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Michael J. Boyle

Loyola University Chicago, mboyle3@luc.edu

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Introduction to the Focus Section: Preparing Leaders in Light of the Standards

Michael J. Boyle
Loyola University Chicago

The role of the principal has been increasingly documented as an important variable in student achievement. As such, the preparation of principals is coming under more scrutiny by legislators and policy makers (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015; Lewis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). It should be argued that the same attention being given to public school principal preparation programs must also be granted formation programs for Catholic school principals. Standard 6 of the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS) (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2010) states that, "An excellent Catholic school has a qualified leader/leadership team empowered by the governing body to realize and implement the school's mission and vision." Further, Benchmark 6.1 states, "The leader/leadership team meets national, state and/or (arch)diocesan requirements for school leadership preparation and licensing to serve as the faith and instructional leader(s) of the school."

The significant phrase here is "faith and instructional leader." The effective Catholic school principal is charged with being both the "faith and instructional leader." With the rise of leadership standards like those of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) (2008), university principal training programs must understandably focus on program alignment with such standards in order to meet certification/licensure requirements. The issue then becomes, how do university programs also prepare candidates in the necessary faith leadership components that are so critical to leading effective Catholic schools?

On October 1-3, 2009, Loyola University Chicago's Center for Catholic School Effectiveness (now the Andrew M. Greeley Center For Catholic Education) and School of Education hosted the second in a series of six planned Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conferences (CHEC) entitled, "Developing and Sustaining Leaders for Catholic Schools: How Can Catholic Higher Education Help?" At that conference, one of the critical questions discussed was "How can we close gaps that exist between leader-

ship programs and on-the-ground knowledge/skills required to lead effective Catholic schools?” (Boyle, 2010). That question remains unanswered.

This focus edition seeks to explore this question and offer solutions. The articles that comprise this focus edition examine this intersection between this increasing emphasis on leadership standards and the need to develop the on-the-ground knowledge and skills required to prepare effective Catholic school principals. Given the reality of addressing national/state leadership standards like the ISLLC, it is critical that there is an examination of the required programmatic balance in the “faith and instructional” leadership competencies required to run an effective Catholic school.

The focus edition begins with the article “The Leadership Challenge: Preparing and Developing Catholic School Principals,” which presents a case for using a combination of the NSBECS and the ISLLC standards to guide the preparation and development of principals. The article suggests a framework, borrowed from public school principal preparation programs, for identifying and addressing areas of growth for Catholic principals preparation programs. Finally, the article calls for the development of a common agenda among CIHE programs for the preparation and development for Catholic School principals.

The second article, by Dr. Anthony Sabatino, “The Virtual Classroom and Catholic School Leadership Preparation: The LMU Certificate in Catholic School Administration (CCSA) Program,” presents a strategy for addressing both the faith and instructional leadership dimension of the Catholic school principal. Using a virtual classroom approach, Sabatino describes how faith formation, combined with instructional leadership skills are developed, especially in places where CIHE may not be present.

The final article, by Dr. Sandria Morten and GERALYN Lawler, both from the Andrew M. Greeley Center for Catholic Education at the School of Education-Loyola University Chicago, describes their institution’s process for developing a standards-based approach for identifying Catholic school principal competencies. The article then proceeds to discuss how the development of this framework was used to align curriculum and to create mentor experiences for Catholic school principal candidates. Assessment of the development of candidate competencies is also discussed.

The intent of this focus edition is to add to the very important conversation of the critical task of ensuring the development of Catholic school principals who are prepared to lead effective Catholic schools. It is imperative that there is an on-going examination of the explicit methods used to

foster both the requisite faith and instructional leadership skills necessary to lead these schools. Find ways to make sure that the faith leadership development is not short-changed in favor of licensure/certification requirements is also vital. The unique nature of the Catholic school principalship demands explicit development in faith leadership skills, while also developing the requisite instructional leadership skills. Without specific development in both of these leadership areas, Catholic schools will not have the qualified leaders they need to ensure their survival.

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