

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.1: *The governing body and leader/leadership team engage in financial planning in collaboration with experts in non-profit management and funding.*

I. What does this benchmark indicate for school performance?

Benchmark 10.1 is about finding competent committee members to help with the financial components of the school. Experts are needed in budgeting, advancement, third source funding, cash flow, and understanding the dynamics of a school calendar year.

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

These are some questions which will help to frame this item:

- What is the employment and experience of board members and those assigned to committees?
- Is there evidence of the school/parish finance office interaction with board and (arch)diocese?
- Who are the experts consulted and what are their qualifications?
- Does the financial plan span a minimum of five years? What does it address?
- What are the revenue sources? Are they listed and addressed in the plan?
- Is there a tuition plan including, proposed increases in tuition and the building of tuition assistance?
- What is the plan for salaries, compensation packages and other personnel costs?
- Do financial plans include planning for the costs associated with facilities maintenance and improvement, including technology hardware?
- Is the budget-planning mission driven with a focus on student learning and outcomes?
- Have the budget and financial planning included plans for enrollment management, advancement and marketing?

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

At level 3-Fully Meets Benchmark,

the leader/leadership team and governing body review the plan on a regular basis and make necessary adjustments in consultation with experts.

At level 4-Exceeds Benchmark,

the financial planning is an integral part of the operation of the school. All the components are working at a high level and documented. There are regularly scheduled meetings with the experts.

At level 2-Partially Meets Benchmark,

a financial plan has been discussed, but there has been no formalization of the plan or consultation with experts.

At level 1-Does Not Meet Benchmark,

there is no financial planning process or any list of experts.

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IV. What are some key suggestions for improvement?

To move from level 1 to level 2,

- Begin to develop a shared financial plan and develop a list of experts.

To move from level 2 to level 3,

- Develop implementation strategies with a leadership team.
- Implement plan with the advise of experts.
- Include the community as implementation progresses.

To move from level 3 to 4,

- Monitor the implementation plan continuously.
- Schedule meetings with experts and share results.
- Include all stakeholders in the implementation strategies.
- Provide results to the various publics.

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

Financial Plan

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.2: *Financial plans include agreed-upon levels of financial investment determined by the partners involved who may include but are not limited to parishes, diocese, religious orders, educational foundations, the larger Catholic community, and responsible boards.*

I. What does this benchmark indicate for school performance?

Benchmark 10.2 is about finding and establishing partners to be committed to the school and willing to provide financial investments. Identifying these partners and developing formal shared agreements regarding the levels of involvement and the levels of corresponding financial assistance is the expectation of this benchmark.

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

These are some questions which will help to frame this item:

- Is there a current list of partners, delineating their relationship to the school?
- Is there a list of partners that have not been cultivated but are under review as probable or possible partners?
- What are the sources of current revenue? What revenue do partners contribute?
- Are there signed formal agreements between the partners acknowledging the level and type of support beyond tuition?
- What are the different types and levels of revenue beyond tuition?
- Is there evidence of successful fundraising and what are the roles of the partners in these efforts?
- Is the school or parish a recipient or partial recipient of endowments?
- Does planned giving at the parish, partner parish or diocesan level or other partner levels contribute to the revenue for the school?
- What other sources of revenue exist?

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

At level **3-Fully meets Benchmark,**

financial plans specify specific levels of financial investments and identify the different partners as their contributions relate to these investments.

At level **4-Exceeds Benchmark,**

financial plans have diverse investments so that the assets are not all in one type of investment and the plans depend upon multiple partners, with designated expectations.

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

the plan has been developed; however, not all resources have been committed. There are no formal agreements; the partnerships are based on a handshake or other informal arrangements.

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

the plan does not exist or the plan is not diverse and relies on only one or two revenue sources, such as parish contribution and tuition. Partnerships are not part of the financial plan.

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IV. What are some key suggestions for improvement?

To move from level 1 to level 2,

- Broaden the plan to include more sources of revenue.
- Establish the potential to secure partners.

To move from level 2 to level 3,

- Identify partner and begin to utilize partners as source of revenue and talent.
- Contact and seek commitments from multiple sources.
- Formalize the agreements with all partners and sources.

