

CATHOLIC EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEW

Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools

Abstract

Review and analysis of Catholic School Identity in Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools, reflecting on the Five Marks of Catholic School Identity as outlined in the document, Catholic School Identity Assessment Tool Companion Guide, adopted by the CCSSA in November 2022.

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March 2023

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INTRODUCTION

CATHOLIC SCHOOL IDENTITY ASSESSMENT TOOL AND PROCESS

Catholic schools play an important role in the Church's mission. As such, Catholic schools must continue to provide an authentic Catholic education, as expected by all stakeholders, for all students.

To this end, Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools has engaged in a formalized review process to assess, evaluate, and provide recommendations, regarding the Division's Catholic school identity, based on five essential marks. The *Catholic School Identity Assessment Tool: Companion Guide to Growing Forward 2014 Symposium Final Report*, approved by the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta (CCSSA), was used for this purpose. The Five Essential Marks of Catholic School Identity have formed the basis for this assessment, including:

Mark 1: Grounded in Christian Anthropology

Mark 2: Catholic Worldview

Mark 3: Faith Infused Curriculum

Mark 4: Gospel Witness

Mark 5: Spirituality of Communion

In completing this review, the following tools have been used:

- Anonymous survey;
- School and site visits;
- Focus groups.

This set of tools has been carefully aligned with the benchmarks and indicators, identified as key aspects of the Five Marks and their corresponding standards. These methods have been used together in a complementary manner to complete this review. Specific methods and instruments have been chosen, based on the type of information being collected. For example, personal reflection, such as participation in sacraments, was collected by an anonymous survey. School/site visits and focus groups were completed to allow observation of key indicators, gathering data through conversations, interviews, and school tours. Review of key school documents, such as school education plans, handbooks, policies, administrative procedures, and guidelines, were reviewed to capture indicators.

A sample of ten schools/sites were selected for this review, including all levels from Kindergarten to Grade Twelve. The results follow.

As well as its use for accountability and assurance, the outcomes of this assessment may be helpful in developing the Division's future Catholic education program outcomes, goals, strategies, and professional learning opportunities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Christ the Redeemer Catholics Schools has engaged in a review of its Catholic education program. This assessment has identified strengths, areas for growth and recommendations, based on the Five Marks of Catholic school identity.

Overall, the Division demonstrates an excellent quality of Catholic education.

Areas of strength include:

- The physical symbols and tangible signs of the Catholic faith embedded throughout all facilities and classrooms.
- The welcoming, caring, and respectful environments created by staff for the benefit of all students and families in their care.
- The infusion of Christian virtues and social teachings into the fabric of school culture, specifically in how teachers and administrators interact with students and families, who have inherent dignity as children of God.
- As Christian witnesses, teachers and administrators emphasize the importance of positive relationships within the Catholic community, engaging in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church and works of service.
- The understanding that Catholic schools are part of a larger community of faith, as evidenced in their connections to local parishes, and outreach to families to serve as a bridge between families and the Church.

Areas for growth and recommendations include:

- To *explicitly make known* the mission of Catholic schools, as centred on Jesus Christ and His Church for each person, who has inherent dignity and eternal destiny.
- The *enhanced* use of sacred items and spaces and *expanded* opportunities for *all students* to participate in faith-based experiences such as retreats.
- The *deepening* of a faith-infused curriculum by helping teachers design lessons that *intentionally* embed Catholic social teachings in a consistent and cohesive manner.
- The need for more *differentiated* and *formalized* faith formation plans and processes for individuals and schools to support formation at all stages of evangelization.
- To continue to seek ways to involve families in the sacramental and liturgical life of the school and parish through intentional and formalized *collaborative plans* (e.g., administrators, school councils and parishes).

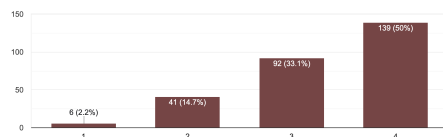
MARK ONE: GROUNDED IN CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY (CREATED IN IMAGE OF GOD WITH ETERNAL DESTINY)

Created in God's image and as Christians, we are called to imitate Jesus in our love for others, and teach others to do the same. Catholic schools are commissioned to value each member and form students as saints. To assess Mark 1, the division and school mission statements were reviewed, both for their content and how their members live out these statements through their actions.

