

Guidelines for Interpreting and Scoring Benchmarks

3.2: *Every student is offered timely, regular, and age-appropriate opportunities to reflect on their life experiences and faith through retreats and other spiritual experiences.*

I. What does this benchmark indicate for school performance?

This benchmark is about schools committing resources of time, space, and funds to provide students with meaningful and joyful encounters with God within the parameters of the school schedule. It is about demonstrating the value of spiritual reflection as a timeless life skill, central to our students' achievements. It is about putting spiritual reflection on par with academics.

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

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

- Are the costs associated with student retreats accounted for annually in the school budget?
- Are retreats differentiated by age-level?
- Do retreat leaders meet with students ahead of time to learn about the students' joys, anxieties, and hopes?
- Does the retreat planning process include a meeting between the relevant school stakeholders to discuss the school's mission, charism and retreat outcomes?
- Do students play a role in the planning of the retreat?
- Do retreats provide a genuine departure from a typical school day?
- Is the retreat evaluated? How extensively?
- Do retreats provide students with fresh and innovative ways to recognize God in their lives?
- Do retreats and spiritual experiences encourage students to be Christ for others?
- Do retreats allow students to encounter the Catholic tradition from a new perspective?
- Are retreats and spiritual experiences focused on youth and joyful?

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

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

students are presented with at least one organized opportunity to engage in a retreat experience under the direction of qualified personnel. Students play a role in the planning of the retreat so it deals with their life experiences in the larger context of the faith.

At level 4- **Exceeds Benchmark,**

students are presented with multiple retreat and reflective experiences throughout the year which they assist in planning under the direction of qualified personnel. These experiences are designed to continuously provide students with an awareness of God's love and God's presence at work in their lives. Schools highlight their traditions to discover methods and practices that reflect the deeper spiritual heritage of the institution.

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

students are offered retreat or reflective experiences rarely, and have little role in the planning of these experiences. The presence of qualified personnel to direct these experiences is sporadic. The experiences bear little relevance to students' lives.

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

retreats or sustained reflections are not a part of the students' experience.

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IV. What are some key suggestions for improvement?

To move from level 1 to level 2,

- Begin to develop a retreat budget.
- Take steps towards placing the retreat and spiritual experiences at the center of the school's life.
- Invite students to gather evidence of God working in their lives and explore creative ways this evidence can be shared.
- Work across the building to swap classroom space for retreat activities so students experience a disruption of their location within the school day.

To move from level 2 to level 3,

- Expand resources in the retreat budget.
- Calendar student retreats while other major school calendaring is being done. Coordinate retreat programming with your school's mission and charism.
- Invite students to focus their community service projects to just one charitable organization and prepare for the retreat by fostering gratitude for those operating the charity and empathy for those being served by the charity.
- Build programming that readies and deepens students' experience of the liturgical seasons of Lent, Advent and Christmas.
- Utilize online prayer platforms.

To move from level 3 to 4,

- Foster a sense of retreat as an on-going journey.
- Provide regular opportunities for students to journal about their journey.
- Support a student blog on their faith experiences pre and post retreat.
- Hire experienced retreat leaders to collaborate with students and renew retreat program.
- Collaborate with students to choose a retreat theme for the year. Let this theme be woven into academic subjects.
- Partner with area parishes, colleges, and community centers to find alternative retreat spaces.

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

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