To move from level 3 to 4,

- Look for more partners and opportunities beyond current commitments.
- Diversify assets through diversification of partnerships and new sources.
- Recognize alternative sources not traditionally approached to partner with catholic schools.

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

Educational foundations

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.3: *Financial plans define revenue sources that include but not limited to tuition, tuition assistance/scholarships, endowment funds, local and regional partnerships, public funding, regional cost sharing, (arch)diocesan and/or religious communities' assistance, foundation gifts, entrepreneurial options and other sources not listed.*

I. What does this benchmark indicate for school performance?

Benchmark 10.3 is about finding third source funding beyond tuition and fundraisers and partner parishes and dioceses. These sources are committed to the school and the programs in this one school.

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

These are some questions which will help to frame this item:

- Does the current revenue stream include multiple sources of funding beyond the parish, the diocese and partnerships with schools etc.?
- What are the various sources and types of revenue beyond tuition?
- What mechanisms are employed by development staff and leadership team to raise funds? Are these traditional fundraisers or more innovative strategies?
- Are funds from fundraisers targeted for investments that will grow the school? Or
- Are funds from fundraisers targeted for specific “needs” which will not grow investment in the school?
- Are there plans that have been developed by the leadership team and board to increase the sources of revenue for the school?
- What are the plans?

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10.3: *Financial plans define revenue sources that include but not limited to tuition, tuition assistance/scholarships, endowment funds, local and regional partnerships, public funding, regional cost sharing, (arch)diocesan and/or religious communities' assistance, foundation gifts, entrepreneurial options and other sources not listed.*

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

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

financial plan defines revenue sources and includes all revenue sources beyond tuition and parish support when appropriate.

At level **4-Exceeds Benchmark,**

financial plan includes a diverse range of revenue sources beyond tuition and fundraising as well as researching best practices of successful schools to incorporate into the financial plan. Financial planning focuses on the cultivation of new sources of revenue with specific targeted goals.

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

only the traditional sources of revenue are listed, tuition, parish support and fundraising.

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

there is no analysis of revenue sources.

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10.3: *Financial plans define revenue sources that include but not limited to tuition, tuition assistance/scholarships, endowment funds, local and regional partnerships, public funding, regional cost sharing, (arch)diocesan and/or religious communities' assistance, foundation gifts, entrepreneurial options and other sources not listed.*

IV. What are some key suggestions for improvement?

To move from level 1 to level 2,

- Identify and analyze several new funding sources.

To move from level 2 to level 3,

- Identify and include diverse funding sources.
- Develop strategies to build relationships with new and diverse funding sources.

To move from level 3 to 4,

- Research best practices from successful schools and other non-profit organizations.
- Work with development staff and board committee to prepare targeted proposals for submission to alternative funding sources.

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

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.4: *Financial plans include the delineation of costs for key target areas such as instruction, tuition assistance, administration, professional development, facilities, equipment, technology, program enhancement/expansion, capital projects and other planned projects.*

I. What does this benchmark indicate for school performance?

Benchmark 10.4 articulates the importance of school leadership teams having a full and complete understanding of the costs associated with fulfilling the school's mission. This means more than simply dividing all the obvious costs by the number of students and calling it a "cost per child" – it means being able to break out those costs into logical areas that can then be analyzed and compared. Schools that have a good handle on this level of data are able to use the information in a number of ways:

- A "real" cost per child can be calculated, incorporating costs that might be otherwise overlooked. For example, a school which operates in a building which is owned and maintained by an associated parish might well never have considered what the space costs—this is a real cost, even if it is borne by the parish rather than the school. Having a comprehensive outline of potential costs would highlight this "hole" in the school's budget, allowing for a robust conversation about the sustainability of the current model and the risks involved with being dependent on the parish's continued support.
- Breaking out costs by area allows the school leadership team to evaluate the level of spending in each, and ensure that the budget accords with the school's mission. For example, a school whose mission centers on academic excellence, but whose teachers are poorly paid or whose budget for professional development is very small might recognize, through this exercise, that their budget tells a different story than does their mission statement.
- Breaking out costs by area also allows the team to analyze each area independently to ascertain if there are better (or cheaper) ways to achieve the school's mission. Benchmarking can be an excellent tool here, which is one of the reasons the standards strongly recommend including experts in non-profit management in the financial planning process. If your school is spending 1.5% of the budget on academic technology, and local competitor schools are all spending 3.5%, it doesn't mean that they're right and you're wrong – but it does indicate that this is an area where further research could be very valuable.

