

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

2.2: Religion classes are an integral part of the academic program in the assignment of teachers, amount of class time and the selection of texts and other curricular materials.

I. What does this benchmark indicate for school performance?

This benchmark indicates that the school holds comparable expectations in rigor, student engagement and academic weight for religion classes as it does for other academic programs. Qualified Catholic teachers are assigned to teach religion classes. These teachers are able to present content correctly and confidently. These teachers are Gospel role models for the students. At the secondary level, qualified teachers hold degrees in theology or related areas. The school schedules consistent and sufficient class time for meaningful, engaging religious instruction. The school gives the appropriate consideration to the budget for instructional materials for religious education as it does for other academic areas.

II. As a review team member, what evidence do I look for?

An examination of the following items will assist in reviewing this area:

- Do class schedules reflect appropriate time allotments for religion classes?
- Is there evidence of teacher qualifications and preparation via lesson plans, professional development, or catechist certification?
- What are the publication dates of textbooks and other instructional materials?
- Are scope and sequence charts, curriculum maps and other course and topical sequences available?

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III. What are the key differences between the levels of the rubric?

At level 3- Fully Meets Benchmark,

religion classes receive the same treatment as other academic disciplines regarding scheduling and allocation of resources. Religion teachers are qualified and certified as catechists at appropriate levels.

At level 4-Exceeds Benchmark,

religion classes are innovative and highly engaging, and integrate the study and practice of religion into students' lives. Instructional materials and other experiences assist in this effort throughout the school. Religious themes and topics are integrated across the curriculum. Student-generated media that interprets and communicates the meaning of the religious content are available throughout the school. Religion teachers are highly qualified and certified as catechists at advanced levels.

At level 2-Partially Meets Benchmark,

there is a regular, organized religious education program in place. It is not given the same attention as other subjects in the selection of qualified teachers and of instructional materials. Less instructional time is allocated for religious instruction in the schedule.

At level 1-Does Not Meet Benchmark,

the school deemphasizes religious instruction. There is a religious education program but there is no priority given to how it is organized, nor to the qualifications of teachers, or to the quality of instructional resources. Class time is more easily and frequently reallocated to other activities than is class time of other academic subjects.

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IV. What are some key suggestions for improvement?

To move from level 1 to level 2,

- Allocate consistent scheduled time to religious instruction.
- Establish a program to credential religion teachers.
- Acquire texts, textbook series, and other up-to-date instructional materials for religion classes.
- Align religious instructional materials to grade-levels, development levels, and curricular expectations.
- Keep religion class times intact when altering the schedule.

To move from level 2 to level 3,

- Review the qualifications of religion teachers and makes changes necessary to assure that those who are teaching religion are qualified to do so.
- Assign criteria consistent with those of the other curriculum areas when choosing textbooks and instructional materials for religion classes. The scheduling of religion classes is given the same priority as that of the other classes.

To move from level 3 to 4,

- Ensure that catechist certification is obtained by all religion teachers.
- Allocate specified time frames and an equitable allocation of class time for religion in relation to other academic areas.
- Collaborate to develop, evaluate and refine religion classes to ensure they are integrally woven into the larger academic program.
- Utilize innovative techniques to engage students in religious education classes.

V. What are key terms for understanding? (Refer to NSBECS Glossary for terms listed below.)