

STANDARDS DOCUMENTATION

MCEA Standard: Catholic Identity



*Revised by the MCEA Leadership Forum (11/2005)
Approved by the Catholic Bishops of Minnesota (02/2006)*

At the foundation of a Catholic school is its Catholic identity. The Catholic school operates in conformance with the laws, teachings, and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. It is committed to teaching the fullness of Catholic faith, values, and practices and to integrating these core values into all academic subject areas. This integration of Catholic faith and values with life distinguishes the Catholic school from other schools.

Members of the Catholic School community strive for growth in their relationship with Jesus Christ. This formation is evidenced in relationships with one another, prayer experiences, well-planned religious instruction, service to community, and value-oriented Christian living.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1) **Narration of Compliance:** For each criteria below (if requested), provide a concise narrative statement that describes how the school complies with the particular criteria. *Be mindful that documented evidence will be necessary during your onsite visit to verify compliance.*
- 2) **Indicators of Compliance:** Review the list of indicators for each criteria to provide ideas for documented evidence of compliance. Ensure that all essential indicators (found in italics below each criteria) are provided during your onsite visit.
- 3) **Strengths and Challenges:** After completing each of the criteria, identify a summary list of strengths and challenges related to the broader standard category.

Criteria

Identity 1.11

MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY STATEMENTS: The school will have mission and philosophy statements that articulate the Catholicity of the school community's shared vision, principles, beliefs, and core values.

St. Thomas More Catholic School has a mission statement and philosophy that clearly articulates the Catholicity of the school community's shared vision, principles, beliefs, and core values.

Indicators of Compliance

St. Thomas More Mission Statement:

St. Thomas More School is a K-8 Catholic school that provides an academically excellent curriculum; promotes the self-worth of each child; and encourages active and responsible Christian leadership and service.

St. Thomas More Philosophy Statement:

St. Thomas More School is a Catholic School sponsored by the Church of St. Thomas More. We focus on Christian values and academic excellence.

Students, families, faculty, staff, and administration jointly strive to meet the spiritual, academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each child.

St. Thomas More Catholic School embraces a whole language curriculum which:

- recognizes each student's unique abilities;
- develops social skills;
- creates life-long learners;
- encourages risk-taking;
- inspires students to work for peace and justice; and
- builds within each child a commitment to living an active faithful life.

Each St. Thomas More Catholic School student learns how to live the Gospel in today's world through learning, respectful relationships, worship, and community service.

**Identity
1.12**

GOVERNANCE AND POLICIES: The school's governing body, policies, and documents and its management practices will reflect the Catholic mission and philosophy of the school.

St. Thomas More Catholic School is a Christ-centered school community that remains faithful to its mission and philosophy statements. All students applying to St. Thomas More are considered for admission. St. Thomas More Catholic School adheres to all nondiscrimination policies during this process. St. Thomas More Catholic School is first and foremost a Catholic parish-based school. As such, our school warmly embraces the time, talent, and treasure of the entire community in fulfilling the mission of the school. As a parish community, we believe in the statement, "All are welcome," and we work diligently to allocate funds to provide financial assistance to those families in need of help to pay tuition. Financial need is not a consideration in determining who may or may not attend St. Thomas More. School-wide policies and procedures emphasize the concept of "cura personalis," or care for the person, as well as the belief that we find God in all things. Ultimately, we are called to act in a Christ-like manner that is focused on being caring, respectful, honest, and faithful to the Gospel. Grievances between students and/or families and the school are handled in a respectful and compassionate manner that reflects the principle of reconciliation and forgiveness.

Indicators of Compliance
Student-Parent Handbook
School Advisory Committee Guidelines

**Identity
1.13**

LEADERSHIP, FACULTY AND STAFF: The school's leadership team, faculty and staff will know, support and model the teachings of the Church as outlined in the *General Directory for Catechesis*, paragraphs 114 – 115 and the *National Directory for Catechesis*, sections 25. A–I and 54.9 a-d. School employees will pursue ongoing religious formation that will enhance the school's Catholic identity. Included in this section, all school employees will adhere to the school's "standards of conduct" that reflects Catholic tradition, Canon Law, and current policies (including Article 12, *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*).

All faculty and staff are reminded by the pastor and principal that they are expected to know, support, and model the teachings of the Catholic Church as outlined in the *General Director of Catechesis* and the *National Director of Catechesis*. All school employees review and sign-off on the Pastoral Code of Conduct as well as participate in VIRTUS training as directed by the USCCB's Charter for the Protection of Child

and Youth. The faculty handbook also contains the Code of Ethics for the Catholic School Teacher, which was developed by the National Catholic Educational Association.