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- Finally, being able to articulate a robust, detailed cost picture will allow the school to practice greater transparency. This information can be very effective when communicating with current and prospective families as well as other stakeholders. Donors, in particular, are increasingly interested in understanding how a school stewards donated resources, and being able to articulate the cost structure, in detail, indicates a high degree of financial control.

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

These are some questions which will help to frame this item:

- How are the costs broken out for all budgets (current year and, if available, the past 3 years)?
- How are the costs broken out in financial plans (next year's plan and, if available, the long-term 3-5 year plan)?
- How frequently are those responsible for reading and using the budgets / plans updating and reporting their numbers? Did you interview those responsible?
- How does the leadership team use this information?
- Is the financial reporting considered trustworthy?
- Is the leadership team or if the team incorporating the information into both strategic and tactical decision making processes?
- Is the information updated and reviewed, in detail, at least quarterly?
- Is this information considered as the key element of important decision processes like budgeting, financial planning, establishing tuition and aid levels, determining annual raises, setting fundraising goals or engaging in capital projects?

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- Is the budget information useful, (presented at a reasonable level – that is, rolled up into categories that are detailed enough to be actionable, but not so detailed that the information is unwieldy)?
- Is the leadership team able to explain (or defend) the specific way cost information has been aggregated?
- How engaged is the leadership team in the process of designing the budget reports?
- Does the leadership team find the reports useful?
- Is the leadership team able to use the information to make better decisions for the school?

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

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

the set of costs being considered is complete – no major categories are left out. Cost information is aggregated to the best level for decision making, and is presented in a set of well thought out reports. Cost data is reviewed regularly by the school leadership team, and is used to inform important decisions. School leaders are cognizant of the relationship between the budget and the school's mission, and are committed to ensuring that they are aligned. The community understands the true “cost per child” and how it relates to tuition.

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At level 4-Exceeds Benchmark,

all costs are included in the analysis, including “replacement cost” (rather than operational cost) for any goods or services that are obtained at less than market rate (examples might include lower-than-market teacher salaries, parish-funded utilities or donated books). Cost data is available in near real time, and can be used for day-to-day management as well as longer term planning. School financial systems / personnel are able to present data at different levels of aggregation depending on the need, from broad rolled-up categories for public reporting to very detailed levels for comparative analysis. Cost information is trended over time and is compared to appropriate benchmark data to identify potential opportunities or weaknesses.

At level 2-Partially Meets Benchmark,

all regular operational costs are considered, but the budget may be missing more complex elements like depreciation, shared services or an accounting for capital expenses .Cost information is presented to the school leadership team in a manner that does not support the kind of planning or decision making desired. Developing detailed cost information is an arduous or expensive process, and so may only be available infrequently (perhaps once a year during “budget season”.) The school leadership team recognizes the importance of understanding costs, but does not always incorporate cost data into planning or decision making processes. Cost data, including the “cost per child”, is not shared consistently with the community nor used to help school families recognize the value of the education they are receiving.

At level 1-Does Not Meet Benchmark,

the cost picture is incomplete; even some (or all) operational costs are not tracked or cannot be incorporated into financial plans. School leaders do not recognize (or agree with) the importance of considering costs when making decision or longer-term plans. The larger community has no knowledge of the true cost of education.

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IV. What are some key suggestions for improvement?

To move from level 1 to level 2, the basics must be put in place:

- Capture and report a consistent system for costs and expenditures by category.
- Develop a process to ensure that the leadership team uses this information during financial planning and decision-making.
- Involve IT work if the current system's infrastructure is insufficient to support the school's budget work.
- Educate school leaders about budgets, including how to read financial reports.

To move from level 2 to level 3,

- Expand the set of costs being reported on to incorporate the more difficult items, probably assisted by someone with expertise in nonprofit finance.
- Commit to data-driven decision making as the norm for all school leaders.
- Provide additional training or coaching to be able to use financial information effectively.
- Make it the norm that the school's financial data is owned by the school's leadership team and creates a comfort level for modifying reports to ensure the reports have an accurate understanding of the school's financial health at all times.