STRENGTHS

- The Division and each school have a mission statement or a motto. Eight statements include reference to the Catholic Church. Seven statements refer to Jesus Christ.
- Most schools include their statements prominently in their student/parent handbooks.
- Focus groups in eight schools know or can generally paraphrase their school's mission statement or motto. Brief statements and mottos were easier to recall and used more often. As an example, Christ the Redeemer's motto, *Leave Not One Heart Behind*, was known by many.
- Over 83% of survey respondents agree that the school's mission statement is communicated to the broader community.

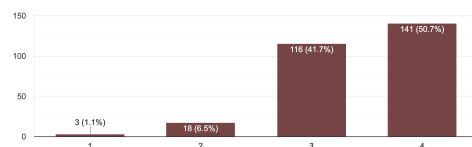
The school's mission statement is frequently communicated to the broader community through social media, in newsletters and reports.
278 responses



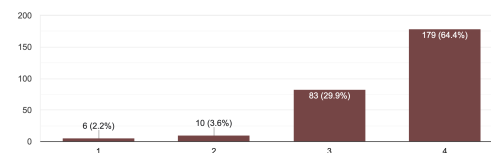
Driven with a lot of empathy for new students; welcoming and happy environment makes students want to come to school; treat everyone the same, like family; feels how Jesus would want it to be.
-Student Focus Group member

- 92% of survey respondents agree that the schools live out their mission statements through their actions. There is high agreement in the following areas: all treated with dignity and respect (94%), all valued and included (92%), most vulnerable and those who have been marginalized given extra care (95%). Documents, such as websites and handbooks, and focus groups gave many examples of these practices.

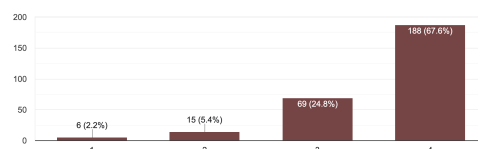
People in our school live out the school's mission statement by their actions.
278 responses



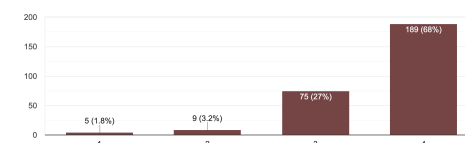
All people are treated with dignity and respect within our school.
278 responses



All people are valued and included within our school.
278 responses



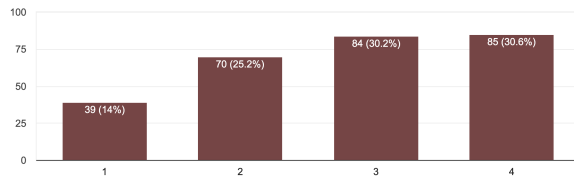
In our school, extra care is given to the most vulnerable and those who have been marginalized.
278 responses



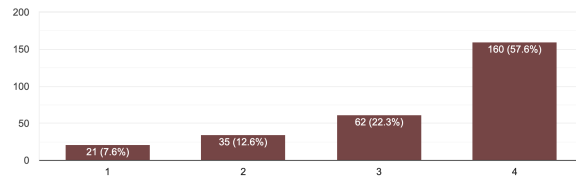
AREAS FOR GROWTH

- While eight schools reference students in some way (e.g., unique, gifts, with potential, souls, and hearts), only one school speaks of students as “created in the image and likeness of God”.
- The Division and three schools have mission statements that are clear and visible on websites.
- 61% of survey respondents agree that they can state the Division’s mission statement. 80% of survey respondents agree that they can state the school’s mission statement.

I can state the division's mission statement.
278 responses

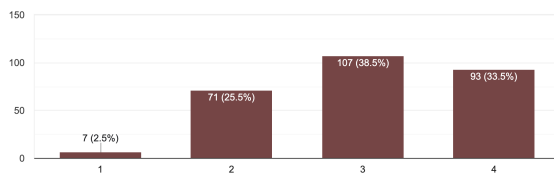


I can state the school's mission statement.
278 responses



- 72% of survey respondents agree that the Division’s mission statement is communicated to the broader community.