The faculty and staff of St. Thomas More Catholic School understand, follow, and support our school's "Code of Conduct". As leaders within the school community, we strive to develop and support a nurturing environment that is Christ-centered. In doing so, we strive to model faith in action and work to build rapport and respectful relationships and interactions among students, parents, faculty, and staff. School leadership, faculty, and staff evaluate and plan their own faith formation and pursue educational opportunities independently.

Indicators of Compliance
Signed Employee Pastoral Code of Conduct Forms
Employee handbook sign-off verification
Code of Ethics for the Catholic School Teacher found in Faculty Handbook
Verification of adherence to background check policies.

**Identity
1.14**

FORMATIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE & FACILITIES: Catholic schools will be welcoming, inclusive, and safe for all who enter the facilities, including families, volunteers and guests. A variety of opportunities will be available for the entire school community to worship and pray together. Schools will develop age appropriate standards of conduct and training programs for children and young people according to the USCCB's Office of Child and Youth Protection. (www.usccb.org/ocyp/websafe.htm)

St. Thomas More personnel work hard to make families, parishioners and visitors welcome. The school office is open year round to assist parents looking to register their children. Students are greeted each morning as they enter the school building and each classroom. Several functions are held throughout the year in which the entire school community participates. There is a program in place to help introduce new families to the St. Thomas More community. School families and community members are always encouraged to share in school Masses and prayer services throughout the year. There are also additional grade-level functions throughout the year to which family and friends are invited.

There are two main entrances to the facility, one on Summit Avenue, and the other by the big playground in back. After being admitted to the building, visitors are required to sign in at the office and wear a visitor tag. All staff and parent volunteers have undergone background checks in accordance with diocesan policy, as well as the USCCB's Charter on the Protection of Child and Youth. Students are supervised by qualified staff at all times. The school is currently taking steps to insure that all volunteers are VIRTUS trained; however, at this time not all school volunteers have undergone this training.

As outlined in our school handbook, the staff integrates Catholic teachings into all aspects of the curriculum and throughout the day. Students of all faiths and backgrounds are welcomed at St. Thomas More Catholic School. Classroom discussions and activities, as well as our daily life, encourage students to engage in social justice. Our school admissions policy reflects an acceptance of all families and students. Beyond this written statement, our students demonstrate genuine respect for each other.

Our staff is trained to accommodate varied physical, intellectual, behavioral, and emotional needs of our students in compliance with Minnesota state licensing standards. Our faculty and staff also value the spiritual needs of the students. In addition, our facility is also designed to accommodate the physical needs of the students.

Our Catholic identity is visible throughout the school in several ways. A large crucifix is the focal point of our main school entrance. Each classroom has a crucifix prominently displayed. Classrooms and hallways have additional visible symbols including statues, portraits of Mary, and saints.

Indicators of Compliance

School Liturgy & Prayer Service Schedule

Visible evidence that the school is Catholic through the use of artwork and sacramental symbols

Visible signs of sensitivity to race, gender, age, religious traditions and families

Evidence of sensitivity to the physical, intellectual, economic, and social-emotional differences of students

Adherence to safe environment guidelines as required in the Archdiocese (including examples of adult & student "Standards of Conduct" and corresponding training schedules)

**Identity
1.15**

INFORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF FAITH: The school will be a faith community that nurtures the spiritual lives of students, families, staff members, and all others having contact with the school.

The religion curriculum has been selected by individual teachers. As students advance through the grades, skills and knowledge are reinforced and expanded upon each year. Students are actively engaged in a variety of service activities throughout the school year. Daily prayer and our school's religion curriculum are both part of our school's daily life. In addition, our vibrant faith community can be witnessed through school Masses and prayer services. Many students also participate in sacramental preparation, which is facilitated by the parish faith formation director and volunteer catechists.

St. Thomas More Catholic School strives to create a Christ-centered environment that nurtures the faith formation and spiritual development of students, families, faculty, and staff. Our Catholic identity is evident throughout the halls and classrooms of our school by way of statues, crucifixes, and posters that clearly represent our shared Catholic faith.

Parents are looked upon as the primary religion educators of their children. Parent and community involvement is encouraged and welcomed in a multitude of ways. Parents and parishioners are encouraged to join their children for school Masses and prayer services, as well as actively participate in any family components of the religion curriculum.