To move from level 3 to 4, a very sophisticated data system

- Hire personnel capable of using it effectively—must be put into place.
- Incorporate historical data (for trend reporting).
- Create comfort level for the leadership team as it relates to financial topics and accounting norms.
- Establish trusted relationships with similar schools (perhaps schools far enough away that competition is not a concern).
- Exchange cost data regularly with partner school to allow for effective benchmarking.
- Complete market research to assess true “replacement costs” for all goods and services.
- Establish a more robust model for reporting the differences (for example, recording teachers' salaries at market cost and recognizing the difference an annual donation by the teacher under gift revenue).

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

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.5: *Current and projected budgets include a statement of the actual and projected revenue sources, indicating an appropriate balance among revenue sources, and a statement of actual and projected expenditures including the actual cost per child, benchmarked compensation/salary scales, and other health benefits and retirement costs.*

I. What does this benchmark indicate for school performance?

Benchmark 10.5 speaks to the need for a complete picture of school revenues and for a robust understanding of the relationship between revenues and costs. Excellent Catholic schools understand that multiple revenue sources are typically necessary to fund schools' missions, and they take a "portfolio" approach to planning for and pursuing different types of revenue. The school is aware of the current "mix" – that is, the percentage of revenue that comes from each source – and they have established a target mix aimed at reducing overall risk and ensuring long-term revenue stability.

- For example, if a school's revenue is 75% tuition, 20% parish subsidy and 5% donations, the leadership team might set a long-term goal of reducing parish subsidies to 5% by increasing donations to 15% (recognizing that this implies a need to invest in an advancement function) and looking for opportunities to create a new income stream (5%) based on renting the building during non-school times.

Schools understand that neither revenue nor costs remain fixed over time, and have incorporated reasonable assumptions into the plan regarding growth, with particular attention paid to areas that are expected to grow most swiftly (e.g. healthcare costs).

They are careful to articulate how this portfolio relates to the aggregate cost per child, and are particularly attentive to the relationship between tuition and costs (see Benchmark 10.6).

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

These are some questions which will help to frame this item:

- First and foremost when you look at the actual financial plan and financial statements is the revenue categorized by type, and are multiple forms of revenue recognized appropriately?
- Are the revenue types described by some of the following suggested (but not limited to) categories: tuition, current-use donations (restricted and unrestricted), donations to endowment funds, payout from endowment funds, transfers from other linked organizations (parish funding), gifts in-kind, contributed services, fund-raising revenues (minus fundraiser costs), rental income, fees for non-core services provided (e.g. after-school care) and probably others?
- Is there evidence that these revenue sources are considered as a portfolio – that is, the leadership team is aware of the percentage of income that comes from each source, and has set a target “mix”?
- Are there established action plans to move the school towards that mix?
- Are these plans based on a robust understanding of the current situation, and take growth factors into account as well?
- What is the availability of this data? Is this data available in the financial plan or via interviews with key personnel?
- Is there indirect evidence that might include any records of actions taken to adjust the mix: increased or decreased reliance on tuition, investment in advancement/development resources, etc...
- Finally, is there evidence that revenue and cost information have been compared effectively, and that comparisons are being used to strengthen the entire community’s awareness of the portion of costs covered by tuition.

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

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

the school will recognize a portfolio of revenue sources in current and projected budgets, and will articulate these as a percentage of total revenue. In future projections, both revenue and cost information will be grown appropriately, taking particular note of the higher growth rates associated with healthcare and retirement benefit costs.

At level **4-Exceeds Benchmark**,

in addition to a revenue portfolio, the school will have a “target mix” portfolio, and will have action plans in place to increase or decrease reliance on specific sources as required. Assumptions about growth / change in revenue or costs will have been developed by a comprehensive team, including experts in the field of nonprofit management.

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

the school recognizes multiple revenue sources, but does not consider them to be a portfolio that can be “rebalanced” to reduce risk and increase long-term sustainability. The school may be highly dependent on a single revenue source, such as tuition or a parish subsidy. Future projections do not take growth into account, or do not include a full accounting of costs and revenue sources

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

school leaders do not have a handle on school revenues, or revenue information is not incorporated into financial plans in any effective way. The school may be wholly dependent on a single source of revenue, such as tuition, with no awareness of the risks involved in such a model.

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IV. What are some key suggestions for improvement?