The division's mission statement is frequently communicated to the broader community through social media, in newsletters and in reports.
278 responses



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide clear, visible, and succinct school mission statements on websites, newsletters, agendas, social media, and other correspondence with the community and public.
- Everyone should know the mission of the school and Division as centred on Jesus Christ, within the Catholic Church and respecting all as children of God, and that this mission is alive.



MARK TWO: CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW

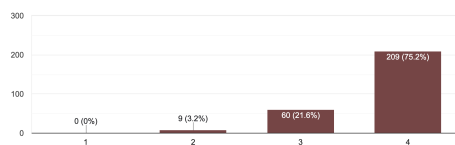
A Catholic school is grounded in the faith, as evidenced by its art, architecture, and furnishings. Visible symbols of the Catholic faith are present, including prayer spaces, and other tangible signs. This Catholic ethos is reflected in the activities, celebrations, and life of the school, as well as in its members.

STRENGTHS

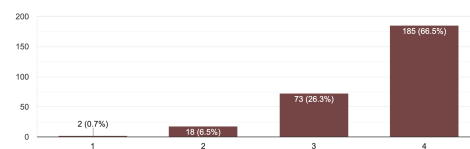
- A standard welcome sign is posted for visitors, *Blessings Upon Your Day*, setting the tone for entrance into the physical space of the school. All schools/sites have banners, statues, images, and/or architectural elements that reflect their namesake, prominent in the main foyers. Offices and classrooms have crucifixes, religious pictures, photos, and sayings. Classrooms and common areas are named after saints.
- Six schools have chapels as designated spaces, and one as an enclave used for liturgies. Almost all of these spaces are free of clutter, used as a sacred space.
- 97% of survey respondents agree that there are numerous opportunities for prayer daily.
- 93% of survey respondents agree that the school community gathers regularly for liturgical celebrations, and 87% agree that Eucharist is celebrated in a Catholic church, as possible.
- The Division and school education plans all indicate that “schools host liturgies and Masses held at the start of the year, throughout liturgical seasons, and at the end of the school year”. Focus groups provided many examples of prayer and liturgical celebrations.



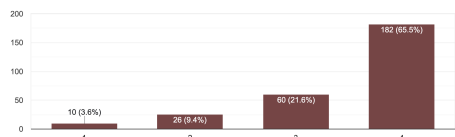
Staff and students have numerous opportunities to pray every day at school, such as at beginning and end of day, grace before snacks/meals, at the start of class, and in spontaneous prayer.
278 responses



The school community gathers regularly for liturgies of the word, and to celebrate the Eucharist.
278 responses

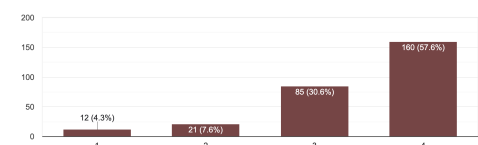


Whenever possible, Eucharist is celebrated in a Catholic church.
278 responses



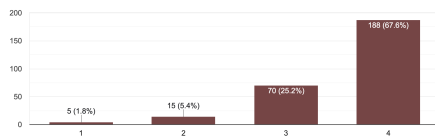
- 89% of survey respondents agree that there is evidence of collaboration with local parishes in the immediate preparation of the sacraments. Some schools are heavily involved with teachers volunteering to do the preparation; others indicate support for preparation as part of the curriculum. Most schools provide information in newsletters and links to the parish website and/or registration forms.

The school collaborates with the local parishes, to support the immediate preparation for the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Reconciliation, and Confirmation.
278 responses



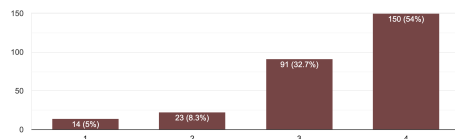
- 93% of survey respondents agree that all staff have opportunities for faith-based retreats or experiences.

