

## Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

**7.1** *The curriculum adheres to appropriate, delineated standards and is vertically aligned to ensure that every student successfully completes a rigorous and coherent sequence of academic courses based on the standards and rooted in Catholic values.*

### **I. What does this benchmark indicate for school performance?**

Benchmark 7.1 is about ensuring that every student in a Catholic school gets a rigorous standards-based curriculum integrated with Catholic values. Two things are necessary: 1) having a *coherent* curriculum based on rigorous standards and integrated with Catholic values, and 2) designing the course of studies to make sure that *every* student benefits from it. It is important to note that a curriculum is an “explicit and comprehensive plan developed to honor a framework of standards,” (Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins, *The Understanding by Design Handbook*). Standards themselves are just part of a curriculum. In this way, the Common Core initiatives or AP standards are not a curriculum, but may be a component of a curriculum along with Catholic teachings, assessments, curriculum maps, etc.

*Coherence* in a curriculum relates to alignment and growth in learning. When a school has a coherent curriculum, it is easy to see clear progression of knowledge, skills, and dispositions from year to year. The program in every subject intentionally develops intellect and values consistent with readiness for the next level, and ultimately readiness for college, career, and life. Thus, the curriculum is “backward designed” from rigorous exit standards and contains clear expectations and progress markers at each grade level to ensure at least one year of learning growth in one year of school, leading to successful demonstration of the exit standards upon graduation.

A school that fully meets this benchmark designs and requires the *sequence* of courses and/or grade level subjects so that students achieve the learning designated in the progress markers (grade level or course standards/outcomes), and in the final exit standards. If the school allows students to select different course sequences, or if the school places students into different course sequences based on prior performance on standardized or classroom-based assessments, educational testing, or other evidence of learning, the school must make sure that all students experience curriculum and instruction that will allow them to successfully achieve the designated progress markers and exit standards regardless of the particular sequence of classes they take.

In excellent Catholic schools, the curriculum - aligned to rigorous academic standards - includes integration of Catholic values across all subjects at curricular depths appropriate to the subject area content. Some subject areas will interweave Catholic teaching at a greater depth complexity than others. For example, in subject areas such as English Language Arts, Social Studies, or Religion, Catholic teaching and values may

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be more closely and directly related to content as well as classroom environment and affective learning; in subject areas such as Physical Education or Mathematics, Catholic teaching may come into play more authentically in the affective domain of being in the class. (See also Benchmark 7.2)

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

Here are some fundamental guiding questions which will help frame this item:

When examining the written curriculum (W.C.):

- Does the W.C. clearly identify which standards are being addressed in this course? In this subject by grade level? In this unit?
- Are the delineated standards valid, research-based, appropriate, and rigorous? Does the written curriculum emphasize critical thinking as evidence of student learning or is growth measured in traditional skill based testing **alone**?
- Can you see intentional and sufficient growth in learning based on the standards and curriculum, from year to year and/or course to course? OR, is there a lot of repetition? OR, is there shifting of which standards are used from grade to grade or course to course?
- Does the W.C. specify content, learning outcomes/objectives, assessments, resources, strategies, and pacing so that schools have enough information to determine that students are expected to grow in knowledge, understanding, skills, and dispositions from year to year, based on the standards?
- Does the W.C. identify Catholic values and other elements of Catholic identity which are authentically integrated into the curriculum?

When examining the sequence of classes that students take:

- Is each student required to take the same sequence of classes?
- If students take different sequences of classes, does the W.C. show that they are expected to achieve the same standards, no matter which sequence they take?

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

#### At level **3- Fully Meets Benchmark**,

the school's written curriculum identifies rigorous academic standards for all subjects/courses and grade levels. There is a required sequence of classes and the written curriculum for the required sequence(s) of classes shows alignment with the standards and is designed to produce growth in learning from year to year, course to course. The written curriculum shows integration of Catholic values at curricular depths appropriate to the subject area content. There is an accountability system in place at each school to measure student growth, and this system is shared and owned by classroom teachers.

#### At level **4-Exceeds Benchmark**,

the school's written curriculum delineates rigorous academic standards for all subjects/courses and grade levels. The written curriculum for the required sequence(s) of classes clearly shows alignment with the standards to produce growth in learning from year to year, course to course. Evidence is readily available to show careful mapping of curriculum content, learning outcomes and assessments to ensure that all students make steady and sufficient progress on the standards. No matter which sequence of classes a student is required to or elects to take, the curriculum for those classes will lead to achievement of the academically rigorous standards. A written curriculum in all subjects shows the integration of Catholic values at curricular depths appropriate to the subject area content.

#### At level **2-Partially Meets Benchmark**,

the school's written curriculum includes references to standards being addressed across subjects and courses/grade levels. There is little or no evidence that the courses have been aligned to the standards and sequenced in order to intentionally focus on specified growth in learning from year to year. Although individual classes include designated standards, the sequence of classes a student takes does not necessarily result in achievement of a delineated set of standards. The standards achieved for any given student are more ad hoc. Written curriculum for some classes shows integration of Catholic values.

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At level **1-Does Not Meet Benchmark**,

there are no delineated academic standards which provide a basis for developing a coherent sequence of classes for students.

### **NOTE:**

One of the consistent, research-based strengths of Catholic schools is the practice of holding all students who enroll to high standards. Benchmark 7.1 reinforces and operationalizes this practice by setting the clear expectation that excellent Catholic schools will use rigorous academic standards as a framework for designing curriculum for each student – regardless of the specific classes they take – that will require them to progress from year to year and result in their meeting high graduation requirements that prepare them for college, career, and life.

### **IV. What are some key suggestions for improvement?**

#### **To move from level 1 to level 2,**

- Provide time and support for faculty to research standards. Provide appropriate instructional materials and training to implement a deep understanding of standards as a foundation for the written curriculum
- Adopt/adapt appropriate, rigorous academic standards for all subjects
- Provide professional development relating to standards-based, backward-designed curriculum
- Develop written curriculum that identifies the standards to be addressed

#### **To move from level 2 to level 3,**

- Use the delineated standards to vertically align courses in sequences that ensure growth in learning on the standards from year to year, course to course
- Provide continuing professional development relating to standards-based, backward-designed curriculum

#### **To move from level 3 to 4,**

- Map the curriculum to identify gaps and/or overlaps between sequences and courses

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- Provide time and support for teachers to work in professional learning communities to monitor student learning results that will provide evidence that: 1) students are achieving the delineated standards, 2) students are growing in learning throughout classes and from year to year, 3) students are achieving the delineated high academic standards regardless of the sequence of courses they take, and 4) learning in all classes includes elements of Catholic identity

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

Standards  
Rigorous curriculum  
Coherent curriculum  
Backward designed  
Progress markers