To move from level 1 to level 2,

- Capture and report all revenue information in accordance with basic non-profit accounting principles.
- Utilize cost data (see benchmark 10.4) so that an effective comparison can take place.
- Use this data at the leadership team level for planning.

To move from level 2 to level 3,

- Report complete revenue data (regularly) as a portfolio whose relative percentages are analyzed.
- Project into the future in more sophisticated ways, taking into account economic growth factors.
- Seek and utilize assistance from an expert in nonprofit management or finance.

To move from level 3 to 4,

- Work as school leaders with peers and experts in the field to establish short, medium and long-term goals for the revenue mix.
- Work as leaders to develop action and investment plans necessary to support movement towards those goals.
- Revisit and review the financial plan regularly, and cost / revenue growth projections should be updated based on the most current available economic data.

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

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.6: *Financial plans include educational materials for distribution to all members of the community explaining the total cost per child and how that cost is met by identifying the percentage of cost that is paid for by tuition and the remaining amount of cost that is supported by other sources of revenue.*

I. What does this benchmark indicate for school performance?

As with any goods or services, perceived value is one of the most important driving factors for families making enrollment decisions at Catholic schools. Benchmark 10.6 recognizes this reality, and directs school leaders to articulate a clear value proposition for current and prospective families based on the comprehensive cost and revenue information described in Benchmarks 10.4 and 10.5. Specifically, a comparison of total value received (the all-in “cost per child”) and the amount of that cost that is covered by tuition can be extremely powerful in attracting and retaining families and students, since (at most schools) the difference is stark: even “full-pay” families are seldom covering the full cost, since tuition is most often set below the full cost per child.

Please note that this benchmark is highly dependent on Benchmark 10.4 (the full cost accounting necessary to develop a cost-per-child measure) and 10.5 (the full revenue picture necessary to show the portion of cost covered by tuition and explain what other sources make up the gap).

Of course, not all value can be calculated economically. In particular, the unique gifts and charism of most Catholic schools go beyond the school’s cost structure, and when describing “value received” it’s important not to lose sight of this, or to become so enamored of the calculations that we present them as the primary reason to choose a Catholic education. However, in a world where most public schools are available, safe, reasonably effective and free, this type of analysis is important to level the playing field and show families that the school is an excellent steward of their resources and is working hard to stretch those tuition dollars as far as possible.

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

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

These are some questions which will help to frame this item:

- What are the scores for the school's performance on Benchmarks 10.4 and 10.5? (Assessment in this area will be different depending on the results for 10.4 and 10.5).
- Did the school score at a Level 1 – Does Not Meet Benchmark for either 10.4 or 10.5? If yes, this benchmark will automatically be Level 1 as well.
- Did the school score at least Level 2 in both 10.4 and 10.5?
- What do you find in the financial plan as well as financially related materials that have been distributed to the school community over the past 18 months? (To some extent, this is an “either it's there or it's not” situation)
- Does the school have a clear cost-per-child articulated and compared to existing tuition, or has it failed to do so?
- What are the responses of interviews with key leadership team members regarding the progress towards the goal, if evidence cannot be found?

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

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

the school will have achieved a Level 3 rating in both 10.4 and 10.5 based on well-understood and comprehensively articulated sets of cost and revenue information. Cost per child is explicitly calculated, incorporated into the financial plan, and communicated clearly to parents and stakeholders. Revenue percentages are applied to the cost per child, showing the percentage covered by tuition and explaining where the remainder of the revenue comes from. This communication is updated at least annually, and is readily available to the community and to prospective parents (for example, published prominently on the school's website).

At level **4-Exceeds Benchmark**,

the school will likely have achieved Level 4 in either 10.4 or 10.5, or perhaps both. In communication materials, the comparison of cost-per-child and tuition / other revenue is trended over time and projected into the future. The comparison with tuition takes the added step of incorporating tuition aid information. This information might be included as an average that reduces the effective tuition across the board, or might be done as a set of scenarios in which full-pay, partial scholarship and full scholarship (if applicable) examples are described. Future projections incorporate a sophisticated understanding of how costs and revenues are expected to change over time, and are informed by the school's plans regarding shifts in the revenue portfolio mix.