All staff have opportunities for faith-based retreats, experiences and/or encounters at least once during the school year.
278 responses



- 87% of survey respondents agree that through service projects, students can share Catholic teaching on social justice and charity. The school documents and focus groups showcase many opportunities to engage in service projects. Service projects are particularly important to parent and student focus groups.

Through their service projects, students can share Catholic teaching on social justice and charity.
278 responses

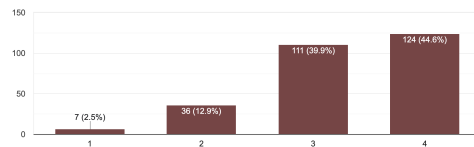


Students do volunteer work in the community, serving dinners at the church for church members and members of the larger community; would like to see more of it; it's a great way to share the faith, and be good citizens in the community.

-Parent Focus Group member

- 85% of survey respondents agree that extra-curricular activities are imbued with the Catholic worldview.

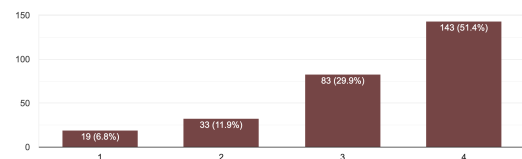
School based clubs, teams, and activities are imbued with a Catholic worldview and promote the teachings of the Catholic Church. (Examples: team ...resources chosen, drama productions, music, etc.)
278 responses



AREAS FOR GROWTH

- While most classrooms have prayer corners, and some schools even have built-in spaces, this is not consistent throughout the Division. In particular, not all standard items are present (i.e., crucifix/cross, candle(s), Bible, and cloth in the colour of the liturgical season). In the absence of prayer corners, classrooms often had faith displays, posters or images.

All students have opportunities for faith-based retreats, experiences and/or encounters at least once during the school year.
278 responses



- 81% of survey respondents agree that all students have opportunities for faith-based retreats, experiences and/or encounters annually, which is significantly lower than the response related to staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Revisit prayer corners, their purpose and use in classrooms. Ensure all sacred spaces and items are treated with care and respect consistently.
- Enhance opportunities for faith-based retreats, experiences, and encounters for all students.

MARK THREE: FAITH INFUSED CURRICULUM (FAITH PERMEATION)

In a Catholic school, faith is permeated throughout its culture and embedded in its curriculum. It provides the opportunity to reflect on learning from the Catholic perspective, and what the Church teaches about faith, reason, and social justice. It gives students the ability to place their learning in the context of their faith and values.

STRENGTHS

- Teachers are able to identify aspects of school culture that reflect Catholic social teachings. Within the focus groups, connections between discipline practices, restorative justice, good citizenship, healthy relationships, and the dignity of the human person are referenced in many stories and examples.
- Teachers value the opportunity to be authentic Catholic educators who can openly apply Catholic social teachings to school life. They appreciate the ability to use Christian concepts, and specific references to

We ask that teachers intentionally tie social justice teachings with Good Works projects. Focus on tying actions to our faith. Continued effort to take care of God's creation.

-School-Based Administrator

Jesus and the Gospel in their day-to-day interactions at school.

- Teachers are generally aware of Catholic social teaching themes within their curriculum areas, and can explicitly identify topics relating to stewardship and dignity of the human person. They also understand the relationship between faith and reason, occasionally addressing it in religion and science classes.
- *Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ* and *Fully Alive* are mentioned a number of times as helpful resources within religion classes and beyond, given the accessibility and depth of supplemental materials available. All schools have scheduled religion classes from Kindergarten to Grade Twelve, including online and summer instruction.
- Many examples highlight the ability to incorporate Christian virtues into instruction. Schools largely develop virtues through school-wide initiatives, such as Fruits of the Spirit, Saints in the Making or Virtue awards. These are applied to the life of the school, classroom practices and lessons in a general way.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

- In the focus groups, other than human dignity and stewardship, other themes of Catholic social doctrine are rarely referenced. Lesson exemplars also tend to highlight these two themes only, and it was often difficult for teachers to reference and/or provide specific information in this area.
- Teachers express the need for more formation to adequately respond to students' questions related to the discussion of sensitive topics.
- Further discussion and/or guidelines for instructional minutes may be helpful at all levels for consistency, to ensure adequate time to achieve key learner outcomes, and to consider an expanded high school program.
- Other than Catholic Learning Communities designated by the division, schools referenced few, if any, concrete initiatives for teachers to collaborate on a regular basis to integrate and permeate faith throughout their subject areas.

