



DIOCESE OF TRENTON

Office of Catholic Education

The Diocese of Trenton's 39 Catholic Schools Receive AdvancED Accreditation

Throughout the 2014-2015 school year, educators in the 39 Catholic schools in the Diocese of Trenton took part in surveys and self-assessments which were part of the AdvancED accreditation process. Invested in student growth, the educators in our Catholic schools wanted to ensure that they are providing an exceptional 21st century educational experience for the students whom they teach.

The accrediting agency, AdvancED, is recognized internationally. It incorporates a standards-driven and student-centered approach with an emphasis on increasing student performance and growth as well as school improvement. AdvancED has accredited over 32,000 institutions in 71 countries and serves over 20 million students worldwide.

Educationally, there are no silos in which teachers or schools operate independently and detached from others. With systemic and sustainable improvement, administrators and faculty work in pursuit of a shared vision that all learners realize their full potential.

To that end, a comprehensive self-assessment of each school was initiated in the spring of 2014. Areas of focus included Catholic identity and the foundational areas of AdvancED standards - purpose and direction, governance and leadership, teaching and assessing for learning, resource and support systems and using results for continuous improvement. Surveys were conducted with parents, faculty, staff and students to learn their perspective relative to the standards. The school documents were uploaded for members of the visiting team to review prior to the November 2015 visit.

During the November visit, interviews were conducted with Bishop O'Connell, diocesan leadership, pastors, principals, parent representatives and community members representing 270 stakeholders. Ten schools in the diocese were visited by members of the external review team to observe student learning in action. The Effective Learning Environment Observation Tool (ELEOT) was utilized to assess student engagement. The ELEOT uses a rating scale of 1 to 4 with 4 being the highest.

The results of this assessment illustrated that schools in the Diocese of Trenton exceeded the AdvancED Network Average in the areas of Equitable Learning (DOT-2.81; AdvancED Avg.- 2.69); High Expectations (DOT-3.06; AdvancED Avg.-2.81); Supportive



Learning (DOT-3.28; AdvancED Avg.- 3.07); Active Learning (DOT-3.12; AdvancED Avg.- 2.94); Well-Managed Learning Environment (DOT-3.40; AdvancED Avg. -3.14); and Digital Learning (DOT-1.91; AdvancED Avg.- 1.83). While exceeding the average for the AdvancED network of schools and scoring positive results, educators see the wisdom in concentrated focus on improvement and growth in the areas of digital learning, progress monitoring and feedback, equity of learning and active learning environments to better meet the needs of today's students.

The team visit concluded on November 4, with Mr. Eddie Krenson, Chair of the External Review Team and Vice-President of the Non-Public School Services for AdvancED, presenting an exit report delineating powerful practices and improvement priorities for the Department of Catholic Schools and its 39 schools.

Powerful Practices (strengths) included the following:

- Administrators and educators, under the leadership of Bishop O'Connell, exhibit a strong sense of Catholic identity which permeates the diocesan climate and culture.
- A collaborative and collegial spirit is apparent among those in leadership with attentiveness to individual initiative.
- The diocese demonstrates effective use of available resources to support its schools including a comprehensive marketing program, the services of a grant writer and the Catholic Alumni Partnership (CAP) Program which provides a strong alumni database for its schools.
- The Department of Catholic Schools raises awareness among administrators to secure all services and resources available at the federal, state and local levels. Support services such as teacher aides, nurses and special educational resource teachers are additional assets that contribute to school resources.
- There is meaningful engagement and empowerment of families in their child's learning.
- The use of Genesis, Power School and similar programs give parents access to student progress.

Improvement Priorities, areas the diocese must address within two years, include the following:

- Study the feasibility of replicating the 2012-2013 Commission Study to determine the level of progress achieved from the recommendations of the original study and to identify priorities that need to be addressed in the next cycle of diocesan planning.



- Conduct benchmark research with other diocesan school systems of like size and mission to identify potential alternative funding resources to reduce the differential between tuition and the cost to educate a child.
- Define and implement a systematic protocol for data analysis from multiple assessments and train administrators and instructional staff in the protocol, interpretation and use of data to guide instructional decisions.

Recommended Opportunities for Improvement included the following:

- Teaching and Assessing for Learning –
 - School surveys conducted with parents, teachers and students revealed the potential for greater improvement in monitoring and supporting instructional practices to deliver a 21st century learning environment. This supports the need for differentiated instruction, active and engaged learning, student-directed learning and equitable learning opportunities. As life-long learners, teachers will have access to professional development to utilize and incorporate 21st century instructional modes that are necessary to support today's students.
- Resource Utilization
 - A process to track the procurement and effective use of resources, such as cooperative purchasing, is to be initiated throughout the system.

The AdvancED External Review Team reported a composite score of all areas addressed throughout the AdvancED Protocol. The rating scale ranges from 100 to 400 with 400 being the highest. It is related with pride that the Diocese of Trenton exceeded the average of all schools in the AdvancED Network in areas of Teaching and Learning Impact (DOT-276; AdvancED -269), Leadership Capacity (DOT-325; AdvancED-293) and Resource Utilization (DOT-300; AdvancED-284). The AdvancED Network Average composite score is 284. That final number, the Index of Education Quality (IEQ) for the Diocese of Trenton, is 295.

We salute our educators for their commitment to the educational process and to student learning. The successful results distinguish the forward-thinking diocesan educational environment!

In summarizing the characteristics of educators in the diocese, the AdvancED visiting team described leaders and educators as fervently Catholic, passionate, mission-driven, effective, vibrant and child-centered. The team applauded the Department of Catholic Schools and its 39 schools for exceeding the AdvancED network averages on the Effective Learning Environment Observation Tool (the instrument for classroom



observation) and the three domains including the overall Index of Education Quality (IEQ) Score Ratings.

The AdvancED Accreditation Commission met on January 28 to review the diocesan study and the external review team's recommendation that schools in the Diocese of Trenton earn the distinction of accreditation by AdvancED. The accreditation will be proudly displayed in all schools as an indicator of competencies and achievement. Sincere thanks are extended to Bishop O'Connell for his support of the study and his continued support of Catholic schools. Thanks are given to all who took part in the AdvancED Accreditation Process including members of the Steering Committee, Pastors, Administrators, the PTA, School Board Members, Parents, and the wider Parish and School Communities.

The study will serve as a guide with attention to addressing the improvement priorities as well as the opportunities for improvement. Beyond the systemic recommendations, focus will be on the 21st century learning skills and the instructional processes to be implemented so that teachers can be agents of change in facilitating student improvement. The AdvancED study provides a tool to continue self-evaluation and the assessment of learning. It provides a blueprint to serve as a guide in making informed decisions for student improvement so that each student may realize their full potential.