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

the school will have achieved a Level 2 rating in both 10.4 and 10.5, and may have achieved Level 3 in one of the two. Cost information is sufficient to create a provisional cost-per-child measure. Clear tuition data is available, such that the school can articulate the percentage of cost covered by tuition, even if it may not be able to explain precisely the mix of other revenue that makes up the gap between cost and tuition. The calculation may be out of date, or is not updated regularly. Even if the calculation is robust (Level 3), if it is not well articulated or is available only sporadically (annual mailing vs. continuously available on the web), the school should be considered Level 2.

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

the school is at Level 1 in either 10.4 or 10.5, indicating that either cost or revenue data is insufficient to be able to articulate the comparison between the two. Even if the calculation is relatively robust (Level 2 or even Level 3), if it lives only within the school's financial planning documents and is not communicated to parents, prospective families and other school stakeholder groups, the school should be considered Level 1. The essence of this benchmark is the word "distribution" – an excellent calculation that no one has seen might as well not exist. In this way, it is possible to achieve high evaluations on Benchmarks 10.4 and 10.5 and yet be level 1 on 10.6 if that great work is hidden under the proverbial bushel basket.

IV. What are some key suggestions for improvement?

To move from level 1 to level 2,

- Review the schools ratings on 10.4 and 10.5.
- Determine why the low ratings, if that is the case, and work on improving 10.4 and 10.5 so there is information to communicate.
- Demonstrate a commitment from the leadership team to communicate the data, if it exists. Commit to this level of transparency.
- Perform the necessary calculation (cost per child, percentage of cost paid for by tuition and remaining amount of cost) and produce a document for immediate transmission to the community (and, if possible, post on the school's web presence).

To move from level 2 to level 3,

- Review the school's ratings on 10.4 and 10.
- Meet with stakeholder communities, if this information is available and determine how best to make this information continuously available to the stakeholders.
- Give extra consideration, in assessing options, to the opinions of families that have recently joined your community, as they are your best proxy for the prospective families out there that you haven't identified yet.

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To move from level 3 to 4,

- Verify that the school is already committed to transparency and is working hard on communicating value to all stakeholders.
- Collaborate with your community members, especially parents, and allow them to drive how you continue to innovate.
- Consider working with an expert in enrollment management or academic marketing to evaluate the best way to present your unique school's situation.
- Utilize well, the value proposition embodied by the difference between effective tuition and actual cost. (Catholic identity and other unique cultural assets)
- A high degree of transparency is indicative of both confidence and humility on the part of the school's leadership team; it shows that you believe in your approach, but are open to hearing better ideas.

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

Stakeholders
Effective tuition
Transparency
Revenue portfolio

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.7: *The governing body and leaders/leadership team provide families access to information about tuition assistance and long-term planning for tuition and Catholic school expenses.*

I. What does this benchmark indicate for school performance?

Benchmark 10.7 recognizes that families pay to go to Catholic school and most need assistance on the possibilities available to support their vision. How do you pay? This requires the leadership team to work closely with families to ensure they all have access to comprehensive and practical information related to multiple sources for tuition assistance and how to seek out such funding, especially sources not directly related to the school. Also most family need to reflect and participate in guided discussions regarding how to plan to pay for tuition and all other expenses related to Catholic school education. Guided assistance in multiple formats, medium and languages is among some of the best practices.

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

This topic requires the board, the leadership team and external reviewers to ask questions such as:

- Is there evidence of focused meetings with families at the time of application, acceptance and entry focused solely on the cost of one child and the expected contributions from the family?
- Is there evidence of focused meetings on how to develop plans to pay the expected tuition (family contribution) for Catholic education?
- What printed materials are provided on paper, on the web page, in workshops or on webinars hosted by the school?
- Are there experts working with the schools to craft and create documents that tell the good news story regarding alternative sources of funding?

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- Are all expenses associated with the education of one child carefully listed, with payment deadlines and school policies regarding payment and non-payment, especially if “fees” are charge for special items?
- Are there planning templates and instructional opportunities to assist families with the creation of planning documents for their families?
- Who are the experts that are providing counsel for families as they plan on how they will fund and pay for the education of their children?
- Is there a published calendar regarding these events?
- Are these events accessible to all families being scheduled for alternative times, rather than the obvious one night a week so often selected?
- What other creative strategies are employed to honestly assist families, rather than punitive measures?
- Are there any established relationships with external funders, or scholarship funders?
- Is there an assessment strategy to determine whether the process in place is effective and to allow for continuous improvement and adjustment?
- Are all materials bilingual and accessible to all populations seeking a Catholic school education?
- Who is monitoring the local environment for reputable information regarding new sources of funding, payment plans and tuition assistance?