Need to have an understanding of the faith in order to appreciate; can't love what you don't know; need a language that [students] can grapple with at their developmental level.

-Teacher Focus Group

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Gather, develop, and share resources that identify, define, and apply Catholic social teachings to the curricula. Design lessons intentionally to infuse teachings in a coherent, consistent, and authentic manner.
- Provide and embed ongoing professional learning opportunities to build teacher capacity in infusing their curricula with Catholic social teaching and in addressing sensitive topics more effectively. Consider a formal structure for teachers to collaborate on lesson design and review.
- Review instructional minutes for elementary and junior high Religion. Consider a 5-credit high school Religion course.

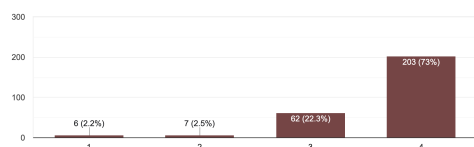
MARK FOUR: GOSPEL WITNESS (LIVING A CHRISTIAN LIFE)

In a Catholic school, it is important for teachers to be a witness to the Gospel. Students benefit from the example of teachers who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church. It is vital to live an authentic Catholic life, so that what is taught is reflected in actions.

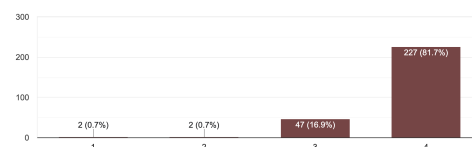
STRENGTHS

- Schools focus on positive relationships within their community and the Board's *Good Works Policy* is reflected in the life of each school. A consistent theme throughout the review is the importance of authentic relationships that support one another and help each member in the community to grow. In each focus group, participants shared stories and examples of faith in action. Each group emphasized the need for everyone in the community to be accepted, loved and to belong, evident in how teachers treat students, how the community supports those most in need and how it serves the most vulnerable.
- Survey responses reflect these strengths as well. 97% of respondents agree that teachers and administrators treat each person with respect, 99% agree that teachers and administrators create a welcoming environment, and 95% agree that they follow fair, respectful discipline processes. 89% agree that teachers and administrators engage in social justice projects and activities.

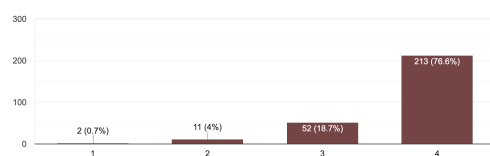
Teachers and administrators treat each person with respect to reflect the dignity of the human person.
278 responses



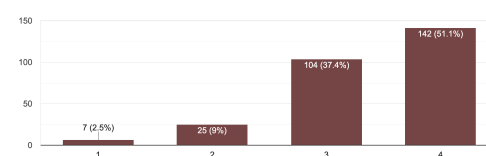
Teachers and administrators create a welcoming environment in their classrooms and school and ensure that all students are welcome, included and belong.
278 responses



Teachers and administrators follow fair, respectful discipline processes.
278 responses



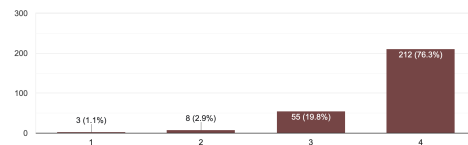
Teachers and administrators engage in social justice projects and activities.
278 responses



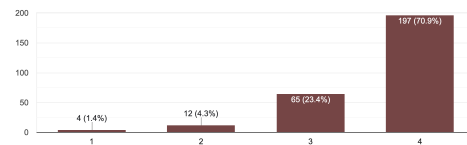
Prayer for [my] child is that as long as he knows Jesus Christ, the rest is gravy, and the school has helped with that immensely.
-Parent Focus Group member

- In addition to creating a positive culture, school staff are also viewed as active in the school's prayer and sacramental life. That is, 96% of survey respondents agree that teachers and administrators plan and engage in school liturgies and prayer as an example for students, 94% of survey respondents agree that staff engages in communal prayer, scripture, retreats, and other faith events with students and 94% agree that that staff share their faith experiences as appropriate in each circumstance.