Indicators of Compliance

Written religion curriculum

Archdiocesan Religion Standards

Schedule of rituals, sacramental preparation, and Catholic traditions in the life of the school

Evidence of instruction in the Catholic social teachings

Classroom Newsletters that inform families about religion curriculum

Letters to families regarding Talking About Touch and Out of Harm's Way programs

**Identity
1.16**

TRANSFORMATIVE FAITH COMMUNITY: The school will actively promote faith-to-action service and social justice experiences as integral elements within the life of the school.

Integral to the mission of St. Thomas More Catholic School is a commitment to foster the Gospel's value of service to others in the entire school and greater community. Social justice issues permeate every curriculum area, especially religion and social studies. Classroom teachers strive daily to nurture a sense of empathy and compassion in the students. The charity that begins at home finds widening circles of concern, which extend from classroom and school service to local, national, and international needs.

Faculty and staff work in collaboration with the Student Council and the 3-5 Service Team to organize a wide range of opportunities for students to participate in social justice issues. These include: Sponsor-a-Family, food shelf drives (spring and fall), birthday boxes, and collection for victims of Hurricane Katrina. In addition to the above, individual classrooms promote social justice through individual projects.

Indicators of Compliance
Weekly school newsletter, The Family Flyer
Classroom newsletters published by K-5 teachers
Announcements & articles in church bulletin
Listing of social justice oriented services projects

SUMMARY: CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Strengths and Challenges

Strengths:

Our school and parish share strong parallel and common ideas/goals consistent with our mission statements.

Daily prayer (morning, before lunch, and end of the day) is an integral component in the lives of the students, faculty, and staff.

There is a strong positive sense of community among students, parents, faculty, and staff.

Service projects are initiated throughout the school year to make our mission statement a living document.

Religion is formally named as a “core” subject in our middle school.

Our community is firmly committed to social justice.

There is ample, visible proof through symbols and activities that this is a Catholic School.

Challenges:

Our religious education program could increase the scope and sequence of the K-8 program, while focusing on the religious education standards put forth by the archdiocese. Essentially, a consistent standards-based religion curriculum needs to be adopted across all grade levels.

Ongoing faith formation opportunities need to be offered to faculty and staff, especially those who formally teach religion.

There needs to be a plan developed to incorporate more resources to supplement the school’s religion curriculum.

A stronger relationship and better communication is needed between the parish religious education program and the school, especially regarding sacramental preparation.

All volunteers need to be VIRTUS trained.

Additional training should be made available to teachers regarding the Talking About Touch and Out of Harm’s Way programs.

There needs to be greater participation in the life of the larger parish by school families.

Development of a stronger relationship between the parish and school is needed.

Allocation of resources to purchase statues for niches in classrooms and library is needed.

EVALUATION OF THE CATHOLIC IDENTITY STANDARD

Who Evaluates the Catholic Identity Standard

The diocesan office will take the primary role of evaluating the Catholic Identity standard, most likely at the same time as the MNSAA onsite visitation. There are at least two models as to how this would practically work:

- (1) An employee of the diocesan education office (superintendent, consultant, other) could be present for part or all of the onsite visit focusing primarily on the Catholic Identity standard. They would not be serving in any official capacity on the MNSAA visitation team, to avoid conflicts of interest, but would work closely along side the team in achieving their purpose.
- (2) A trained individual could be designated the responsibility of reviewing the Catholic Identity standard during the onsite visit. Provided they are not employed by the diocesan office, and they meet the other guidelines related to conflicts of interest, they could serve as a member of the MNSAA visitation team as well. They might only review the Catholic Identity standard, or they might participate as a full team member.

General Guidelines for the Evaluation of the Catholic Identity Standard

- MNSAA teams will cooperate with diocesan offices by providing any relevant or appropriate feedback they have regarding their perceptions of the Catholic Identity standard in relation to the mission/philosophy of the school, or how it is infused throughout (or guides) the other standard areas.
- The MNSAA team and jurisdictional office should have separate work spaces, to acknowledge and support the distinct roles of each.
- Schools should provide “hospitality” for the diocesan office (or designee), that is meals, but not travel reimbursement and/or lodging (unless the individual is also serving on the MNSAA team). Any additional compensation for services rendered by diocesan office designees is the responsibility of the respective diocese.
- Schools will be asked to respond to recommendations made within the MNSAA team report. This would also be the appropriate time for schools to address any recommendations made regarding the Catholic Identity standard as well.