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.7: *The governing body and leaders/leadership team provide families access to information about tuition assistance and long-term planning for tuition and Catholic school expenses.*

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

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

there is evidence of a clear communication strategy to provide the information to families regarding the costs, tuition expectations and planning strategies for providing the funding necessary to plan for the long term. This strategy is clear, concise and communications reach all constituents ensuring access to information about tuition assistance and planning for long-term education of their child through graduation.

At level **4-Exceeds Benchmark,**

communications plans to reach out and serve all constituents are well established and well designed. Families are receptive and participating with school staff to gather information regarding tuition assistance, payment planning. Each family is individually packaged with a financial plan, clear delineation of costs and tuition assistance and tuition payment expectations. Families understand the policies and provide feedback on all facets on a regular basis. Evidence of collaborative relationships with donors, funders and dioceses demonstrate the openness to growth and change of all aspects of programming for this aspect of sustainability.

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

the economic picture of the school is not shared with the families, where all understand the cost of educating one child and what the expectation is for payment from each participating family. Tuition assistance information is provided to those who ask or a narrow list of program is listed for all to investigate on their own using websites and other forms of guidance. Some form of arbitrary award system limits any local assistance. There is little or no active engagement or empowerment of families to learn and own the responsibilities of funding for Catholic education.

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

There are no efforts by the governing board or the leadership team to provide tuition assistance information broadly to all families as well as instructional opportunities to understand how to manage these opportunities. Each family is on its own to find the funding and in some cases will be assisted depending on who is contacted.

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IV. What are some key suggestions for improvement?

To move from level 1 to level 2,

- Develop strategies to share information regarding available tuition assistance with information regarding how to apply.
- Publicize information regarding payment plans.
- Host opportunities to begin the conversation regarding the need to prepare plans to pay over the long term.

To move from level 2 to level 3,

- Develop a clear communication strategy/plan on the “financing” of a Catholic education at your school.
- Include opportunities for meetings, workshops, and print materials and online resources.
- Create lists of tuition assistance available from traditional sources and lists of opportunities not widely shared, and perhaps unique to your local community or the talents of your students.
- Ensure that all families are fully informed and individually packaged so that they understand all the facets of funding their children’s education at this school.

To move from level 3 to 4,

- Families are actively involved in the planning of their payments with school staff and consult on a regular basis.
- All communications are clear and in multiple languages allowing all who seek a Catholic education to apply.
- Directions are very well written and forms are easy and simple.
- Policies are well written, well publicized and widely accepted, known and understood.
- Plans to achieve level four are delineated by the board in collaboration with the staff and include the intentional review and revision on a yearly basis.

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.7: *The governing body and leaders/leadership team provide families access to information about tuition assistance and long-term planning for tuition and Catholic school expenses.*

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

Tuition assistance
Payment plans
Financial package

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.8: *The governing body and leader/leadership team ensure that appropriately developed financial plans and budgets are implemented using current and effective business practices as a means of providing good stewardship of resources.*

I. What does this benchmark indicate for school performance?

Benchmark 10.8 is focused on the responsibilities of the leadership to ensure the activation and utilization of financial plans and budgets. Assessing the quality of this implementation is key and the practices should be compared to or measured by the standards associated with effective business practices (profit and non profit) that are associated with successful, effective, responsible management of resources.

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

Evidence to be reviewed should include those documents (plans, meeting minutes, agendas, public communications etc.) and conversations that answer key questions such as:

- Is there a clear financial planning document with suggested strategies for implementation and monitoring?
- Do the position descriptions of the leadership team include the expectation to activate and utilize all financial plans prepared in collaboration with the governing board?
- Are the financial plans inclusive of all facets of school life, with notations regarding the multiple kinds of resources necessary to manage?
- What governance board documents describe board expectations for committee oversight and assessment of leadership's implementation of financial plans?
- Is there documentation of leadership's management strategies and assessments of outcomes?