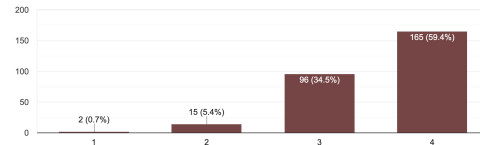
Teachers and administrators plan and engage in school liturgies and prayer, providing an example for students.
278 responses



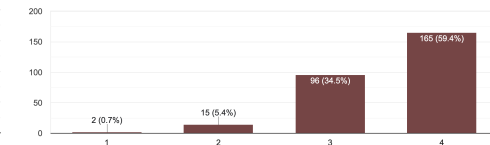
Teachers and administrators engage in liturgy, communal prayer, scripture, retreats, and other faith events with students.
278 responses



Teachers and administrators share their faith experiences, as appropriate in each circumstance.
278 responses

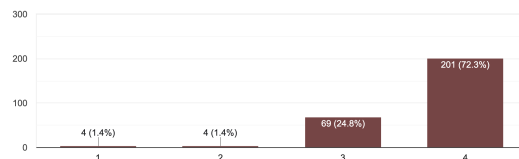


Teachers and administrators share their faith experiences, as appropriate in each circumstance.
278 responses

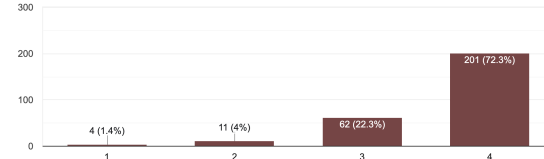


- Further, 97% of survey respondents agree that teachers, administrators, and staff are invited to participate in the life of the parish, and 95% agree that teachers and administrators are involved in the school's social activities and events. Connection with the larger community and parish life is evidenced in documents and conversations within the focus groups. It is clear that teachers are expected to be authentic witnesses, and more importantly, that they are truly committed to a Catholic way of life. Newsletters and staff bulletins are full of examples that both share the faith and invite active participation in it. Teachers indicate that they assist with sacramental preparation and liturgical ministries.

Teachers, administrators, and staff are invited to participate in the life of the parish, including Sunday Eucharist, sacraments, ministries, parish groups, social life, and charity.
278 responses



Teachers and administrators are involved in the school's social activities and events.
278 responses



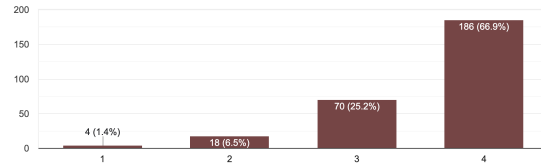
- School staff members are supported with division-wide expectations, resources, faith leaders, and professional learning time to help them grow as a Christian witness. Faith Days, retreats, luncheons, conferences, guest speakers, new teacher orientations, and division level personnel are all allocated to assist with the faith formation of teachers and administrators. The Catholic Learning Communities (CLC's) annual plan clearly allocates five sessions for faith topics. Division and school education plans highlight new and existing strategies to assist in formation as well.

[This] school is a testament to the Catholic faith through the support that is received from the Division for this school; small but mighty, this school is seen as something important and worth time, energy and funds; a testament to the people in the school and the Division.

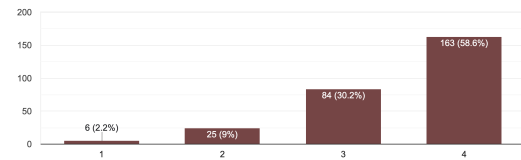
-Teacher Focus Group member

- In reflecting on their own faith formation, 92% of survey respondents agree that they create faith formation plans, 89% agree they are supported with allocated resources, and 88% agree that their plans are differentiated, based on their needs.

