ability to choose a school that engenders their values.

Great hope lies ahead of us. Dr. Shulman and the collaborators of the inaugural CHEC Conference have reinvigorated our imaginations, scholarly initiatives, and networking for the future of Catholic education. Let us con-

tinue diligently, enthusiastically, and in prayer that we might share the Lord's way to be seekers of faith formation and for academic excellence in Catholic schools. Let us find means for all who want to enroll in Catholic schools through public funding, their own treasure, or through funds from private donors and philanthropists. Collaboration of Catholic colleges and universities, PK-12 Catholic schools, and other stakeholders hold keys to parental choice through public funding and for financial sustainability and vitality for Catholic schools.

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