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.8: *The governing body and leader/leadership team ensure that appropriately developed financial plans and budgets are implemented using current and effective business practices as a means of providing good stewardship of resources.*

- What are the key business practices that are employed and why?
- What are the benchmarked best practices of other (nonprofit and for profit) businesses? Where can they be found?
- What businesses are selected and used as benchmark businesses? Do they make sense?
- Who is responsible for developing and executing the financial plans and how involved is the school leadership team?
- Is the information regarding the financial plans, the budget and the allocation of budget shared with key constituents and staff? How?
- Are there examples of assessments regarding practices that have generated a change in the approach to managing the financials for the school?
- What are the strategies for revising and redrawing planning documents over designated periods of time?

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

At level **3-Fully meets Benchmark,**

the leadership team is managing the resources of the school, utilizing best business practices as recommended and provided for by the governing board. There is documentation that verifies the implementation process is evaluated and assessed on a regular basis as part of the annual review of the leadership team and as part of the oversight provided by the board finance committee. Finally, all assessments of the practices focus on the quality of work as well as the effectiveness of the realization of the financial plan to provide the necessary resources to support the effective articulation of mission and vision.

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.8: *The governing body and leader/leadership team ensure that appropriately developed financial plans and budgets are implemented using current and effective business practices as a means of providing good stewardship of resources.*

At level 4-Exceeds Benchmark,

the plan that is executed is mature, and effective and based on best practices as demonstrated by the benchmark institutions chose to be points of reference of assessment and evaluation. The planning process, over time, is evaluated and adjusted to better provide for the changing vision and context of the school. This is a flexible, adaptive and creative planning process. All constituents are included in the larger planning process which is informed by mission and allows for the continuous changing nature of the vision – what the school does and how they will do it. The financial plans are tied to the vision and not stand alone documents but rather integral to the planning of curriculum, instruction and all services provided to families and staff.

At level 2-Partially Meets Benchmark,

The board and the leadership team engage in financial planning and budgeting, but it is not based on school planning and all stakeholders do not inform this financial plan. The plans are not developed in collaboration with school leaders and usually not tied to the planned curriculum and instructional outcomes associated with the primary work of the school. Or there is no continuous planning process, rather it is a once a year static event. Or there are well-developed plans, but there is no mechanism to ensure that the leadership is implementing the plan and no mechanism to gather feedback once it is implemented.

At level 1-Does Not Meet Benchmark,

There is no evidence of a continuous structured planning process, with multiple stakeholders and communications with all participants. Planning is ad hoc and done by a few who are either on the board or comprise the leadership team, or are parish finance persons. There is no reference to non-profit best business practices, but rather an adherence to “our” way.

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.8: *The governing body and leader/leadership team ensure that appropriately developed financial plans and budgets are implemented using current and effective business practices as a means of providing good stewardship of resources.*

IV. What are some key suggestions for improvement?

To move from level 1 to level 2,

- Develop a process for continuous financial planning with work focused on budgets, oversight of implementation, continuous accounting by all parties and revisions.
- Research and find the best practices to use as benchmarks and models for planning. Look at other schools, systems, or nonprofits for models.
- Find experts to consult and with who can instruct and assist with the work.

To move from level 2 to level 3,

- Incorporate industry best practices for the planning models created and implemented, including best practices for assessment and oversight.
- Develop and post target dates and calendars for all planning steps for approval by board members.
- Delineate and share clear assessment of leadership team's activities related to budget oversight and implementation. Share with all members of the leadership team. No surprises.
- Seek out the support and consultative advice of industry experts.

To move from level 3 to 4,

- Develop a flexible, robust planning process that is adaptive to change in environment.
- Insure an ongoing planning process which is continuously evaluated.
- Continuously evaluate the efficacy and feasibility of all planning documents.
- Include all stakeholders in the planning process.
- Include the leadership team as significant leaders and integral to the success of the planning process.
- Integrate all members of the leadership team into all facets of the planning process.
- Inform the leadership team at all levels regarding finances, especially those items related to department budgets, including personnel and resources.

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

10.8: *The governing body and leader/leadership team ensure that appropriately developed financial plans and budgets are implemented using current and effective business practices as a means of providing good stewardship of resources.*

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

Financial plans
Budgets
Non-profit organization
For profit businesses
Resources