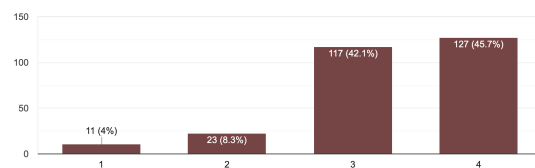
As part of their ongoing development, administrators and teachers create a school faith formation plan, and teachers are highly encouraged to add a personal growth plan at the start of each school year.
278 responses



Teachers and administrators are supported in their ongoing faith formation plans with allocated resources.
278 responses

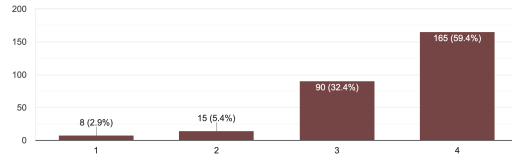


Division and school faith formation plans address the needs of staff at all stages of evangelization, knowledge, and practice.
278 responses



- Divisional hiring practices prioritize the importance of Gospel witness, particularly in the selection of teachers and administrators. This is clearly identified on Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools website, and 92% of survey respondents affirm this practice.

Hiring practice places the faith life and the willingness to grow in faith of the prospective candidate as a priority.
278 responses



AREAS FOR GROWTH

- In reviewing documents and engaging in discussion within the focus groups, it is clear that most initiatives addressing faith formation are set expectations at the Division level. This is a significant strength as reported above. Yet, targeted school-specific strategies would be helpful for the faith formation of staff, given differences in local context and individual needs.
- Dedicated, planned time for collaboration among teachers to assist with their formation and growth. While the Catholic Learning Communities (CLC's) schedule blocked out time for faith topics, these were not always well-planned or specific to the needs of individual staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consistent creation of formalized individual and collective faith formation plans at the school level, and embedded time to discuss, implement and review these plans.

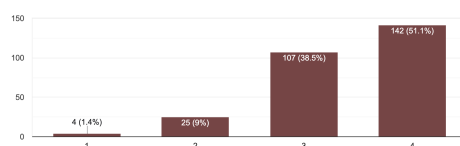
MARK FIVE: SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION (BUILDING COMMUNITY AND UNITY)

An authentic Catholic school builds a strong and respectful community and unity among all, striving for what is found in the Holy Trinity. It builds relationships among all of its stakeholders, including the bishop of the diocese, trustees, administrators, staff, students, and families.

STRENGTHS

- Board policies and administrative procedures identify key stakeholders and their roles. This includes the role of the Board, trustees, school councils, volunteers, staff, and the bishop of the diocese. All school websites link to information about school councils and volunteering as applicable, as well as to the Board policies and administrative procedures. Survey respondents also affirm the clarity of roles with 90% agreement.

Roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the division and school are clearly articulated and understood (e.g., teacher, administrator, local bishop... provincial groups involved in Catholic education).
278 responses

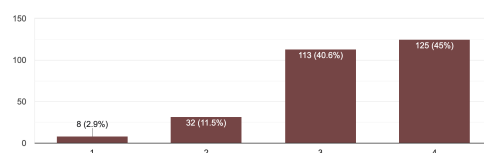


The work done at the Division level supports the school and liaises with the bishop; CCSSA Resource personnel in the Division office are easily accessible.

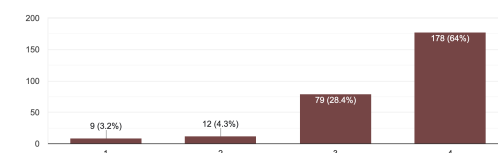
-Teacher Focus Group member

- School council agendas include opening and closing prayers to embed their discussions within the community of faith.
- The Division and school education plans include existing strategies to connect leaders with the bishop of the diocese through liturgical, professional learning, and social events as well as formal meetings. Focus groups describe this relationship as clearly defined and understood.
- Likewise, 86% of survey respondents agree that the school and parish work together to help build the faith of the families enrolled in Catholic schools, and 92% agree that priests, deacons and religious are frequently invited to participate in the life of the school.

The school and the local parish work together to nurture the faith life of families who send their children to the Catholic school.
278 responses



The school frequently invites local parish priests, deacons and religious to school functions and encourages them to be actively involved in the school community.
278 responses

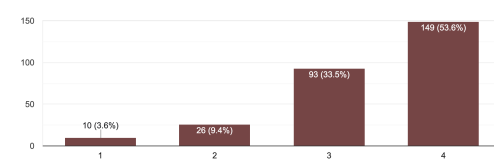


- Division and school education plans both reference a strategy to collaborate with Grateful Advocates for Catholic Education (GrACE) in supporting publicly funded Catholic education.
- All schools identified service projects and social justice activities which required working with outside agencies, providing support locally and globally. Outside resources are vetted by divisional personnel. Charitable organizations appear to be vetted by the principal of each school, who receives support to do so when requested.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

- Although 87% of survey respondents agree that school councils work with the shared purpose of a Catholic school, there is little evidence to support this in reviewing school council documents (i.e., agendas and minutes). While school councils are very supportive of their schools, their efforts are largely directed at fundraising for school events. Sometimes, these events include social activities related to feast days and/or liturgies. There is evidence that some administrators report on the faith priorities, but there is little evidence to show significant collaboration with school council on these topics. Very little information was provided regarding school councils in the focus groups.

The school has an active and vibrant school council working with the shared purpose of a Catholic school.
278 responses

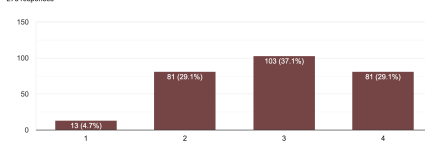


Trying to find ways to inspire students to be more participatory in the Church; religion classes are academic courses, but don't translate into a practical faith.

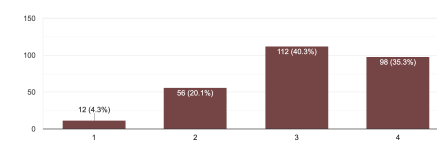
-Teacher focus group member

- Involvement of parents in the faith life of the school and parish is viewed as important by staff in focus groups. Participants mentioned many ways that families are invited to the school and parish, typically for liturgical celebrations (e.g., Eucharistic celebrations, communal prayer, recognition of virtues, reception of sacrament celebrations, etc.). However, only 66% of survey respondents agree that parents are actively involved in the faith life of the school, and 77% agree that there is a plan to increase involvement.

Parents/guardians are actively involved in the faith life of our school.
278 responses



The school has a plan to increase involvement of parents in the life of the school and parish.
278 responses



- In a similar way, focus groups describe attempts to engage students and families in parish life by inviting them to mass and engaging them in liturgical ministries when possible and/or for special events. Participants describe their schools as bridges to the parish and hope that their efforts can connect students and families to the sacramental life of the Church. Further, school staff expressed the need for parish priests to be present more often and more organically in the school where possible. While a few schools shared meaningful, positive stories about their priest's involvement in the school, several others reported that their priests were unable to be present regularly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to seek ways to increase student and family participation in the life of the parish, including the reception of the sacraments. If appropriate, consider initiating more formalized plans with the parish and school council to do so.
- Consider development of a more formalized process for engaging with outside agencies, such as charitable organizations.

APPENDIX: GUIDING DOCUMENTS

Catholic Leadership Quality Standard. Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta.

Catholic School Identity Assessment Tool: Companion Guide to Growing Forward 2014 Symposium Final Report.
Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta.

[Growing Forward 2014 Symposium Final Report.](#) Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association.

[Marks of an Excellent Catholic Leader.](#) Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta.

The Excellent Catholic Teacher. Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following for all of their assistance in conducting this review:

Grant Gay, Director of Catholic Education

Pat MacDonald, Associate Superintendent of Learning

Dr. Scott Morrison, Chief Superintendent

Principals, administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents of Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools

The Diocese of Calgary and Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta for assistance in the development of the *Catholic School Identity Assessment Tool Companion Guide* and its approved use in Alberta Catholic schools.